

St Mary's C of E Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115084
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	311821
Inspection dates	28–29 January 2008
Reporting inspector	John Messer

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	81
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Claire Scargill
Headteacher	Ms Donna Parker
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2003
School address	Colchester Road Ardleigh Colchester Essex CO7 7NS
Telephone number	01206230394
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This village school is much smaller than average. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is average. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. There are a few pupils who speak English as an additional language but all are fluent in English. Children's attainment on entry to the school varies widely from year to year but overall it is well below that typical for this age, especially in communication, language and literacy. A higher than average proportion of pupils transfer from other schools to St Mary's after the normal times of admission. The school has a Healthy Schools award. A new headteacher has recently been appointed.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school where pupils make good progress and attain standards that are above average. The leadership and management of the school are good. The new headteacher encourages all staff to work closely together in a united effort to improve pupils' learning opportunities further. Governors support and challenge the school effectively and monitor its work closely. A key strength is the wide range of different skills and specialist expertise that staff have developed. A teaching assistant is skilled in information and communication technology (ICT), others are enthusiastic about drama and cookery and a specialist music teacher visits each week. The caretaker fulfils many roles in the school and runs popular after school games clubs. The subject leaders for the Foundation Stage, English, mathematics, science and ICT are all very knowledgeable and promote learning well across the school. They all fit into a close-knit team of staff who share a commitment to providing a rich curriculum.

Pupils achieve well at each stage because the teaching is good. From well below expected starting points, standards are below those expected nationally in Reception. In Year 2 standards in reading, writing and mathematics are average and above average in Year 6. Across the school, pupils achieve well in ICT, and technology is used effectively to support learning. The key skills that pupils develop give them a good foundation for the next phase of their education. There are weaknesses in spelling, handwriting and in the way pupils present their work that undermine the quality of their finished products. This is partly due to the significant number of newcomers who have not benefited from the rigorous training in basic skills in the school's Reception class. It is also because teachers do not always insist on high standards of presentation. The potential of the outside area for young children's learning has not been fully developed.

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. From their very first days in school, they are encouraged to use initiative and develop independence. As a result, they become confident learners and enjoy extending their skills and finding out more about the world. The curriculum is relevant to pupils' needs, and topics such as about Africa, capture their interests well.

Pupils' progress is measured accurately and careful records are kept, but these records are not analysed in sufficient detail to see if all pupils are making enough progress in each term and in each year. In addition, the data is not used to set precise targets for the amount of progress that each pupil is expected to make each term in literacy and numeracy. Data is used well to support the identification of pupils who are finding learning difficult and may not be making enough progress.

There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have risen and almost all the issues raised at that time have been resolved. The exception is handwriting, which remains an area for improvement. The school's improving trend, and the determination of all staff to raise standards further, demonstrates that it has good capacity to improve. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and it correctly identifies the key priorities for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children settle happily into the Reception class and make good progress. There is a strong emphasis on teaching children the links between letters and the sounds they make and on extending their vocabulary, because these aspects of their development have been clearly

