

St Mary's CofE (A) First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124344
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	292965
Inspection dates	6-7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Mary Hamby HMI

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4-9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	184
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Johnstone
Headteacher	Jeni Hammersley
Date of previous school inspection	3 February 2003
School address	The Heath Uttoxeter ST14 7LX
Telephone number	01889 256450
Fax number	01889 256454

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is slightly smaller than average. Most of the children come from White British backgrounds and the percentage of children entitled to free school meals is slightly higher than average. Fewer children than average have learning difficulties and disabilities in the school as a whole, but the proportions vary greatly from year to year. The current Year 3, for example, has almost double the number in Year 4.

There have been several changes of staff since the last inspection, including a change of headteacher and deputy headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This satisfactory school has some good features. The care and guidance given to the pupils is good and the strong Christian ethos helps them to understand the importance of kindness and to behave well. Personal development is good; the pupils are keen to adopt healthy lifestyles and make a contribution to their community. Parents are very pleased with what is provided. They appreciate many aspects of the school, from 'the friendly face on reception' to the teachers who are 'very approachable' to the headteacher who 'puts the children first', is 'easily reached' and 'always ready to listen'.

The pupils enjoy school and their achievement is satisfactory in each key stage. In the Reception Year, the children settle in well and are given sensitive support to help concentrate on their tasks. Standards are lower than the levels expected when the children enter school, but are closer to average by the end of the year, except in speaking and listening and writing, where they are still low. This legacy continues into the rest of the school and these areas remain as weaknesses. Standards in other subjects are satisfactory.

The teaching is satisfactory. Lessons are lively and capture the interest of the pupils. Relationships are good and the pupils are keen to learn. Planning has improved, but questions are not challenging enough for some of the pupils and opportunities for speaking and listening are not exploited consistently. Marking is not as helpful as it should be, and so some pupils do not get enough information about what they need to do to improve.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The headteacher and deputy headteacher form a strong team with a clear vision for the school. They have improved the curriculum to include more opportunity for creativity and thinking skills so that the curriculum is now good. A gradual start has been made to improving the leadership and management skills of other teachers to increase their effectiveness and understanding of whole-school issues. However, this is still at an early stage, and staff are not effective enough in monitoring and evaluation of their areas of responsibility.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in speaking and listening and writing throughout the school.
- Improve the teaching to ensure that questions are challenging for all pupils and that marking helps them to understand how to improve their work.
- Sharpen the leadership and management skills of staff to ensure that school policies and pupils' learning are monitored and evaluated thoroughly. 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.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The children start school with lower than expected levels of skills and knowledge. The welcoming culture and well-focused curriculum help them to achieve well in their personal development. In other areas of learning, achievement is satisfactory. However, pupils still start Year 1 with below-average skills in listening and speaking, and early writing.

Achievement from Years 1 to 4 is satisfactory, though it is marginally better in Years 1 and 2 than Years 3 and 4. Standards in the main are satisfactory, but in writing and speaking and

listening they are not as good as they should be. The pupils do not have a wide enough vocabulary to call upon when writing, and their spelling is erratic. Speaking and listening skills are developing, but the pupils are not yet confident in using more formal language to explain their thoughts and are not given enough opportunity to listen and respond to each other's ideas.

Throughout the school the pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities gain in confidence because they are given suitable support. They make sound progress. They have appropriate targets set for them, but these are not emphasised frequently enough.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. The children in the Reception Year settle well and have good dispositions to both work and play. Their enjoyment of school is evident in the way they relate well to each other and have fun.

Pupils' attendance is average and absence from school is followed up properly. All pupils enjoy coming to school, are polite, have positive attitudes and respond well to instructions. Behaviour is good, both in lessons and at playtimes. The pupils are supportive of those who need help. They raise money regularly for charities and enjoy close links with the local church and community. In addition, pupils are starting to develop their business enterprise skills through the production and sale of items such as the salt-dough Christmas decorations.

