

St Mary's CofE VA Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124311
Local Authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	292952
Inspection dates	13–14 March 2007
Reporting inspector	John Eadie

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	284
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Karl Hymus
Headteacher	Gillian James
Date of previous school inspection	17 June 2002
School address	Ladywell Road Tunstall Stoke-on-Trent ST6 5DE
Telephone number	01782 235337
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average-sized school serves the parish and local community. There are areas of economic deprivation in the locality, which is reflected in the higher- than-average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. About a quarter of pupils are of Pakistani heritage and almost all the remainder are White British, other small groups representing a range of other ethnicities. Almost half of the Pakistani pupils and many of those from other heritages attract extra funding to support them in learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is increasing and is a little above average. There have been some significant staffing problems which has meant that the school has not had a stable leadership team until very recently. Even now, the deputy headteacher and the Key Stage 2 manager are temporary postholders. The headteacher started in January 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school, though it is improving rapidly. Parents recognise this progress and say such things as, 'Recently the school has become brighter and more stimulating, with a much broader education.' Much of the reason for the improvements is the drive and enthusiasm of the headteacher, very ably supported by the new leadership team. After the national tests last year, they correctly identified that standards in mathematics were not good enough. A number of well-focused strategies were put in place and pupils' progress in mathematics is now improving. Despite this, standards in mathematics are still lower than those in reading and writing.

Leadership and management are only satisfactory as the new team has not had a significant impact on improving pupils' progress, although this has started in mathematics. A rigorous programme of monitoring has begun, but governors and many subject co-ordinators are not sufficiently involved in the process. This has meant that the effectiveness of some strategies has not been evaluated. For example, a new curriculum has been implemented which involves more practical activities, particularly to interest and engage boys. Although it is meeting the needs of the pupils and the curriculum is satisfactory, it has not been evaluated to see how it can be modified and improved further.

Children start school with skill levels appreciably below those expected, and a minority speak very little English. Because of the good provision, they make good progress in the Foundation Stage Unit. Pupils who do not speak English at home are supported well when they first start and, as they move up through the school, almost all cope well with the demands of the curriculum in English. Through Years 1 to 6, pupils make satisfactory progress. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and they reach broadly average standards by the time they leave. Progress is not better as teaching is inconsistent, although teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There are too few opportunities for good practice to be shared to raise the general standard of teaching.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They are well behaved and very welcoming to visitors. The major reason for this good personal development is good care, guidance and support. The pupils' security and happiness are a high priority for all adults and this is reflected in pupils thoroughly enjoying school. They regard lessons as being 'fun' and are keen to work hard. New systems have been put in place to keep a check on the progress that pupils make. These are very thorough and ensure that none is falling behind. However, they are not having a significant impact on accelerating pupils' progress.

Although monitoring is in its early stages, the leadership team have a very accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Bearing this in mind, with the progress currently being made and the shared drive to succeed, the school is well placed to continue on its upward path.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics to match those in reading and writing.
- By sharing good practice, ensure that teaching is consistently good.
- Extend the monitoring to all levels of leadership and management to improve pupils' progress and standards of teaching and learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and they reach broadly average standards by the time they leave. Children start in the Nursery with levels of skills and knowledge appreciably below those expected and a minority, who do not speak English at home, have very little command of English when they start. Children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes, particularly in their development of language skills. However, they are still below expected levels by the time they start in Year 1.

Pupils make satisfactory progress from Year 1 to Year 6. Data shows that progress in mathematics improved significantly last term, but standards in this subject are still below those in reading and writing. Pupils who do not speak English at home make particularly good progress in developing their understanding of English. By the time they are in Years 1 and 2, almost all are coping comfortably with the demands of the curriculum in English and make satisfactory progress. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are given clear plans for their learning, are supported well and make the same progress as their classmates.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development are good because of the strong emphasis given to this through all aspects of school life. Although pupils have good awareness of the cultures of other countries, their awareness of the multi-cultural society in which they live is only satisfactory. Pupils are friendly to, and supportive of, each other and all adults, because of the constant emphasis on the friendship charter which they helped to draw up.

