

St Mary and St Thomas' CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104796
Local Authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	308673
Inspection date	16 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Judith Tolley

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	224
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Philip Burman
Headteacher	Mrs Kirsty Haw
Date of previous school inspection	27 June 2005
School address	Barton Close St Helens Merseyside WA10 2HS
Telephone number	01744 678010
Fax number	01744 678013

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The Inspector investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; personal development and well-being; academic guidance and support; and leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from: the school's self-evaluation; national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, policies and minutes of meetings; observation of the school at work; interviews with senior members of staff and students; and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This school is larger than average. Pupils are predominantly of White British heritage and there are very few for whom English is not their first language. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is high. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. It has the Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Children join the school with attainment which is mostly well below that expected for their age. By the end of Year 2 standards are above average. By Year 6 standards are above average in English, mathematics and science and many pupils attain standards higher than expected for their age: achievement is outstanding. In the school's national test results at both Year 2 and Year 6, standards have risen significantly over the last three years and continue to rise.

Pupils' personal development is excellent. They take pride in their school, have excellent relationships with each other and their teachers and find that learning is both exciting and fun. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and during their time in the school pupils develop a real love of learning. Pupils are given frequent opportunities to take responsibility, for example, in the school council, as Bully Busters and Playground Leaders. They treat this very seriously and are confident in expressing their views. They are particularly proud of the work they have done to improve outside play facilities. Much of this is because the quality of care, guidance and support is excellent. The school follows government guidelines to ensure the safety of its pupils and the safe recruitment of staff. Parents and carers appreciate the way the school supports their children and the help given to ensure pupils can achieve their best. Pupils become confident, articulate and eager learners who thoroughly enjoy their education and who are able to make the right choices about healthy living. Attendance is close to average. The school has put in considerable effort to improve attendance and punctuality and this has proved to be very successful. Rates of attendance and punctuality have improved significantly over the last three years and continue to rise.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding and ensures that all pupils make excellent progress from their starting points. Pupils say that lessons are interesting and fun. They particularly enjoy the opportunities for working collaboratively, for example, in science and English. They like to solve problems and to present their ideas. Teachers know pupils very well indeed and lessons are very well planned to meet pupils' individual needs. Teachers use questioning very effectively to support and extend learning and every opportunity is taken to provide activities designed to develop pupils' skills at speaking and listening and their independence. Because of outstanding teaching in the Foundation Stage, children begin Year 1 with a firm foundation for learning. Assessment information is used very effectively to inform planning. Pupils are fully involved in evaluating their own and each other's work and know in detail how to improve.

Systems to monitor pupils' progress and set targets are rigorous and very effective. As a result, the school is able to respond very promptly to changing needs and circumstances to ensure pupils' progress is not hindered. The school works very hard in collaboration with outside agencies and through its Nurture Group to support pupils and to eliminate barriers to learning. This is greatly appreciated by parents and pupils alike.

Leadership and management are outstanding. There has been excellent improvement since the last inspection. Standards and achievement have improved significantly over the last three years and continue to rise. The headteacher provides very clear direction. Actions taken to broaden pupils' experience and promote excitement and enjoyment in their learning, for instance, through the problem solving events such as the 'Murder Mystery' and 'Dinosaur Eggs', have a significant impact not only upon standards but also on pupils' attitudes towards learning. Staff

and pupils talk about these activities with enthusiasm. The headteacher is very strongly supported by all staff and has very successfully brought about a high level of consistency across the school, for example, in the excellent curriculum. Senior members of staff work closely together in a very effective and enthusiastic team. Staff and pupils alike are proud of their achievements, speak enthusiastically about the work of the school and share a determination to strive for excellence. All teachers and support staff are involved in planning and in decision making; they regularly share good practice to help each other. Monitoring of the school's work is rigorous and thorough. Self-evaluation is honest, accurate and forms the basis for short and long-term planning. Challenging targets are set, met and regularly reviewed. Governors act very effectively as critical friends and are also fully involved in the school's self-evaluation and improvement process. The school has an outstanding capacity to improve further and provides excellent value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children get off to an excellent start in the Foundation Stage. From starting points mostly well below those expected for their age, in particular in communication, children's achievement is excellent. Teachers plan creative and interesting activities which take account of children's different needs and place the emphasis on developing communication skills, very carefully. This leads to rapid learning in a fun and exciting atmosphere. Because of outstanding teaching children make excellent progress, particularly in their personal development, speaking and listening. The challenging behaviour of a significant number of children when they start in the Foundation Stage is quickly rectified. Staff have high expectations and patiently teach the required social skills. As a result, children gain more positive attitudes and become very engaged in their learning. They take responsibility for choosing activities and enjoy doing special jobs such as giving out milk and tidying up. Continuous close checks on individual progress celebrate milestones reached by individuals and enable a very smooth transition between classes. As a result, most achieve the expected learning goals for their age and some exceed them by the start of Year 1. Children have excellent relationships with each other and their teachers and are keen to learn and behave well. They treat each other kindly and enjoy taking responsibility and participating in group activities. Their welfare is promoted very well, based on very good links with parents and very strong leadership and management.

What the school should do to improve further

There are no significant areas for improvement. The school is very much aware of what it needs to do to improve further and plans are already in place to do this.

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?	1
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for making me so welcome when I came to visit your school recently. I really enjoyed watching you work and play. I also thoroughly enjoyed talking to you and hearing your views.

I am sure you will not be surprised to know that your school is an excellent one. You told me how good it was and I agree with you. I was particularly impressed by your behaviour and the excellent way you get on with each other and your teachers.

You play a very important role in making decisions in your school and take your responsibilities very seriously. I was really impressed by the way some of you help in the playground and teach younger children how to play playground games. You told me how much you enjoy your lessons and it was easy to see why. You also told me how much you enjoyed the special whole school activities the teachers plan for you, such as the 'Murder Mystery' and the 'Dinosaur Eggs', how exciting they were and how much they helped you learn. Teachers work very hard to make activities interesting and fun. It was clear to me how much you enjoyed planning presentations and investigations together in science and how well you got on when you worked together in your literacy lessons. You reach good standards in your work and you all make excellent progress.

Children in the Nursery and Reception classes also make excellent progress. I noticed how well the younger children learned through play and how much they enjoyed learning to read and write. They wondered whether the inspector would give them a tick like their own 'Tidy Up Inspectors' in their class. Yes, I did, a great big one!

You are very well looked after and your teachers have a thorough knowledge of how each of you is getting on. They give you very good advice about how to improve your work. I expect you know that your headteacher and the staff at the school work very hard to think up new ideas and make things better.

I am confident that you will help your teachers to make sure your school continues to be successful and a happy place to be and to learn.