The school has been successful in encouraging pupils to adopt a healthy lifestyle. They know and understand that this is achieved through eating a healthy diet and participating in physical exercise. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe and know the procedures should any issues of inappropriate behaviour occur. They also see that the recently established school council has influence in making changes that affect their lives positively, such as developing the outside quiet area in the playground.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Staff have good relationships with the pupils and this helps lessons to be enjoyable. Discipline is effective and most lessons are taught at a brisk pace and so the amount of work covered is good. In the best lessons, the pace is adjusted so that the pupils are given reminders of what is expected and urged to do their best. The teachers work, with varying degrees of success, to match tasks to the capabilities of their pupils, but many of them find this more difficult in the whole-class sessions. In these sessions, the questions mainly target pupils of average ability, being too easy for some and too hard for others. This limits pupils' progress.

There are some examples of good marking which helps to spur the pupils on, but by and large this is not the case. Marking does not focus well enough on the pupils' targets and so there are instances where the pupils make the same mistakes over a period of time. Although the pupils know their targets, they are not as sure as they might be about how they can achieve them.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. This is because subject planning has improved since the last inspection and the links between the different key stages have been strengthened. The school has implemented its creative curriculum which links successfully with the school's motto of 'Learning to love and loving to learn'. The curriculum is effective in developing pupils' skills and learning attitudes, and has been implemented particularly well in the early years of the school. The increasing focus on encouraging pupils' creativity by expanding the number and range of practical activities helps pupils of all abilities to apply their knowledge. Good use is made of the expertise of visitors, such as the recent 'artist in residence', to enrich the pupils' experience.

The school has improved the range of clubs and there is now a broad range of activities for the pupils to enjoy. In addition, the school organises various educational visits, including a residential trip for Year 4 pupils, which help to broaden the pupils' horizons.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Parents are correct in their views that this is a strong aspect of the school. The school provides good quality care, guidance and support for all its pupils. It keeps them safe through the application of appropriate health and safety and security procedures. Pupils are confident to talk to adults in school if they have a problem and show care and concern for each other.

The school's assessment and tracking systems work well and identify quickly any pupils in need of support. Those pupils identified as needing additional help are supported well by staff in school and, where required, by outside expertise. Suitable targets are set for pupils, but the school recognises the need to improve its arrangements for checking pupils' progress towards individual targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They display a strong sense of purpose and are keen to implement plans for school improvement. The regular evaluation of lessons, analysis of test results and tracking of progress by the senior team has directed their attention to areas of weakness and provision has improved. Advice from the local authority is used judiciously to introduce new ideas and develop teaching skills.

The leadership skills of other staff are developing, but are not currently strong enough. Some useful work has been started to encourage the development of a team approach to management. However, the monitoring of teaching and learning and other aspects of evaluation are still at an early stage. The school has sound capacity to improve further.

Parents are consulted on aspects of school life, and responses show that most are pleased with what the school offers. The school listens to the views of parents and some changes have been made as a result of consultation. The governors comprise a supportive group who are becoming increasingly involved in strategic leadership, but they are not sufficiently involved in evaluation.

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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?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
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	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	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?	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.

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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

June 8 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of St Mary's C of E (A) First School, Uttoxeter, Staffordshire ST14 7LX

Thank you for making Mr Buxton and I so welcome when we came to see your school. We noticed that you behaved well and were kind to each other. We enjoyed talking to you and reading what your parents had to say about your school.

Our report says that your school is 'satisfactory'. This means that there are more good things about it than weaknesses. One good thing is that your headteacher already knew the things that needed improving – so she must know the school very well!

We noticed that you understand how to be healthy and keep fit and that you enjoy the responsibilities you have to make your school run smoothly. You like coming to school and live up to your school rules of 'love and respect'. The staff care for you and know you all very well. The teachers plan interesting things for you to do in lessons and on visits and this makes school enjoyable.

In order to make your school even better we want writing to improve as much as it can. You can help with this by practising your spellings and by trying your hardest to make your writing interesting and suitable for its purpose. We also think that you need more chances to speak and listen to each other. This does not mean chattering in class! We would like you to practise giving little talks and really listen to each other's views and opinions.

We have asked the teachers to make sure they ask you questions which really make you all think hard, and have asked them to give you more helpful comments when they mark your work. This will help you know what you can do to improve, so make sure that you try as hard as you can to do what they suggest.

Lastly we have asked that all the teachers take a share in checking up on the teaching more often so that all of you learn well. This will help the teachers, too, by developing their skills in helping to manage the school.

Don't forget to try your hardest. Best wishes from Mrs Hamby