

St Margaret's Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118464
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	312948
Inspection dates	9–10 June 2008
Reporting inspector	George Logan

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	310
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lesley Baldwin
Headteacher	Nichola Hanman
Date of previous school inspection	7 July 2004
School address	Orchard Street Rainham Gillingham ME8 9AE
Telephone number	01634 231327
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Age group	3–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average infant school. A very small number of pupils are of Gypsy/Roma heritage. A small number of pupils are learning English as their second language. Since its last inspection, the school has been extensively refurbished, including the construction of a large, well-resourced Foundation Stage unit. A significant number of the children who attend the Nursery live outside the school's defined catchment area and do not continue to Reception. As a result, many children are new to the school at the beginning of the Reception year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Margaret's is a good school that has made significant progress since its last inspection. Achievement has improved, standards have risen and the younger children benefit from modern, high-quality accommodation. Parents rightly value the good quality of care, guidance and support, as one commented, 'St Margaret's offers exceptionally high standards of education and care.' Pupils develop positive attitudes to learning as their personal development is good. Pupils feel that they are safe and can rely on adults to help them. They have a good understanding of how to stay healthy. Almost all behave well and enjoy school. Attendance is broadly average.

Children have a really good start in Nursery. They make outstanding progress from their broadly average starting points, with many acquiring skills significantly higher than expected, because of a creative, well-planned curriculum and effective teaching. Some of this initial momentum is lost as many children do not continue to Reception and others join the school. However, even though progress slows a little in Reception, reflecting minor weaknesses in planning and assessment, it is still good and most children reach, and a significant number exceed, average levels in all areas of learning. As a result of good teaching, pupils, including those with additional learning needs, make good progress through Years 1 and 2 and, in most years, standards are above average at the end of Year 2. Unusually, standards are likely to be closer to average in 2008, reflecting the level of need of this group of pupils. However, they too have made good progress. This is particularly true in mathematics, where the performance of girls had been weaker in 2007. A key strength of teaching is the encouragement given to Year 1 pupils to record their work independently, so reinforcing their basic skills well. Pupils across the school have benefited from the current focus on the sounds and shapes of letters. However, not all classes, particularly in Year 2, provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills in other subjects. Those at an early stage of learning English achieve well in spoken English, particularly where they have the support of a teacher familiar with their home language. Gypsy/Roma pupils make steady progress, because they attend school frequently and are effectively supported in lessons.

Across the school, pupils acquire good skills in information and communication technology (ICT). The curriculum meets pupils' needs well. Pupils like and support the good extra-curricular activities provided by attending them regularly.

The headteacher has a clear vision for improvement and provides good leadership. School self-evaluation is good. The school is analysing data on pupils' progress more rigorously this year, to ensure that targets set are sufficiently challenging, particularly for more able pupils. Subject leadership has improved significantly. Governors are effective and successfully fulfil their role as critical friends, ready to hold school leaders to account. The school has good capacity to build further upon recent changes.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Outstanding Nursery provision and good provision in Reception ensure that children make rapid progress. The transition from pre-school is skilfully managed, with effective induction arrangements, so that children settle in quickly. They are cared for well and benefit from a broad curriculum that provides a variety of absorbing experiences. They make particularly good

