

St Mary's Island Church of England (Aided) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132056
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	298595
Inspection dates	14–15 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	340
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John M Saunders
Headteacher	Sharon Day
Date of previous school inspection	29 June 2006
School address	Island Way West St Mary's Island Chatham ME4 3ST
Telephone number	01634 891050
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Pupils start school with above average capabilities in this larger than average sized school. An average proportion has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is in an area of high mobility and many pupils leave and join the school partway through their primary education. When the school was last inspected, it was issued with a Notice to Improve the quality of leadership and management. It had a monitoring inspection visit in February 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. St Mary's Island provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. The main weaknesses in leadership and management identified in the last inspection have been tackled successfully, so that staff now work more effectively as a team. With improved arrangements for tracking pupils' progress, school leaders have a much clearer picture of how well each pupil is doing. This has contributed to a rise in standards. School leaders and governors acknowledge, however, that they have further to go. Although results in the Year 6 national tests in 2007 were sharply up on the previous year, pupils still did less well in mathematics and science than in English. Expectations have not always been high enough. Recognising this, school leaders have, this term, agreed more challenging targets for the attainment of Year 6 pupils in mathematics.

There are many able pupils in the school, and pupils of all abilities are well motivated and have very positive attitudes to learning. Their behaviour is exemplary. Because St Mary's Island provides a caring and supportive environment, pupils are very happy and enjoy school. They get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage, so that they start Year 1 with standards that are notably above average. Staffing difficulties in the recent past have meant that they have not built sufficiently on these standards in Years 1 and 2. The broadly average standards in recent national assessments at the end of Year 2 are not as high as they should be for such able and enthusiastic pupils. There are encouraging signs, however, that standards of current work in Years 1 and 2 are better than seen in previous years. Work in Years 3 to 6 shows that the improvements of 2007 are on track to be sustained in English and mathematics, although there is less work evident in science in Year 6 than might be expected for this stage in the term. School leaders do not do enough to routinely check that the planned curriculum is being taught.

The quality of teaching and learning has improved but some inconsistencies remain. Although school leaders regularly observe teachers' lessons, they do not systematically follow these observations up to make sure that action has been taken to iron out weaknesses. As was the case in the last inspection and on the inspection monitoring visit, work is still not consistently well matched to the range of abilities in each class. More able pupils, in particular, are not always challenged enough. This is a concern that parents also raise. Several comment that although 'teaching is better this year', they 'would like more hard evidence that our children are being stretched to reach their potential'.

Pupils have, and refer to, individual targets that help them to identify what they need to focus on to improve their work in English and mathematics. Marking, however, gives less consistent guidance to pupils. Some shows clearly what pupils need to do to improve their work but the weakest merely acknowledges that work has been done.

Communication with parents is much better than in the past, and the 'parentmail' fortnightly emailed newsletters are greatly appreciated. As parents observe, 'a lot of time and effort has been spent in improving the school since the last Ofsted report'. Although there are several areas where monitoring and follow up have not been rigorous enough to ensure more rapid improvements in provision for pupils, the raised standards demonstrate the school's satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children quickly settle to the routines of school life in the Reception Year. Parents voice much praise for this and the way their children learn to love coming to school. One typically wrote, 'I couldn't ask for a better start to my son's education. He is thoroughly enjoying school life and has learnt so much in such a short space of time.' Another described how, on a visit, they were 'impressed with how inviting and colourful the classroom was, the good behaviour, the range of activities and how purposeful the children were'. The children enjoy the good range of indoor and outdoor activities on offer, but occasionally staff do too much for them when children could be making more choices for themselves. Good teaching in the Foundation Stage means that children maintain, and build on, the above average capabilities that they have at the start. Standards at the end of the Reception Year are above expectations for children's ages, particularly in social development, language and mathematical development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Follow up management decisions and initiatives so that, in particular, school leaders check on delivery of the curriculum and whether teachers have taken on board points they have been given for development.
- Consistently match work to pupils' different abilities so that it provides enough challenge for more able pupils.
- Ensure that all marking gives pupils clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work.

