



St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118754
Local Authority Kent
Inspection number 291242
Inspection dates 11–12 December 2006
Reporting inspector Derek Watts

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

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|---|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Type of school | Primary | School address | St Mary's Road |
| School category | Voluntary aided | | Swanley |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 | | BR8 7BU |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01322 665212 |
| Number on roll (school) | 206 | Fax number | 01322 662114 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair | Andrew Jessup |
| | | Headteacher | Amanda McGarrigle |
| Date of previous school inspection | 30 April 2001 | | |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's CE is a smaller than average primary school. Most pupils are from a White British background. A few pupils speak English as an additional language but none are at an early stage of English language acquisition. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. The school serves an area with a significant proportion of Traveller families. Children's attainment on entry to the Nursery is below average, with a significant proportion having low language and social skills. The previous headteacher left in July 2006 to take up a post with the local authority. At the time of the inspection, an acting headteacher and an acting deputy were leading the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Mary's CE Primary is a good school where pupils achieve well and make good progress in their personal development. The vast majority of parents are happy with the quality of education provided and give the school good support.

Good leadership and management are major reasons for the school's effectiveness and the good improvements since the last inspection. The acting headteacher and acting deputy are well focused on raising achievement and improving provision. Other leadership roles are developing well and most subject leaders are effectively monitoring and developing their subjects. Recent improvements to assessment and tracking mean that the school has a clear overview of how well each individual pupil is progressing. The school is demonstrating a good capacity to improve.

Effective care, guidance and support contribute significantly to pupils' academic and personal development. In this positive school community, all pupils are valued and thrive. Their needs are carefully assessed, and guidance and support for those with learning difficulties, and the gifted and talented, are all good. Pupils enjoy school and have positive attitudes to learning. Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. Pupils with challenging behaviour are well managed and supported by staff. The school has worked hard to improve attendance, which is now satisfactory. Pupils show a good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles and how to keep safe.

Good provision in the Foundation Stage helps children in the Nursery and Reception to get off to a good start. They make good progress in all areas of learning. Pupils' progress in Years 1 and 2 is satisfactory and improving. Limited opportunities for extended writing account for pupils doing less well in this area. Teaching and learning are good overall but stronger in Years 3 to 6. Pupils make good progress in these year groups. Standards in Year 6 are average overall. Pupils do less well in writing but the school is tackling this. Good assessment systems mean that teachers have a clear picture of what pupils know and can do. Teachers usually use this information well to match work to pupils' abilities and needs so that they are challenged and learn at a good pace. Occasionally, pupils are not challenged enough, pace is lacking and the rate of learning slows. A good range of additional activities enriches an effective curriculum. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement and standards in writing particularly in Years 1 and 2, by providing more regular opportunities for pupils to write for extended periods.
- Ensure that all lessons are suitably challenging for pupils and that learning maintains a good pace.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good but there are variations in their rate of progress. Children in the Nursery get a good start. Pupil progress in Years 1 and 2 has been no better than satisfactory, due to past weaknesses in the quality of teaching, but the school is tackling this. Teaching is improving and pupils are making good progress in most areas but writing is less strong. Standards in writing in last year's Year 2 were well below average. Whilst the school has writing as a priority, pupils in Years 1 and 2 do not have sufficient opportunities to write at length. National test results for Year 6 have improved significantly since the last inspection and were above average in 2004 and 2005. National data shows that these pupils made exceptional progress from their below average starting points in Year 2. Whilst results in 2006 were not as high, pupils made good progress to reach average standards. The slight decline reflects the year group's higher than usual proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and late joiners with low attainment. Good progress in English and mathematics, good information and communication technology (ICT) skills and plenty of opportunities to work in teams all help to prepare pupils well for their future lives. The school's effective and inclusive provision enables all groups of pupils to achieve well, including gifted and talented pupils, Travellers and those with learning difficulties.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. St Mary's is particularly successful at celebrating the culture of Traveller families. As a consequence, Traveller pupils and their families feel valued and other members of the school have a clear understanding of their lifestyle. The school places much emphasis on good attendance and as a result, it has improved to broadly average levels. One pupil explained, 'Holidays are no longer allowed in school time'. Pupils appreciate the way the teachers make learning enjoyable. One child commented, 'Teachers make learning active and help us to understand'. Most pupils behave well and have good attitudes to learning. When a few pupils exhibit challenging behaviour, this is well managed by the staff. Year 6 pupils develop effective leadership skills through the School Council, supporting younger pupils and the prefect system. The school takes pupils' suggestions seriously. For example, the School Council has initiated an outside activity area to promote fitness. Pupils show a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and they take regular exercise. They are keen to show they take on board the need to stay safe. There is a good uptake of the wide range of additional sporting activities. In the Foundation Stage, children's personal and social skills develop well, due to the early identification of pupils needing extra support.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Effective teaching and learning contributes to pupils' good achievement. Teaching in the Foundation Stage, particularly in the Nursery, provides a good blend of direct teaching and opportunities for children to explore. Across the school, teachers plan lessons well and share learning intentions with the class so pupils know what they are to learn. Teachers promote new vocabulary and provide good opportunities for pupils to discuss their work, especially in Years 3 to 6. Consequently, pupils' speaking and listening skills are developing well. Assessment is usually used effectively to match tasks to pupils' different abilities and needs. As a result, pupils are suitably challenged, interested, and make good progress. However, occasionally, work is not well matched to pupils' needs, pace and challenge is not as high and so pupils' learning slows. An over-reliance on worksheets in Years 1 and 2 limits opportunities for pupils to organise their own work and to write at length. Teachers direct teaching assistants well so they can give good quality help to those who need it.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum promotes good achievement and good personal development. Writing has been identified as a priority for improvement and the school continues to take effective action to tackle this, particularly in Years 3 to 6. However, there are insufficient opportunities for extended writing in Years 1 and 2. Provision for ICT has been improved and is now used well to support teaching and learning in a range of subjects. A broad range of well-attended activities, including sports clubs and music tuition, enrich the curriculum. Positive links with a local professional football club successfully promote pupils' confidence and football skills. Pupils with exceptional musical talent have good opportunities to perform in the local community. A well-planned personal, social and health education programme gives good attention to healthy lifestyles and keeping safe. The Foundation Stage offers a wide range of interesting and stimulating activities that promote enjoyment and good progress.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are well-cared for and parents are happy with the care their children receive at school. Staff know their pupils well and ensure they are taught in a secure and safe environment. There are effective procedures to ensure that all pupils are protected and safe. Good links with external agencies help to provide for the needs of all pupils, including those with learning difficulties. Teaching assistants provide good support for those with behavioural, emotional and learning needs. Sound links with the church contribute to pupils' moral and spiritual development.

