

St Mellion CofE VA School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112030
Local Authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	310766
Inspection date	16 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Geoff Burgess

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	50
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vacant Position
Headteacher	Angela Palin
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2003
School address	St Mellion Saltash PL12 6RN
Telephone number	01579 350567
Fax number	01579 350567

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: • Given small numbers, very high mobility, hugely improved standards and good CVA over the past three years, is the actual value added by the school even better than good? • With this in mind, the inspector will evaluate all aspects of provision to see what, if anything, makes this possible. • Evidence was gathered from: • Latest national test results, the school's records, latest targets, pupils' work and discussions with school leaders. • First hand evidence in the school, interviews with staff and pupils, parental responses and an analysis of school documentation. 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 small school serves a rural area not far from Plymouth. More than half the pupils on roll come from further afield by choice. Pupil mobility is exceptionally high. Almost all pupils are White British. Few are eligible for free school meals. Most children start school with average abilities and the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is average. However, with very small numbers in each year group, an individual pupil with LDD can significantly alter the overall attainment of that group.

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 which sets itself such high standards that it sees itself as good. Six years ago it had serious weaknesses and an uncertain future. Two years later, the weaknesses had been resolved and sound foundations laid. Since then, strong and very effective leadership and the concerted efforts of everyone involved have seen the school go from strength to strength. Parents are delighted with the education their children receive. Typically, a parent describes the school as 'a shining example of how a school can help in the development of responsible young people, who still have a desire for learning, having fun and helping others'.

The outstanding personal development of pupils of all ages is a key factor in making the school such a happy place, and in the excellent progress that most pupils make in their time at the school. This is particularly important for the many who joined the school in the older classes. Here, the school's efforts to build pupils' self-esteem and confidence have been particularly effective. A parent notes, 'His reading ability and general attitude has been transformed in the short time he has been at St Mellion.'

With small numbers in each year group, standards vary year on year ranging from below average in 2004, to exceptionally high in 2006 with overall standards above average in 2007. Over the longer term, boys do as well as girls but the school acknowledges that standards in writing are not quite as good as they are in other subjects and is working to make them better. The many pupils who join the school late complicate the judgement on achievement. However, a close analysis of the school's records shows that, as noted above, almost all pupils make excellent progress during their time at the school. The few who do not, tend to be pupils who join the school too late for its excellent provision to make a real impact.

Parents rate the contribution of staff to their children's very good progress very highly. One notes, 'My child is average but will still be 'pushed' and challenged to produce better work.' Very well planned activities match the needs of all pupils in the mixed age classes and very effective teaching assistants make a vital contribution to supporting and guiding pupils individually and in groups. Pupils think their teachers and helpers are 'always there' for them to 'help us do the things we struggle with'. High quality assessment and tracking procedures ensure that everyone is fully aware of how well individual pupils are doing and what they need to do to improve. The quality of academic guidance is excellent. Arrangements for ensuring that pupils with LDD are promptly identified and that their needs are met routinely in the classroom are very effective.

The school's innovative approach to curriculum planning based on the Foundation Stage six areas of learning, enables teachers to work flexibly across subjects and take on any opportunities available to enrich or broaden the curriculum. This is much enhanced by the school's investment in bringing in subject specialists to teach art, design and technology, music and French. Pupils love working this way, saying their teachers 'make the lessons fun and interesting'. With small numbers involved, the sheer number and variety of extra opportunities provided by staff and volunteers during and outside school hours means that each pupil has a multitude of activities to enjoy in addition to what they do in class. Underpinning all the above is the excellent way the school cares for and values each pupil as an important member of the school community. Parents are especially pleased that all staff are so approachable and helpful. To quote a parent: 'The children are taught such a sense of unity that they seem to be as a family and are all friends.' Pupils' behaviour is exemplary in all situations. Every effort is made to ensure pupils

are safe and know how to look after themselves and each other. As a result, they are happy, confident and full of self-esteem and respect for others. Pupils are very aware of what they need to do to stay fit and healthy and are as keen as the rest of the school community that the school should have its own hall so that they can be even more active. To the school's great credit, even without a hall, very good use of all available resources, such as the Trimtrail financed by the parents' association, a local pool where all pupils swim each week, and numerous sports clubs, means pupils are very enthusiastic about being active.

Pupils' involvement in the school and wider community is very good. For instance, every pupil is involved in making decisions about the school at monthly school meetings. Pupils' awareness of their responsibilities in the wider world is shown by the fact that, after a new hall, the thing they most want to change is the school's heating system because of its impact on the school's carbon footprint. The school, very aware that its pupils live in an area with few people of other cultures or faiths, ensures that its pupils are well prepared to live in a multicultural society. Together with pupils' well developed literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills, all this prepares pupils very well for moving on to secondary school and their later life.

The popularity of the school, the very high regard in which it is held by parents and pupils, the excellent learning environment, and the high standards noted above, are all testimony to the exceptional leadership and management the school has benefited from in recent years. Encouraged and very well supported by the governing body, the staff team continue to build on very strong foundations with the confidence to challenge accepted thinking and set ever-higher targets for themselves and their pupils. The school's capacity to innovate and improve is excellent.

The headteacher's contribution to the transformation of the school is exceptional. Her ability to create an ethos and environment that brings the best out of adults and children has been remarkable. A notable feature of this, given the small size of the school, is the way she looks outside the school and the immediate area for ideas, support and information. Self-evaluation based on the most rigorous of monitoring procedures is at the core of everything. The school's current and longer-term plans reflect the challenging targets the school sets itself and show just how clear the headteacher's ambition and shared vision for the school remain.

A parent sums it all up well by stating, 'St Mellion staff have given my children a brilliant start in life.'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The very small number of Foundation Stage children happily share a class with Years 1 and 2 pupils. Great care is taken to ensure that their needs are met by careful planning and support. This is greatly helped by the school's novel approach to overall curriculum planning based on the six areas of learning. Very effective arrangements for monitoring and tracking children's progress have identified the fact that they started school with higher attainment than usual and expectations have been raised accordingly. These children are making very good progress in all areas of learning, benefiting and learning from working alongside their older classmates.

What the school should do to improve further

- Help pupils to improve their writing to the same standards as in other subjects.

- Work with the local authority to find ways in which a hall can be provided so that the school can make the excellent education it provides even 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?	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	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

20 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mellion CE VA Primary School, Saltash, PL12 6RB

Thank you for making me feel so welcome on my visit. I thoroughly enjoyed my day with you despite the rain! I agree with you that it is a shame you have not got a hall, especially when it rains. You are obviously very proud of your school and, like you, I think it is 'brilliant'.

I found these good things:

- Your behaviour is excellent. You work very hard and do your best.
- Everybody gets on fantastically well together and when new pupils join the school, they very quickly become part of the 'family'.
- I agree with you that your teachers and helpers are really good at helping you learn and you make very good progress.
- You are exceptionally good at swimming
- The things you have to do in class are interesting and fun.
- You are able to enjoy lots of extra activities during and after school.
- You know you are safe and that there is always someone to turn to.
- I know you appreciate all the grown-ups do to make sure your time in school is as happy as possible.
- Your headteacher is great at making it possible for you and all the grown-ups to do your best and enjoy working together.

To make things even better, I have asked your school to:

- Help you write as well as you read and do mathematics.
- Try again to see if they can get a new hall built.

You can help too by continuing to work hard and doing your best. Again, thank you for all you do to make your school as good as it is. It was a pleasure for me to share it with you for a short time.

Yours sincerely

Geoff Burgess Lead inspector

20 October 2007

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