

St Mary's Church of England (VA) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124766
Local Authority	SUFFOLK
Inspection number	293108
Inspection dates	19–20 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Michael Miller

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	280
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Finnis
Headteacher	Mrs Wendy Garrad
Date of previous school inspection	20 May 2002
School address	North Terrace Mildenhall Bury St. Edmunds Suffolk IP28 7AB
Telephone number	01638713317
Fax number	01638712020

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School is a larger than average first school for pupils aged 4 to 9. It serves the market town of Mildenhall in Suffolk, and some of the surrounding villages. It has a strong Christian ethos. There are broadly similar numbers of boys and girls. The proportion of pupils claiming free school meals is well below average. Children enter the Foundation Stage with below expected standards. Most pupils are of White British heritage, or with American national backgrounds from military personnel at the local air force base. The proportion speaking English as an additional language is low. An average percentage of pupils has learning difficulties, disabilities or a statement of special educational need.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Mary's Primary School provides a satisfactory education, with a number of important good features. There is good capacity for improvement. However, the school has been over-generous in some aspects of its self-evaluation, particularly of its standards and effectiveness. This is due mainly to a justified optimism for on-going improvement. Progress is good in the Foundation Stage. Standards in literacy and numeracy have been raised since the last inspection, but attainment remains broadly average and achievement satisfactory by Years 2 and 4. Some good groundwork has been undertaken, particularly over the past couple of years, to improve progress. In particular, the school is now monitoring pupils' progress more rigorously and is starting to make more effective use of this information in planning lessons. The management structure has been strengthened to support this. The school's leaders are now focussed well on enabling pupils' progress. Self-evaluation and target setting, whilst satisfactory overall, are improving gradually as staff in new posts of responsibility, and governors, gain in confidence and experience. The impact of these developments has yet to be seen fully in pupils' improved progress and higher standards. Consequently, improvement since the last inspection and value for money are satisfactory.

An important factor supporting the school's capacity to improve is its successful promotion of the pupils' personal development. This is in keeping with its strong Christian ethos. There is a good work ethic and pupils enjoy school, show good attitudes to learning, and behave well. Pupils have learnt to be sensible and adopt healthy and safe lifestyles. Display work promotes well the pupils' self-esteem. The curriculum is good, increasingly innovative, and enriched well through extra-curricular and other activities. Links between subjects are being developed well. Where curriculum change and development have been implemented, learning and pupils' progress are better. Questioning techniques are being used well by some teachers to challenge, involve and motivate pupils. However, where curriculum change has yet to be implemented, teachers' methods and approaches result in pupils being less actively involved in learning. Teachers' use of assessment to support lesson planning and pupils' progress is not yet consistent across the school. Academic guidance, learning and teaching are therefore only satisfactory. Pastoral support and guidance are good, and children are safeguarded well.

The school's management demonstrates satisfactory but improving leadership overall. Together with the support of other staff and governors, they are working hard to create the right conditions within which pupils can prosper. The successful promotion of spiritual, moral, social, and multicultural values, underpins well the school's educational approach. As one parent wrote, 'My child lacked confidence, but St Mary's encourages its pupils to develop as individuals, and we have watched him positively blossom these last two years.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop further its work to improve standards and achievement by Years 2 and 4.
- Make more effective use of the developing good practice in assessment to monitor the pace of pupils' progress more rigorously, and to further improve target setting for all groups of pupils.
- Develop the improving monitoring and evaluation skills of the school's leaders, at all levels, to raise the overall quality of pupils' learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are average. Children start in the Foundation Stage with below average standards, but this does vary from year to year. Children currently in Reception have made good progress and are on track to meet the nationally expected standards. They are being prepared well for the National Curriculum. Pupils make satisfactory progress through Years 2 and 4, and standards remain average. Good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities helps them to make good progress, particularly with the help of teaching assistants in lessons. Until the last couple of academic years, the monitoring of progress has not been sufficiently effective. Consequently, progress has not been consistently high enough in Years 1 to 4. However, changes in systems are now ensuring sufficient data are kept. The tracking of pupils' progress is therefore now more effective, but the impact on achievement of these new approaches has yet to be assessed and evaluated fully.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school's 'Values' programme enables pupils to consider well issues such as the importance of showing respect for others. Links with schools abroad help pupils to strengthen their understanding of other cultures and inter-racial harmony. Attendance is broadly average, but pupils enjoy school and are keen to learn. Most pupils behave well and are proud of their achievements. They are friendly towards visitors and consider well each other's needs. Working relationships are supportive and warm. Pupils develop into confident young people. They are keen to adopt safe and healthy lifestyles and make a good contribution to the wider community. The school council is regarded highly, and involved well in school life. In fact, pupils would like it to meet more regularly. Good personal qualities and satisfactory key skills prepare them soundly for the next stage of education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. They are particularly good in the Foundation Stage. There are some good and improving features to teaching in Years 1 to 4, but learning and progress are not consistently good. This is partly because the activities teachers plan do not always engage pupils fully. Most teachers cater well for pupils' differing learning styles or abilities. The best teaching was seen in lessons where curriculum development is having a good impact on changing teaching styles. In such lessons, pupils learn well because tasks match their needs closely, lessons move at a brisk pace, and skilled questioning explores well pupils' knowledge and understanding. Pupils say that most of their lessons are interesting, although some of the work is too easy. Teachers' use of assessment is not consistently sharp enough in setting targets or providing consistently good challenge for the more able pupils. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is good, and skilled teaching assistants play a valuable role in supporting pupils' learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