Effective assessment systems have been introduced recently and teachers are beginning to track the progress of individual and groups of pupils. This is starting to have a positive impact on pupils' learning, particularly in writing. There are clear plans to introduce similar arrangements in science. Pupils have clear learning targets for writing but targets for mathematics are not consistent across the school. Good marking enables pupils to know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are successfully promoting good achievement and good personal development. The acting headteacher has high expectations and has formed an effective partnership with the deputy headteacher. They are successfully building on the school's previous achievements. Leaders, together with other staff, have created a positive and inclusive atmosphere for pupils to learn. The role of subject leaders is developing well. Those new to the leadership posts are provided with good support and training.

Self-evaluation is effective and the school has a clear view of what it does well and what needs to be improved. Senior leaders and the local authority effectively monitor teaching. Good feedback, support and training are helping to ensure that most shortcomings in practice are remedied. The school improvement plan contains appropriate priorities such as improving writing but the monitoring of provision for writing is not always rigorous enough.

Governors are supportive, well informed and are beginning to hold the school to account by asking challenging questions about pupils' achievement and the quality of provision. Since the last inspection, the school has made good progress and continues to demonstrate a good capacity to improve. Pupils' achievement, teaching and learning and pupils' personal development have all improved from satisfactory to good.

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Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 2 |
| 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 | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |

Achievement and standards

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| How well do learners achieve? | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 2 |

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| 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 | 2 |

The quality of provision

| | |
|---|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 2 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 2 |
| 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.

Leadership and management

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2 |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 2 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 2 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 2 |
| 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 |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you so much for welcoming us into your school and showing us your work. We enjoyed our visit and would like to tell you what we found out. We found that St Mary's CE is a good school and one you can be proud of. The school has made good improvement since the last inspection.

These things are strengths of the school:

- you clearly enjoy school and the good activities offered
- children in Nursery get off to a good start
- teaching is mainly good, which is why you learn so much
- pupils in Years 3 to 6 make good progress
- most of you behave well in lessons and around the school
- all pupils are included in activities and you get on well with each other
- the staff know you and care for you well and you receive good support from them
- your acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher are leading the school well
- you look smart in your uniform with the new tie
- your parents are pleased with the school.

These are the things the school has been asked to improve:

- help some of you to make more progress in writing, particularly in Years 1 and 2.
- make sure that teachers always give you work that is hard enough so that you can make good progress in every lesson.

Finally, thank you once again for all your help. We wish you all the best for the future.