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

Standards in the Year 6 tests have risen significantly since the last inspection. There has been good improvement in English, mathematics and science, although pupils still do notably better in English than they do in other subjects. Year 2 assessment results have been lower than they should be, given the number of able and well motivated pupils. Current work shows, however, that pupils are now making better progress in Years 1 and 2. Work in Years 3 to 6 shows that the school is set to sustain and build on the improved standards in 2007 in English and mathematics. However, science standards are at risk if the amount of work in this subject in Year 6 does not increase. Although pupils of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, make satisfactory progress, more able pupils do not always make as much progress they could because they are not always given challenging enough work. Pupils who join the school part way through their primary education do as well as their classmates. Parents say this is because they are helped to 'quickly learn the routines and expectations of the school'. The progress pupils make in their key literacy and numeracy skills prepares them satisfactorily for the next stage of their education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are friendly, courteous and exceedingly well behaved. They are proud of their school's facilities and look after them carefully. Pupils are also safety conscious and feel secure. The school has a clear Christian ethos and the development of the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is strong. Pupils enjoy coming to school, as is demonstrated by their above average attendance. Pupils are mostly enthusiastic in lessons, although a few are occasionally content to let an uninteresting lesson drift over them.

Pupils understand well how to eat healthily and the need for exercise. Many participate in the wide range of sporting activities offered. The 'Walking Bus' scheme has proved so successful that there are now four different routes. There is a strong sense of community. 'We work as a team', one pupil said. Pupils support each other well in the classroom and in the playground. Particularly noticeable is the way that older pupils help and take responsibility for younger ones. Pupils also feel that staff listen to their opinions. There is an effective school council whose suggestions, for example to improve playground equipment and safety, have been implemented. Pupils support a number of charities and local community events.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection, with more practical activities that the pupils enjoy. Interactive whiteboards are in every classroom and they are used well to enliven lessons. During the best lessons, teachers check frequently whether pupils have understood and where the gaps in learning are. However, not all teachers' planning matches work to the needs of all the pupils, so that more able pupils, in particular, are not always challenged enough. Relationships between staff and pupils are very good. Lessons contribute to pupils' good personal development as well as their academic progress through encouraging cooperation as well as independent work. Teaching assistants provide very good support where they take notes of pupils' progress and teach small groups sensitively using a good range of resources.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

St Mary's Island benefits from spacious accommodation and good facilities. Pupils enjoy the variety of activities in school and through the various clubs, as well as the trips that give them first hand experiences. Older pupils take part in a residential week to develop their independence and team skills. The provision for literacy is good, with many opportunities to practise it through other subjects. However, links between numeracy and other subjects are less well developed. There is not enough science timetabled for some classes. The very simplest French is taught but it is not systematically planned to ensure pupils develop their knowledge and use of French as they move up the school. The school is aiming for more creative links between different subjects, but these remain at an early stage of development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The care and support the school provides are good. The academic guidance is improving, but is still not better than satisfactory. Teachers now have much clearer information on how well pupils are progressing than was the case at the time of the last inspection. Most pupils know what their targets are for English and mathematics, but they are less clear about how to achieve them. This is because the guidance teachers give through marking varies in quality and detail. Pupils feel that staff are caring and supportive. The systems adopted to improve pupils' attendance and punctuality have been very effective. These include better communication with parents of persistent latecomers and awards for which pupils eagerly compete.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Improvements have been made since the last inspection, particularly in the use of data to track pupils' progress. These have led to better standards and achievement. There is better team spirit in the school, communication with parents has improved, and governors are becoming better informed and more ready to challenge school leaders. The school now has a clearer view of its strengths and weaknesses and has accurately identified several areas for further improvement. However, too many responsibilities, that are usually the job of middle managers, have been taken on by the senior leadership team, for example taking on the role of managing individual subjects. Although school leaders observe lessons, these observations are not followed up systematically to ensure improvements have been put in place. This leads to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. The school's long term plans are not detailed enough and the curriculum plans do not reflect the school's stated aims for greater creativity. Parents are generally supportive, but a minority are critical of leadership and management. As one parent said, 'This is one of the most affluent areas of Medway. We should be doing better.'

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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	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	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

19 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Island CofE Primary School, Chatham ME4 3ST

Thank you for making me so welcome when the other inspectors and I came to visit your school. You told us how you thought your school is getting better, and we agree. The school is giving you a satisfactory education and the management of the school has improved. We have asked the school to make some further improvements, however, to see that decisions are always followed up, including when staff come to see each other's lessons.

We were impressed with how very well behaved you all are and how keen you are to work hard to do well in your schoolwork. Children do especially well in the Reception classes. The rest of you are making sound progress because the school's provision for you is satisfactory but we think you should be doing even better. We have asked teachers to make sure that they take extra care to match work to your different abilities because we think that some of you could be tackling harder work.

We were pleased to see that you know your targets in English and maths, but we were disappointed that not all of your teachers' marking gives you such helpful guidance on how to do better. We have asked the school to improve this.

You can all play your part too by continuing to work hard and doing your very best.

Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly.

Best wishes. Selwyn Ward Lead Inspector

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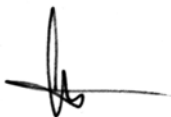
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Selwyn Ward
Lead Inspector