



West Malling Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School and Speech and Language Unit

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118633
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291195
Inspection date	25 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Patricia Davies

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	129
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Hall
Headteacher	Lynette Bickers
Date of previous school inspection	9 February 2005
School address	Old Cricket Ground Norman Road West Malling ME19 6RL
Telephone number	01732 842061
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

West Malling is a small school. Several pupils travel some distance to attend the main school and its attached unit draws pupils from a wide area across the local authority (LA). The unit currently has 18 pupils, all with a statement of special educational need. The main school has a high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, many with a wide range of needs and including social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The proportion with statements of special educational need is above average. The school's population is constantly changing, with pupils leaving and joining the school in all year groups. Attainment on entry to the Reception group is well below expectations. Most pupils are from White British families. A very small proportion is from other minority ethnic backgrounds and a few of these pupils are learning to speak English. There have been some recent changes to teaching staff and two present class teacher appointments are temporary.

Having been placed in special measures in September 2003, the school was removed from this category following inspection in February 2005.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

West Malling's overall effectiveness is satisfactory, with some strong features. Close attention to improving behaviour and fostering pupils' enjoyment of school life has created a positive climate for learning. Care, guidance and support are good. Most of the parents who expressed their views about the school spoke enthusiastically of its happy and caring environment. The outcomes speak for themselves in pupils' good personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Academic achievement is satisfactory. Children make good progress in the unit and in Reception, while progress is satisfactory throughout the rest of the school. The considerable challenge posed by the high levels of learning difficulties and disabilities, and the constant movement of pupils in and out of the school, have had a significant impact on attainment in recent years, and standards remain low at Year 2 and Year 6. Staff tackle these challenges cheerfully and constructively. Needs are rapidly assessed so that extra support can be given where necessary. Teaching assistants play an invaluable role in providing this support. Nevertheless, the school is well aware that more concentrated attention should be given to those with the capacity for reaching the higher levels of attainment. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, and with elements of good progress in all lessons. Pupils enjoy their lessons and work hard.

Provision in the unit is good. Pupils have their own learning programmes and independent skills are carefully fostered. Independence is also developed well in Reception, and provision is good here too. As a result, recent data show standards are close to expected levels by the end of this first year at school. The curriculum is satisfactory. It is enhanced by a wide selection of additional activities, which successfully extend pupils' experience and their awareness of personal health and safety.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Governors take effective steps to ensure that financial decisions meet the school's needs. The school has an accurate understanding of its effectiveness and the action needed to secure further improvement. This knowledge illustrates the school's satisfactory capacity to grow and develop in the future. Under the strong leadership of the headteacher, new senior and subject leaders are increasing their influence on academic performance, but have yet to focus their monitoring more sharply on the impact of initiatives to raise standards and increase achievement.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Pay close attention to promoting the achievement of pupils with the potential for reaching the higher levels of attainment, in order to raise standards.
- Ensure senior staff and subject leaders focus their monitoring sharply on the impact of the school's work to improve pupils' academic performance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The school secures pupils' satisfactory achievement within challenging circumstances. Improvements to resources and planning, and opportunities to develop independent learning

habits, have ensured good progress in Reception. Pupils in the unit also progress well. Progress throughout the rest of the school is satisfactory, and with some good progress during lessons. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those learning to speak English also make satisfactory progress. The school gives much attention to pupils with low attainment, who benefit from focused support in small groups. It understands that it needs to prioritise more closely the needs of the more able pupils in order to raise standards.

There are some signs of improvement in recent national tests results, but standards remain exceptionally low at Year 2 and at Year 6, with few pupils reaching the higher levels. Nevertheless, the high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities has a significant impact on the overall attainment of small individual year groups. So, too, does the continuous movement of pupils in and out of the school. These factors have a marked effect on test results and national comparisons of 'value added' to pupils' performance.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Improvements in this area have been significant. Behaviour is now good and pupils recognise that it has got better. Their discussions about bullying and their role as playground 'friends' give them a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe from any harassment of this kind. For Year 6 pupils, this understanding has taken them into more sophisticated debate about the use of mobile telephones and internet safety. Pupils clearly like to come together for assembly, are keen to volunteer to perform in front of others and readily take moments for quiet reflection. They enjoy lessons, work well together and enthusiastically take part in lunchtime activities. Even those who are less confident to speak out show, when encouraged to answer, that they have listened carefully.

