

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Portbury

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109272
Local Authority	North Somerset
Inspection number	309948
Inspection date	30 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Martin Kerly

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	111
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rebecca Ogden
Headteacher	Carole Sharp
Date of previous school inspection	6 October 2003
School address	Church Road Portbury Bristol BS20 7TR
Telephone number	01275 372066
Fax number	01275 372066

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following: • the achievement of pupils and in particular the current progress being made by pupils of all abilities • variations and trends in the quality of teaching and learning • the capacity of leaders to raise standards. Evidence was gathered from observations around the school, discussions with pupils and staff, and analyses of the school's working documents and the questionnaires completed by parents. Other aspects of the school were not inspected in detail, but the inspector 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

Numbers are rising steadily, although the school remains much smaller than average. There are four classes, each containing pupils from two year groups. Pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic circumstances from the village and other communities further afield. Almost all are White British. None is at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. Whilst the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is lower than the national average, these pupils are distributed unevenly between year groups, with a relatively high proportion in some years. The attainment of pupils on entry is varied and, with small numbers, fluctuates from one year to the next, but overall it is close to that usually found. The school building has recently been extended along with a major reorganisation of existing accommodation and outdoor areas to provide designated rooms for the youngest children, computers, and a library.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This good school serves its community well. It has a number of significant strengths. Pupils are exceptionally positive about their school, enjoy it immensely and display excellent attitudes towards one another. These outstanding elements contribute to their good personal development and well-being and are key features of the school's success. Parents appreciate the good care, guidance and support received by their children and the positive impact these have on their attitudes and moral development. One reflected the feelings of others by writing about their child, 'I feel she is well cared for and most importantly she is happy here.' Another commented, 'Each child has been recognised as an individual and has received encouragement to shine in many areas.' The headteacher and senior staff lead the school well. There are well-structured systems for checking the school's work, providing an accurate view of all aspects of its performance. This has enabled the school to make significant progress since the last inspection and the school is well placed to improve further. Pupils smile a lot, have fun and go out of their way to welcome visitors. They are exceptionally thoughtful towards one another and those in the wider community less fortunate than they are. They feel valued and very conscientiously take on many additional responsibilities in school and participate in activities in the wider community. Those in Year 6 delight in their responsibility of being paired with children in the Foundation Stage. One playground buddy explained, 'We have a buddies bench but no-one usually sits on it because most people have lots of friends here.' Pupils respond very enthusiastically to ideas promoting healthy lifestyles, including completing 50 laps of a circuit at lunchtime as part of the 'world walk challenge' and making healthy food as part of a healthy living week. The school has received the national Healthy School Award and Activemark in recognition of its work. Pupils behave well throughout the school day. Attendance is above average and pupils arrive punctually. They feel safe and are confident that all adults in school take good care of them. The school rigorously implements all the statutory procedures designed to safeguard pupils, with extensive on-going staff training. It works well with external professionals to help meet the specific needs of vulnerable pupils and those with complex difficulties.

Children in the Foundation Stage get off to a sound start and the provision is satisfactory. The new classroom and designated outdoor areas for these children are not being used to their full potential and the children are not consistently extended or inspired by the range of activities provided. Progress accelerates in Years 1 and 2, and again in Years 5 and 6, enabling pupils of all abilities to achieve well. In national assessments in Years 2 and 6, standards are above average, particularly in reading, writing and science. Standards in mathematics are average but not as high as other subjects. Standards declined in 2007 in Year 6, in a year with a higher-than-usual proportion of pupils with learning difficulties. Pupils currently in each key stage are well on track to reach their challenging targets and pupils in Years 2 and 6 are attaining above average standards.

Teaching and learning are good, with many strong features. Consequently, pupils are acquiring the skills needed for the next stage of their education and adult life, including well-developed collaborative and problem-solving skills. Teachers have very effective relationships with the pupils. They provide imaginative and stimulating experiences in a broad curriculum. This inspires pupils and contributes to their exceptional attitudes and strong personal development, for example, when working in science in small groups to make life-size posters of the human body's circulatory system. Teachers regularly assess pupils' progress and help them to assess their own

learning and identify next steps. Pupils are involved in agreeing learning targets, and this supports their academic guidance. They are becoming aware of their progress towards them and find them useful. Teachers collect good information about each pupil's learning. However, they do not always use this information fully when planning activities to ensure work is closely matched to the wide range of abilities. In some mathematics lessons, for example, pupils of all abilities spend much of the lesson engaged on the same computation or problem-solving activity. This slows the progress of a few pupils, particularly the most able and those with learning difficulties. Pupils recognise the breadth and range of enriching activities, such as the special weeks for art and multicultural experiences, visits to places of interest, the good range of clubs and competitive sporting and musical events. Displays in classrooms and around the school reflect this broad range but there is relatively little displayed to promote learning in mathematics. There are effective links between subjects, for example, when developing arguments for and against junk foods during a literacy lesson. This adds to pupils' interest, as could be seen when the pupils burst into spontaneous applause in response to an impromptu role play between the teacher and a pupil.