Pupils understand how to live a healthy lifestyle and why they should, although lunchtime food choices show they do not always practise this. Some pupils really enjoy the wide range of physical activities that is available through after-school clubs, although many do not readily pursue activity outside of school. Pupils said they 'feel safe and comfortable in school' and know who they can talk to. Curriculum opportunities in many subjects are helping pupils to develop their problem-solving and creative skills to prepare them satisfactorily for their future. Pupils make a good contribution to the community through their involvement in the school council, for instance, and their initiatives in fund raising. Attendance is average and the school has a good range of strategies to improve it.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching varies across the school and there are some inconsistencies in practice. In some instances, teachers' management of pupils is not effective and activities are too easy for pupils. In others, teachers have high expectations leading to very good behaviour, and ask good questions that make pupils think deeply. In most lessons, work is matched well to pupils' abilities but this is not always the case. Most teaching assistants play a full part in lessons, with well-timed prompts and questions to move pupils on in their learning. The approach to teaching in the Foundation Stage, with a good range of activities, gives many opportunities for learning and meets children's needs well.

Pupils are aware of their successes and their difficulties and hold up special cards effectively to signal when they need support. Pupils are encouraged to ask for help and most, through the comments in their books or through discussion with their teacher, are clear about what their next steps in learning are. Teachers make every effort to include pupils who do not speak English at home in their lessons, explaining any new vocabulary, for example.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum provides a satisfactory range of learning activities that meet the needs of all pupils, so pupils say they enjoy their lessons. The recent introduction of more practical activities in Years 1 to 4 is at an early stage but is helping to make learning more meaningful, particularly for boys. This is similar to the Foundation Stage curriculum, and helps smooth the transition into Year 1. Children in the Foundation Stage Unit enjoy a good and varied curriculum that meets their needs well, but activities in the outdoor area sometimes lack a clear learning focus. Good plans are made to support pupils who do not speak English at home and they are quickly able to take a full part in lessons.

Satisfactory provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology provides pupils with the basic tools for their future, although there are few examples of these skills being practised in other subjects. Parents and pupils appreciate the good range of visits and visitors and the variety of clubs. These extend pupils' social development, and pupils enjoy the good opportunities for them to learn to play a musical instrument or sing in a choir.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school is a caring environment and parents say their children are looked after well. Safeguarding arrangements are robust. However, despite improvements in site security, there are still issues with the completion of the fencing which need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The school works well with local agencies and this ensures good support for pupils who are learning English as a second language, for instance. Year 6 pupils visit the local High School regularly and this ensures they transfer confidently to the next stage of their education.

New systems for tracking academic progress are thorough and give teachers a very clear picture of how well pupils are learning. However, these systems are not yet having a major impact on improving progress. They are beginning to provide useful information to set targets, and pupils know these targets and say they help them to improve their work. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is good. Their needs are identified early in their school career and they are provided with suitable programmes that match their learning needs.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The leadership of the headteacher is good. She has played a key role in managing, and pursuing with determination, many changes over the last year. This has been done through the sharing of a clear strategy and vision and the action to match. She leads developments in teaching and learning particularly effectively.

Self-evaluation identifies the right priorities for improvement and is beginning to involve middle managers and governors in supporting the capable and enthusiastic senior leadership team. There has been a long-term lack of involvement of governors in monitoring school improvement and holding the school to account. The new chair of governors has shown effective leadership in already refocusing the governors on their role as critical friend to the school. Test results and teachers' assessments have recently started being analysed well by both the senior leadership team and subject leaders to show where progress is less than expected, and timely support is being put in place. This support is beginning to make a difference to pupils' long-term progress.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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	2
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	3
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	3
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	2
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	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

We very much enjoyed visiting your school this week and talking with so many of you. We were particularly impressed with how polite you all were and how pleasant you were to talk to. You clearly enjoy school and we are not surprised as, although it is presently satisfactory, it is improving rapidly.

These are the best things we found about your school:

- You behave well and are growing up into sensible young people.
- All adults look after you well and there are particularly good systems for checking on your progress to make sure none of you fall behind.
- Your headteacher and other teachers know clearly how to improve your school.
- You make a good start in the Foundation Stage Unit.
- Those of you who do not speak English at home are learning English well.

We think that the following things could be improved:

- Although your standards in maths are improving, they are still behind those in reading and writing.
- Some lessons are not as good as others and we have suggested that teachers learn from the best lessons so that all lessons are good.
- Make sure that everyone is checking what is going on to make sure that the school is improving as quickly as it could.

Best wishes and keep up the good work.