use of the outdoor area. Relationships are close and supportive, enabling children to make good gains in their personal and social development. They relate confidently to each other. Children show good attitudes, initiate activities independently and sustain good levels of concentration. Good teaching ensures that children make good progress in all areas of learning. However, Reception planning does not yet consistently identify support, challenge and extension for all the areas of learning, or the deployment of available adults to support learning. Assessment procedures in Reception are not always sufficiently rigorous in identifying the next steps in learning. The current focus on the shapes and sounds of letters is ensuring more rapid progress in language but the school recognises that in Reception progress in writing is not as strong as in other areas.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that assessment and planning for Foundation Stage children clearly identify challenging activities in all areas of their learning and provide better guidance for helpers in the classroom.
- Provide more consistent opportunities for pupils to write in subjects across the curriculum so their skills improve more quickly.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children enter Nursery with skills around the level expected. They make rapid progress, so that, by the end of the year, their skills are significantly above those expected. At the beginning of Reception, with many new children, overall skills are, again, around the expected level. Progress is good and almost all children reach average levels and some do better still. Typically, pupils achieve well in Years 1 and 2, attaining above average standards by the end of Year 2. However, pupils' current work indicates that attainment is average, reflecting the higher than usual proportion of pupils with additional learning needs. Although this still represents good achievement, pupils make brisker progress in Year 1 than in Year 2, especially those who are more able. The pace of learning in mathematics has improved this year. However, there are inconsistencies in the promotion of pupils' writing skills and this constrains progress. Those with additional learning needs achieve well because of the good support they receive. Pupils who speak English as a second language make rapid progress in their oral skills. Frequent attendance ensures that the few pupils of Gypsy/Roma heritage achieve at least satisfactorily.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are articulate, enthusiastic and gregarious. They behave well and conduct themselves safely. Pupils feel that bullying is rare and are confident that adults will always help them. They feel secure and enjoy school. As one parent said, 'My daughter wants to come to school even during the holidays!' Attendance is satisfactory. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay healthy, supported by good opportunities for physical exercise. Spiritual and moral development is good. Although aspects of cultural development are good, pupils' engagement with the ethnic and cultural diversity of contemporary Britain is not as strong. While pupils contribute well to the school community through the school council and many classroom 'jobs', links with the wider community appear more limited. Pupils' good personal qualities and their highly developed social skills contribute positively to their future economic well-being, effectively underpinned by their secure basic skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers motivate pupils effectively, leading to their good achievement. Relationships are close and trusting, so that pupils feel able to try things out. The environment for learning is calm and well organised. The current checks on pupils' progress ensure that staff are aware of what pupils need to do to move forward. Although sometimes lacking in detail, planning generally reflects the needs of groups of pupils and most lessons have a brisk pace that moves learning on quickly. Occasionally, particularly in Year 2, planned work does not provide sufficient challenge for more able pupils. A key strength is the encouragement of pupils to develop independence, taking responsibility for recording their work to the best standard they can. Teachers' marking shows how pupils can improve their work further. Although their role in lessons is not always explicitly defined, teaching assistants effectively support pupils with additional learning needs.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage curriculum covers the areas of learning well. The school has reviewed the curriculum for Years 1 and 2 to ensure that it meets pupils' needs. Pupils have a positive response to the regular themed weeks that enhance the curriculum well. In some classes, pupils have good opportunities to extend their writing skills through tasks in history, geography and science. However, there are inconsistencies of practice, particularly in Year 2. ICT is resourced well and effectively extends pupils' learning, while physical education is enhanced by good out of school opportunities. Provision for pupils who need additional support is appropriately targeted on what they most need to learn. The school supports pupils for whom English is a second language well, enabling them to access the curriculum. The extra-curricular and enhancement activities, including a Year 2 residential visit, are particularly good and broaden pupils' horizons well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is good. The school sustains a close partnership with parents. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust and effective. Staff know individual pupils well and this close knowledge, and the readiness of staff to go the extra mile, ensures that their welfare needs are met well, often supported by the school's effective links with external agencies. Academic guidance is satisfactory. In broad terms, it ensures that pupils achieve well. Individual pupil targets in literacy and numeracy are well established in Year 1. However, the school has been evaluating their impact on achievement and is moving towards a more streamlined system. Older pupils are encouraged to evaluate their progress towards identified goals and this is supported well by systematic marking of work by teachers.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides strong, effective leadership. She has built a cohesive, enthusiastic team with a shared commitment to improvement. The monitoring of teaching and pupils' work is generally thorough and accurate. The effectiveness of subject leadership, previously a weakness, has improved considerably, underpinning a more shared approach to leadership. The school knows itself well. Self-evaluation is good. A more effective system of checking on pupils' progress has ensured that staff are strongly focused on improving pupils' learning. The school has taken robust action this year to set more challenging targets for pupils' performance. They are currently fine-tuning the system to ensure that expectations, particularly of more able pupils, are high enough. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities conscientiously. Governors challenge, as well as support, the school's leadership. They closely monitor the effectiveness of provision and know the strengths and weaker aspects of the school well. The school has good capacity to improve.

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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?	3
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	3
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	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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	3
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

12 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Margaret's Infant School, Rainham, ME8 9AE

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited you. We really enjoyed meeting you and could see how happy you are in school. I have to tell you that it is the first school I have visited with its own chickens! We found that St Margaret's Infant School is a good school, with lots of things that work really well.

- The main things that we found are these:
- You behave well in lessons and seldom waste time.
- Teaching is mostly good, and you generally make good progress.
- The nursery is outstanding and it is a really special experience for the youngest children.
- The school makes sure that you are cared for well, and you have a good understanding of how important it is to eat healthily and take regular exercise.
- The curriculum is good, with interesting out-of-school activities.
- Those in charge of the school make sure it is very calm and runs smoothly.

We are asking the school to make these changes so that you do even better:

- Make sure that Reception teachers write down all their ideas about how well everyone is doing, what they need to do next to get even better and who will help them.
- Ensure that you get to do lots of writing in subjects like history, geography and science.

You can help by continuing to work hard and do your best. We hope that you will have every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

- George Logan
- Lead Inspector

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Lead Inspector