

St Mary's Junior Mixed School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117385
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312596
Inspection date	2 July 2008
Reporting inspector	David Speakman

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	7-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	233
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sarah Bennett
Headteacher	Mrs Patricia Jenkins
Date of previous school inspection	29 September 2003
School address	St Mary's Way Baldock Hertfordshire SG7 6HY
Telephone number	01462892156
Fax number	01462896772

Age group	7-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the accuracy of teacher assessments in confirming that attainment is still above average
- standards in subjects other than English, mathematics and science, and
- the quality of academic guidance that pupils receive.

Evidence was gathered from discussions with the headteacher, senior staff, governors and pupils, as well as parents' questionnaires, observations of lessons, pupils' work and a variety of documents, including the school's records of pupils' progress. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as provided in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This average-sized junior school draws most of its pupils from the immediate locality with a few from a little further afield. Attainment on entry to Year 3 is broadly average. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties is average, including a few who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Most pupils come from White British backgrounds. The number with a minority ethnic heritage is average, although many different groups are represented. None of them is at the early stages of learning English. The school has a Healthy School award. The headteacher took up her appointment in January 2008.

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 provides a balanced education that pays equally good attention to pupils' personal development as to academic progress. Parental comments included, 'The school has a lovely, caring ethos. Coming into the school I am always struck by how polite, friendly and well-behaved the children are.'

Pupils' overall achievement is good and standards are above average in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6. Pupils are prepared well for the next stages of their education. While pupils' progress is good, it is inconsistent. This uneven progress reflects the quality of teaching and learning, which is better in the upper school than elsewhere. Assessment data confirms that pupils make better progress in Years 5 and 6 than in the other two years. Pupils who find learning difficult achieve well against the targets in their individualised education plans. The school makes sure that those with special talents have good opportunities to develop their skills effectively. In addition to above average attainment in English, mathematics and science, standards are also good in other subjects. For example, all pupils have good opportunities to learn how to play a musical instrument, such as the recorder, under the specialist tuition of a visiting music teacher. Singing in assemblies is lively and tuneful. Standards in physical education are above those normally expected, as shown by the school's good achievement in competitive sports. Artwork on display throughout the school is of a high quality. A wide range of media is evident including the use of fabrics, paint, clay and computers to produce two and three-dimensional work. Pupils have good computer skills and use these as a matter of course to support and enrich learning.

The strong ethos of care is reflected in pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils' attitudes to learning are characterised in the strength of their interest and desire to achieve. Pupils value the awards received for achievement and demonstrate a particularly high regard for the 'outstanding citizenship award', which recognises special actions that they initiate themselves. They say they enjoy school and this contributes to the above average level of attendance. The school has revised its approach to behaviour management recently. Teachers now use a more positive approach, based more frequently on what pupils do right rather than focusing on what they do wrong. This helps them to learn what constitutes good behaviour and is seen in their actions during lessons and at break times. Pupils say that adults are quick to react to any inappropriate behaviour and this helps them to improve. The school council makes a good contribution to the quality of life in school. Its members represent the views of other pupils well and they have been involved in some important decisions. They also initiate and organise some important events for the school and for charities. Some parents are concerned that pupils and their views are not taken into account sufficiently. However, the inspection found that pupils' views are considered to be important in the running of the school. The headteacher values parents' opinions highly and is busy fostering good relations with them. Pupils are exceptionally aware of healthy lifestyles and organise a daily tuck shop accordingly. They take an active part in many opportunities to stay physically fit during lessons and the wide range of extra-curricular provision.

Teaching and learning are good overall, although the quality ranges from outstanding to satisfactory. The main reason for the variation lies in the significant difference in opportunities given to pupils to take responsibility for learning themselves. In the best teaching, pupils work in collaboration with others to good effect, using computer simulations and learning much from opportunities to discuss and evaluate each other's findings. In the few lessons where this

is not the case teachers direct pupils too much, telling them what to do stage by stage, restricting discussion. Similarly, the effectiveness of teaching assistants varies, depending upon the skill with which teachers deploy them. The curriculum is good. Its strength lies in the balance between basic skills and provision for creative and physical subjects. Personal, social, health and citizenship education plays an important part and supports pupils' personal development well. A good range of visits and visitors, including those from the public services, and good extra-curricular provision enriches pupils' interest and enjoyment. Training in dealing with emergency situations enhances pupils' knowledge of safety issues exceptionally well.

Care, guidance and support are good. Child protection systems, safeguarding and risk assessments are fully in place. While personal development is not monitored formally, staff are very aware of, and take care to assist, those who need support. Much development in the quality of academic guidance for pupils has taken place recently, although the outcomes of this are clearer in some classes than in others. Most pupils make good use of their targets, although sometimes these are not written in easily understood language.

Good leadership and management helps the school to function well. The new headteacher has already established an extremely clear vision for further improvement based on realistic and very accurate methods of evaluation. She seeks the views of others and works with determination to achieve challenging targets. This builds on the good work of the deputy headteacher and governors who were effective during the transition period, so that standards did not fall. However, the roles of subject leaders, some new to their posts, are not yet as strong. Nevertheless, all staff are held increasingly accountable for the performance of their pupils. Governors are well organised and provide both support and challenge. This good quality leadership and management in the context of its good track record shows that the school has good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that the quality of all teaching matches that of the best, so that pupils make good progress more evenly through the school.
- Develop the roles of subject leaders to enable them to assist the headteacher, senior leadership team and governors in monitoring and evaluating school 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

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	1
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

3 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Junior Mixed School, Baldock, Hertfordshire, SG7 6HY

I very much enjoyed the day I spent in your school recently and would like to thank you all for making me welcome. With your help, I found out a lot about your school. I enjoyed meeting you and your teachers, visiting lessons, watching you work, speaking to you about your school and finding out about how you help to make it successful.

You go to a good school. Under the strong leadership of your headteacher, the staff work effectively to provide you with a good education. Teaching and the care adults show for you are good. You make an important contribution by behaving well, taking responsibility seriously and trying hard to do your best. As a result, you make good progress overall, which is more rapid in Years 5 and 6. You reach above average standards in your work and are well prepared to go on to the next stages of your education. I was impressed by the way you all get on well together. You care about each other and feel safe at school. Those of you I spoke to said that you enjoy school. Your parents are happy with how the school cares for you and how well you are progressing.

To improve things further I have asked the headteacher and governors to make sure that teaching and learning become even better so that you all make good progress throughout the school. I am also suggesting that teachers in charge of subjects develop the skills necessary to support the headteacher in improving the school.

I wish you all the best in the future.

David Speakman

Lead inspector