

St Mary's CofE Primary School, Amersham

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110455
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310313
Inspection dates	2–3 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Joy Considine

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	330
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs S Pounce
Headteacher	Mrs J Hills
Date of previous school inspection	13 June 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	School Lane Amersham HP7 0EL
Telephone number	01494 726032

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	2–3 March 2009
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Fax number

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Age group 4-11

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's is a larger than average popular primary school with provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage for children in the Nursery and Reception classes. Most pupils come from the local area and are mainly White British. A very small proportion come from minority ethnic backgrounds and are learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is low compared with most schools. All of these pupils receive additional support in lessons and have moderate learning or emotional and social difficulties. The school provides a breakfast club and an after school club which are managed by the Amersham Hospital Day Nursery. The school has received a number of awards including Investors in People and Activemark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The headteacher, together with a committed team of staff and governors, has established a purposeful environment reflecting the Christian ethos of the school. As one parent wrote, 'we have been impressed with the happy, positive atmosphere and the strong sense of community.' There have been significant improvements since the last inspection and the school now provides a good quality of education for pupils. Children make a successful start to the Early Years Foundation Stage because staff have created a delightful environment in which they feel safe and secure and learn extremely well. They make outstanding progress in their personal and academic skills. In the rest of the school pupils make good progress. Standards at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 have risen steadily over the past five years and are exceptionally high in English, mathematics and science.

Pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in their behaviour and very positive attitudes in school. They are very friendly, polite and helpful and show great respect towards the values and feelings of others. They adopt healthy lifestyles and particularly enjoy the wide range of physical activities provided by the school. Pupils feel safe and secure in school and know that if an incident does arise, it will be dealt with swiftly by adults. Staff provide pupils with a broad range of opportunities to develop their confidence and independence and to take responsibility within school and the wider community beyond. For example, pupils take part in the Amersham Music Festival and the annual church fete. Pupils speak confidently about the range of enrichment activities and special projects that enable them to practise their skills and to develop new interests.

Teaching is good and this ensures that pupils make good progress throughout the school. Pupils enjoy their lessons because teachers make learning fun. Teachers provide plenty of opportunities for pupils to talk in lessons, but they miss opportunities to further challenge pupils by asking probing questions that will deepen their understanding. Teaching assistants are particularly skilled in supporting those pupils who need additional support. The curriculum is enriched through a planned programme of visits to places of interest such as the mosque in Chesham and Windsor Castle. Teachers' link subjects together where possible, but they do not show how pupils' skills and knowledge in these subjects will be developed. All pupils have targets in literacy and numeracy, so they have a good understanding of what they have done well.

The school has improved significantly since the last inspection owing to the dedicated leadership of the headteacher and governors. Standards have risen because the quality of teaching is now good. There is a stable team of teachers who are now taking an active role in developing their subject area and monitoring the quality of provision. This has led to greater consistency in teaching and learning. Systems for recording pupils' attainment are now in place, but these are not always used rigorously enough to improve pupils' progress. Inclusion is fundamental to the school's ethos and steps are taken to ensure that there is equality of opportunity for everyone. The governing body is fully involved in shaping the strategic direction of the school and has an extremely accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The school promotes community cohesion well. It has made good progress in tackling the issues from the last inspection and is well placed to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The Early Years Foundation Stage provides a stimulating and lively environment both indoors and outside, with opportunities for pupils to explore and to develop inquiring and independent minds. Many enter with skills slightly below those expected for their age but make excellent progress in all aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. Children are confident and articulate, and feel safe and secure. They work and play well together and are developing independence and readily take on responsibilities such as tidying up. Staff understand the unique talents of each child and they plan activities which take into account the learning and developmental needs of individual pupils. One example of this is the development of a 'building site' in the outdoor area to encourage boys to use the outdoor area more effectively. The learning environment is safe, attractive and well resourced. Children move between areas freely and engage in an appropriate balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities. Staff use themes such as 'bears' to explore different curriculum areas, including counting and ordering sizes of bears and making bear masks. The leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are excellent. The team have high aspirations for all of the children and they are committed to providing high-quality care and education. The staff continually evaluate their practice to improve provision. Relationships with parents and outside agencies are excellent and used very effectively to support children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make more rigorous use of data to accelerate progress for all pupils.
- Provide more challenge for pupils by improving teachers' questioning skills so that they probe pupils' understanding better.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Standards are consistently extremely high in English, mathematics and science. Pupils' results in national assessments considerably exceed the expected levels by Year 6. Examples of high-quality work are apparent in a variety of subjects in pupils' books and on displays. There is some variation in rates of progress between subjects. For example, at Key Stage 2 the proportion of pupils who progress to the higher levels in reading is higher than for writing and mathematics. Pupils who have moderate learning difficulties and behavioural and emotional difficulties do well, particularly at Key Stage 2, making the same good progress as their classmates, and sometimes better. This is because of the good support they receive, particularly from the skilled teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is outstanding. They enjoy school and this is reflected in their positive attitudes and behaviour in and around the school. Attendance is outstanding. Pupils feel safe and secure and they have a clear understanding of the need to make healthy choices. Pupils take pride in their school and they actively participate in decision-making through the school council. They also take on other roles and responsibilities such as house captains, playground buddies and helpers. There are strong links with the local community because pupils take part in events such as carol singing at Christmas, delivering