identified as key weaknesses. The classroom is a hive of activity. Traditional stories, such as the 'Little Red Hen' are used skilfully as the basis for many purposeful activities, such as bread making. Practical activities help children to learn effectively. They knew that they needed to add 200 millilitres of water and three grams of yeast to their bread mixture. Teaching is good and staff work closely together as a team to promote effective learning. Parents help with learning at home, especially with literacy skills, but many children do not reach, for example, the expected levels in communication, language and literacy by the end of Reception. The outside area is used well but is not extensive enough or sufficiently well designed to maximise its potential as a learning resource.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure pupils' targets for learning in literacy and numeracy are clearer, and are geared to pupils making faster progress through greater challenges, and are monitored more frequently.
- Raise teachers' expectations relating to the presentation of pupils' work, accurate spelling and neat handwriting.
- Develop the outside area for children in Reception, so that it provides a much more powerful learning environment.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils, including those who find learning difficult, make good progress. Children make good progress in the Reception class but standards by the end of the Reception year are below those expected in key areas such as language. Pupils make mostly good progress in Years 1 and 2, and in literacy progress is particularly good. By the end of Year 2, standards are average in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' progress in Years 3 to 6 is good and standards by the end of Year 6 are above average in English, mathematics and science. Newcomers, including those from abroad who speak English as a second language, quickly settle in and learn enough English to enable them to make good progress. Pupils' work in art and design and ICT is above average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are eager to learn and keen to succeed. They take their responsibilities seriously and the older ones look after the younger ones carefully. Relationships throughout the school, including those between adults and pupils, are excellent and this supports learning well. Pupils say that they particularly like the small size of the school because, 'Everyone knows everyone else, we all make friends and are part of one big happy family.' The ethos of the school is rooted in a commitment to giving each individual equal opportunities to succeed. The encouragement that each pupil receives helps them all to develop high levels of self-esteem and confidence in themselves as effective learners. Attendance and behaviour are good. Pupils have a good understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles. They know how to stay safe and look after themselves. They support charitable fund raising events enthusiastically and have a good understanding of their responsibilities to the wider community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Skilled teaching assistants make a strong contribution to the good quality of teaching across the school. Lesson planning is thorough and includes the key vocabulary that will be introduced in each lesson. Technology, such as interactive whiteboards and digital cameras, is used well to stimulate learning. There are inconsistencies in approaches to teaching and learning handwriting. The school has just adopted a new handwriting scheme but this is not being applied rigorously enough to achieve a rapid improvement in standards of presentation. Teachers do not always make pupils sufficiently aware of their targets in literacy and numeracy or what they need to do to reach the next stages in their learning. Teachers are good at motivating pupils and encouraging them to become good learners who work enthusiastically.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The rich curriculum is relevant to pupils' needs and supports a well-rounded education. There is a strong emphasis on teaching key skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. In addition, whole school topics are planned that are effective in capturing pupils' interests and promoting an enthusiasm for learning. The school continues to plan closer links between subjects. Music and the performing arts are well represented. Provision for ICT is particularly good and pupils develop a good range of key computer skills that support their learning across the curriculum. There is good provision for sports and games that promotes pupils' physical health well. A good range of visits and visitors enhance learning effectively. Good attention is paid to promoting pupils' understanding of different cultures and beliefs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care and guidance are excellent. All staff know each individual pupil extremely well so that any sign of unhappiness is noted quickly and dealt with sensitively. Academic guidance has good aspects but pupils' individual targets for learning are not always clear enough or sufficiently challenging. Provision for pupils who need extra help with their learning is good. Support is pitched at just the right level to help them succeed and so they make good progress and develop good self-esteem. Parents whose children have joined the school in classes other than Reception comment favourably on how quickly their children become part of the school family and how well they are helped to succeed. All safeguarding procedures are in place and meet regulations.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school has improved year on year since the last inspection. Staff, parents and pupils are very pleased with the impact that the new headteacher has had on the school. One parent's comment was typical, 'Our new head has only been with us one term and already she has gained the respect of both parents, and more importantly, children alike.' Many parents appreciate how approachable and friendly all staff are. The headteacher has given a new impetus to school

improvement and team building. She provides clear direction and has maintained the effective improvement planning. The governing body supports the school well. The school is now poised to make further advances.

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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	2
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	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	2
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	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

30 January 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of St Mary's Primary School, Ardleigh, Essex, CO7 7NS

What a lovely school! I thoroughly enjoyed my short visit. Thank you for being so welcoming and helpful.

There are many good things about the school. You are all so friendly. You are very sensible and well behaved. Your headteacher gives good leadership. All the grown ups work together to help you with your learning and want to make absolutely sure that you all do as well as you possibly can. You make good friendships. I was particularly impressed with the way you welcome newcomers into the school family. Quite a number of children join your school in different year groups and you soon make them feel at home. You work and play happily together and enjoy learning new things. You always do your best and so you make good progress. By the time you get to Class 4 you are good at reading, writing, mathematics, science and ICT. You think hard about how to become powerful learners and are good at identifying what makes learning successful. You enjoy doing some interesting things, like the big project on Africa. You know how to stay safe and look after yourselves. You have a good understanding about how to eat a balanced diet and the need to take regular, vigorous exercise.

There are three main things that Ms Parker and I think would help to improve the school even more. We think that it would help you to make even better progress if you had a much clearer understanding of the targets you are aiming at in literacy and numeracy. We also think that you could improve your spelling and handwriting. Lastly, we think that the outside learning area for the children in Class 1 could be extended and made much more exciting.

I wish you every success in the future.

John Messer

Lead inspector