Most pupils have good attendance, which the school promotes well. At times, attendance is above average, although it varies. Through the school council all pupils have a strong 'voice' in school affairs, drawing up, for example, the school's 'travel plan'. There is considerable emphasis in the unit on developing independence, which successfully fosters the confidence and maturity of these pupils. All these good personal qualities are valuable assets to have in store for adult life. Pupils' sensible choices of food at lunchtimes and their lively participation in a wide range of sporting activities show their good understanding of how to keep healthy and fit.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school's involvement in an intensive learning programme, supported through the LA, has given lessons a tighter structure and focus. Consequently, activities are suitably matched to the needs of different ability groups and most pupils know what they have to do. Some lessons are good, and all lessons have strong features and elements of good progress. These factors vitally ensure pupils' satisfactory progress over time.

Pupils' willing industry and good behaviour are conspicuous, successfully encouraged through warm relationships with staff and a calm working atmosphere. Teaching assistants work closely with pupils during whole-class, as well as small group, activities. When the pace is lively and challenging, questions really explore pupils' understanding and learning moves on at a good

rate, but this is not yet always the case. Pupils complete a good quantity of work. It is checked regularly and the school has identified the need to develop the quality of feedback as a means of providing greater challenge.

Lessons in the unit are extremely well planned and organised so that pupils receive plenty of individual support for their particular speech and language needs. This approach successfully develops confidence and independence so that pupils move purposefully from one activity to the next, or find themselves work to do when a task is completed. Just occasionally, more could be demanded of those capable of higher attainment.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Displays around the school show a balanced curriculum. There is a broad range of clubs and sporting activities. Those held at lunchtime make sure that pupils who cannot stay after school do not miss out. Science and book weeks, class trips, visiting story tellers and performance groups are all ways in which the school successfully captures pupils' interest and encourages their cultural awareness.

Planning and resources for information and communication technology (ICT) have been much improved and pupils benefit from links made between this and other subjects to extend the English and mathematics curriculum. Initiatives to improve subject vocabulary and extend the opportunities for practical and investigation work in mathematics and science are at a relatively early stage, but their effects are already evident in lessons.

Pupils in the unit benefit from a wide range of approaches to meet an increasingly complex range of needs. Although the needs of pupils with learning difficulties in the main school are largely different, more could be done to share the good practice taking place in the unit to benefit pupils in other classes.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

One parent wrote: 'West Malling is a warm and inviting school... dedicated to providing a safe and secure learning environment for children'. This reflects similar very positive views expressed by other parents and illustrates the school's successful pastoral and academic care. A crucial strength lies in the considerable knowledge staff have about individual pupils, as well as the conspicuous attention given to pupils' personal development. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils and supporting those who are vulnerable are secure and aided by good links with outside agencies. Breakfast club is a valuable start to the day, where pupils learn important social skills and just enjoy being together.

Assessment systems are well established. Progress is closely tracked and pupils' academic potential is carefully scrutinised to set them challenging National Curriculum levels to reach. Pupils also have sharply focused learning targets. Some pupils can explain their targets, but more could be expected of others in remembering what they are.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher, staff and governors work together as a positive and constructive team, determined to make a difference in difficult circumstances. The school's success in improving behaviour and developing teaching and learning has created a good foundation for moving on. Nevertheless, new initiatives have yet to make a significant and sustained impact on low standards, particularly at the higher levels.

The school makes good use of assessment information to identify strengths and weaknesses and the headteacher has a clear understanding of the quality of teaching. Staff new to their responsibilities at senior and subject level have made a good start, but their monitoring activities are not yet fully developed. Consequently, they do not have a detailed understanding of the impact of improvements. Governors understand the school's many challenges and have a good broad knowledge of its priorities. They are keen to support its work and act as 'critical friends'. The school has clearly won the support and satisfaction of the majority of parents. Most of them feel the school to be open and accommodating, although a very small minority feel they are not kept well informed.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Pupils

West Malling C of E Primary School and Language Unit, Old Cricket Ground, Norman Road,
West Malling, Kent ME19 6RL

Thank you very much for welcoming us to your school. We were pleased to speak with so many of you and hear what you had to say about your school and your work. This letter is to tell you some of the main things we found out while we were with you.

First and foremost, your school is doing a satisfactory job and all the staff are working really hard to make it even better. In some cases things have already improved, like your behaviour. We were glad to hear that you thought so too.

Here are some other important things about your school

- You enjoy school a lot and we could see this in how well you behaved and concentrated during lessons and in your enthusiasm when you played games at lunch time.
- You have a good understanding of how to keep fit, healthy and safe.
- All the staff take good care of you, and check carefully how well you are doing, which is especially important when so many new children join the school.
- Those of you in Reception and in the unit do well, and those in other classes make satisfactory progress.
- There are lots of interesting clubs and activities for you to take part in, including the ones at lunch break for those of you who cannot stay after school.

This is what your school has been asked to do to make things even better

- Make sure that those of you who find work that bit easier do better and reach higher standards.
- Ensure teachers look very carefully at how successfully improvements are helping you to learn better.

With best wishes for the future.

Patricia Davies Lead inspector