harvest gifts to the community and participation in inter-school sporting events. Pupils reach high standards in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) and are well prepared for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers know their pupils and plan learning activities which are suitably matched to their needs and interests. They are well organised and prepare interesting resources to help pupils to develop their skills. For example, in one lesson the teacher made 'telephones' for pupils to use to practise their speaking and listening skills. Skilled teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning by offering good support to those needing additional help. In some lessons teachers miss opportunities to challenge pupils by asking searching questions to develop their understanding and accelerate progress. Teachers make good use of assessment information to plan learning. They mark pupils' work and make helpful comments showing what they have done well, but they do not always identify what pupils need to do to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum which is well planned and which meets the needs and interests of pupils. It makes good provision for pupils' personal development, so that they acquire a range of skills including literacy, numeracy and ICT. The newly established computer suite enables pupils to develop their computer skills. The school enriches the curriculum through a wide range of visits to places such as London Zoo and the Maritime Museum. Pupils in Year 5 and 6 have a residential visit to the Isle of Wight. Themed weeks such as the multicultural week help pupils to understand about living in a culturally diverse society. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including professional sports coaching to support pupils' personal and social development. The school has achieved Activemark in recognition of its work in physical education. The school's overall curriculum plan shows the breadth and balance of what is to be taught, but this is not broken down into specific skills, knowledge and understanding to ensure good continuity and progression in all subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides a very caring environment in which pupils feel safe, happy and secure. Good relationships are a strength of the school. Adults know the pupils and they take a personal interest in dealing with any concerns or worries that may arise. There are no reported incidents of bullying. The school carries out regular health and safety audits and meets all legal requirements for health and safety requirements. Procedures for safeguarding pupils, including CRB checks made on staff, are outstanding. All staff have received child protection training. The needs of all pupils are met due to clear procedures to identify problems early and to put into place actions to overcome them. Leaders carefully review the progress made by pupils and this is resulting in a continuing improvement in standards. Pupils have academic targets, so that they know what they are expected to learn.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, supported by her skilled deputy headteacher, has established a committed team of teachers who share her determination to provide a high quality of education for all pupils. They have received the Investors in People award, reflecting the school's commitment to professional development. Leaders have created a purposeful environment reflecting the Christian values of the school. Each pupil is valued for the unique contribution they make to the school. Staff work hard to ensure that all pupils can access the opportunities provided by the school and to offer special support for those needing additional help. The school makes effective use of data to raise standards, but the approach to analysing the data is not systematic enough to help all pupils make better progress. The role of middle managers has improved since the last inspection and they are now accountable for standards and achievement in their subject. The school makes good use of external partnerships to support its work. For example, there are close links with the parish church and community. Staff and governors are increasingly developing links beyond the local area, which are helping to build a cohesive community that respects all faiths and customs represented in wider society. For example, pupils are currently raising funds to provide toilet facilities for a village in India. Governors are fully involved in the life of the school and comply well with their statutory responsibilities. All stakeholders are suitably involved in evaluating the school's strengths and in identifying appropriate areas for 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?	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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
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 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?	1

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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

16 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's CofE Primary School, Amersham, Amersham, HP7 0EL

Thank you very much for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed the opportunity to meet you and to see how well you are learning in lessons. Your teachers try to make learning fun, which is why so many of you say you enjoy school. Your attendance is very high and this helps you to reach very high standards in your work. Your teachers care very much for you and make sure that you are safe and secure in school. We were particularly impressed with the wide range of after school clubs and activities that so many of you enjoy. Clearly the school is a happy and friendly community.

St Mary's is a good school. Most of you work hard and are well prepared for the next stage of your education. However, there are two improvements that could make your school even better. We have asked your teachers to:

- ask more questions in lessons to challenge you to think even harder about some of your work
- use information about how well you are doing more rigorously so that you all make even better progress.

Yours faithfully

Joy Considine

Lead Inspector