An important element of school improvement is the school's development of a good curriculum to help it improve pupils' progress. It now meets the needs of learners well, and therefore lessons are becoming increasingly more enjoyable, relevant and meaningful for all groups of pupils. The most notable emerging strength is in the links developing between subjects, as with some good Year 3 work combining successfully art, French, geography, information and communication technology, and literacy. Furthermore, teachers in Years 3 and 4 are experimenting well with drama and role-play in order to increase pupils' involvement. Pupils' response to such work is positive. Curriculum enrichment is strong due to a good range of well attended clubs, links with external groups, and the wide range of visits and visitors. Pupils speak highly of the many activities provided. Resources are of good quality and used well to support the curriculum and develop learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. However, pastoral care is good. Parents say their children are happy at school and are looked after well. Their confidence is well placed and procedures for health and safety, and child protection, are rigorous. There are good links with external agencies. These help to ensure strong support for pupils who face challenging circumstances, or who have learning difficulties or disabilities. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Pupils' attainment is monitored soundly and more use is now made of the data to improve their progress. It is analysed by class teachers in addition to senior managers, which helps to ensure the prompt identification of any pupils who may be underachieving. Although teachers provide pupils in Years 1 to 4 with group targets for improvement in reading, writing and mathematics, not all pupils are aware of how to apply them to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving. The recent restructuring of the leadership team is starting to ensure a more rigorous analysis of the school's performance. The headteacher is demonstrating good leadership in encouraging delegation, and in enabling less senior staff to take responsibility. The school's middle leadership shows good potential, and accountability is accepted readily. Initiatives to support the pupils' personal and academic development are taken very seriously. However, the use of monitoring information to raise pupils' progress, although improving, is not yet developed fully. There has been an important change of focus by the governing body, to ensure it is holding the school to account more effectively. Professional links between staff and governors have been strengthened. These enable a better mutual understanding of the pupils' needs. Some initiatives are in their early days, but because of much clearer direction from the school's leadership team, they are starting to have a gradual impact on improving pupils' achievements. The school is therefore demonstrating good capacity for further improvement.

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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?	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	2

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?	3

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	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

21 March 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England (VA) Primary School, North Terrace, Mildenhall, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP28 7AB

We would like to thank you all for welcoming us so warmly into your school. We were impressed by your friendliness towards us. We enjoyed our conversations with you. This letter is to tell you what we found out about your school.

These are the things we found are best about your school.

- You behave well, pay attention in class, and enjoy being involved in learning.
- Together with your teachers and staff you help to make the school a welcoming place.
- You show respect for each other and the qualities which make a good friend.
- Your teachers are helping you to make important links between subjects, so that you can learn more and make better progress.
- Your school works well with others to help support you in your learning.
- Your teachers and governors are enthusiastic and determined to help you to improve.

This is what we have asked your school to do now.

- Help you improve your skills and learning to enable you to achieve even better.
- Improve the way teachers record and make use of information on your progress.
- Improve further the ways in which your teachers, and those in charge of your learning, check on the work of the school.

Your teachers have talked with us about all this, and we support their ideas for helping you to learn and make even better progress. You too can help by continuing to work hard and encouraging each other to do your best.

With all best wishes for your future,

Michael Miller

Lead inspector

Gillian Smith and Richard Perkins

Team Inspectors