An important factor in the good leadership and management is the way the headteacher, who has a clear strategic view, has promoted the school's vision statement, 'A caring, Christian community committed to achievement' so that pupils readily refer to it and are keen to demonstrate how they are fulfilling it. The school recently acquired the Investors in People status. Teachers are encouraged to fulfil leadership roles. They carry out careful and systematic checks on their areas, for example, the quality of writing or pupils' personal, social and emotional development. They make good use of the information gained to determine priorities in the improvement plan and share it in detail with the governing body. Governors have a clear view of the school's performance. They are led well and have effective systems for receiving information and contributing to strategic decisions. There are comprehensive systems for tracking pupils' progress and the school uses this information well to help raise standards by setting realistic and yet challenging targets for the end of each year. There are regular and formal systems for informing parents about their children's progress and newsletters about events in school, but a substantial minority of parents are concerned about the level of day-to-day contacts and feel unwelcome when wishing to raise minor points. One parent commented, 'We feel the school needs to improve communication with parents'. Another wrote, 'I, amongst others, do not feel that we are able to make suggestions or even ask questions, as all too often it is wrongly taken as a criticism.' The school was not aware of this perception prior to the inspection and is committed to reflecting on it and working to resolve it.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The children share the new classroom with some Year 1 pupils. There are effective systems for introducing children to school and this enables them to settle quickly and feel secure within established routines. They make satisfactory progress and many make good progress in mathematical development. By the end of the year, most are attaining standards expected nationally for their age. The teacher and her assistant provide a satisfactory range of activities but there are few imaginative stimuli in the classroom for role play and to promote curiosity. Limited use is made of the designated outdoor area to support all six areas of learning, with relatively few opportunities for children to move independently in and out of doors. At times, while playing, children's learning slows as opportunities are missed to intervene and extend their thinking and understanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics by improving the match of work to pupils' different abilities and strengthening the numerate environment in classrooms.
- Make better use of the new Foundation Stage accommodation and designated outdoor area by inspiring children with high quality activities and extending their learning through well-timed adult interventions.
- Improve communication with parents so that they all feel welcome and at ease when seeking information or raising points about their children's education.

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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?	2
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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
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?	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

6 February 2008

Dear Children,

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Portbury, Bristol
BS20 7TR

Thank you for the way you all made me feel very welcome in your school recently. I thoroughly enjoyed talking to some of you, visiting your classrooms and seeing some of your work. I was particularly impressed by the exceptionally friendly way you all greeted me as I walked around the school and playground. You were right to tell me that St Mary's is a good school. Here are some of the highlights:

- You are brilliant in the way you care for one another, share things, help each other and play together. Those of you who are buddies, monitors, school councillors or class monitors carry out your duties very conscientiously.
- You all told me how much you like school and all the really interesting things your teachers plan for you to do. I could see this in the way you set about some of your tasks such as designing the posters of the human body.
- I felt exhausted by your energy and fitness in the 'world walk challenge' at lunchtime! You are obviously experts on knowing how to stay fit and healthy.
- You work hard in lessons and make good progress towards your targets.
- Your teachers have lots of good ideas to make lessons interesting and are helping you to learn how to work in groups and solve problems.
- All the adults in school take good care of you and this helps you to feel safe.
- The headteacher and leaders have good ways of checking up on everything around school. They are always thinking about ways of improving the school.

I have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to work together on three things:

- Help you make more progress in mathematics by making sure that the work you all get is not too hard or too easy and that there are displays in your classroom to help you understand what you are learning in mathematics.
- Provide more interesting and different things for the Reception children to do in their classroom and outside.
- Think about ways of improving links with your parents so that they feel more in touch with what is going on day-to-day and able to pop in if they have a question or something they want to talk about.

I know you will want to help the school in these things and you may well have your own ideas about them.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Kerly Lead Inspector