

St Mark's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118613
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313016
Inspection dates	7–8 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Brenda Spencer

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	185
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Karen Stevenson
Headteacher	Richard Barham
Date of previous school inspection	18 November 2002
School address	Ramslye Road Tunbridge Wells TN4 8LN
Telephone number	01892 525402
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is set in a residential estate of association and private housing. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high. Nearly a third of pupils are from ethnic groups other than White British, only a very small number of whom speak English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school provides a satisfactory education. It is improving and parents appreciate the journey being made and have justifiable faith in the senior leadership. This confidence, the ongoing support of the local authority and the well-developed partnerships with other agencies mean that St Mark's is well placed to continue to improve.

The school is sharply focused on improving the pupils' satisfactory achievement. Its work, particularly the effectiveness of teaching, is kept under very regular review. Constructive feedback has supported many staff in improving provision. Consequently, standards and achievement are improving, particularly in Key Stage 2 and in the Foundation Stage, where progress is now good. Achievement is better in writing and mathematics than in reading across the school, and especially so in Key Stage 1, where pupils do not read well enough. Frequent changes of staff in Key Stage 1 have hindered pupils' progress.

Patterns in assessment data are analysed to see if individual pupils' progress is good enough and to provide support where necessary. Improved provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is reflected in the good progress they make. The assessments pupils undertake are examined to see whether there are specific aspects of learning which require extra attention. This task is sometimes undertaken at too late a stage to inform the planning for the beginning of the academic year. Within lessons, the targets for learning are well considered and provide an appropriate level of challenge across the range of pupils' abilities in most classes. However, this is not yet evident in the ambitions for pupils' attainment by the end of Key Stage 2. These published targets do not take account of the impact of improving provision and are too cautious.

Good attention is paid to pupils' welfare. Consequently, pupils feel safe and express confidence in staff's sensitivity to their needs. The mutually respectful relationships in lessons contribute much to the culture for learning and the pupils' clear enjoyment of what they are doing. This enthusiasm is also supported by the range of extra-curricular activities on offer and the engaging programme of visits and visitors. All the necessary procedures are in place to ensure that suitable adults look after pupils in a safe environment.

The senior leadership team has determinedly addressed several major weaknesses identified in the last inspection. The change in culture has been painful but there is now strengthening support from the school community to raise the quality of its work. As yet, the necessary leadership and management skills are not developed among sufficient numbers of staff to enable an equitable distribution of responsibilities. This situation has been compounded by staff absence. Consequently, some staff carry considerable loads, including the headteacher and deputy.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good and children make good progress. Parents are very appreciative of the progress their children make and of how happy they are. The good routines and organisation of the class mean children settle well and confidently make independent choices about what they want to do. Despite starting with attainment that is below expectation, most children are now making the recommended gains in learning by the end of Reception. Their writing in particular is well developed. Detailed assessments mean that teachers are able to plan good activities within a relevant curriculum. While children develop knowledge about

number, calculation and shape well, their skills in using this to solve practical problems are not as strong. Children do not make sufficient use of non-fiction books.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement in reading, particularly in Key Stage 1.
- Use data more promptly to identify specifically what needs to improve in pupils' learning.
- Develop the skills of middle managers so that subject responsibilities are more equitably shared.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children enter Reception with skill levels which are lower than might be expected in communication and numeracy. In 2007, most children gained the necessary skills to tackle the National Curriculum successfully. At the end of Key Stage 1 in 2007, standards were exceptionally low, especially in reading. The current Year 2 is on track to reach broadly average standards in writing and below-average standards in mathematics. Standards remain unacceptably low in reading. After several years of decline, standards are now rising in Key Stage 2. The current cohort is on track to reach standards which are broadly average in English and mathematics.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Use of assessment to inform planning has improved. Consequently, many pupils are making good gains in their learning, including those from a range of ethnic backgrounds. The high proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. In Key Stage 2, progress has improved over three years and is now good. Children in the Foundation Stage are also making good progress. A better curriculum and helpful marking mean that pupils' writing is improving rapidly across the school. In Key Stage 1, progress is only satisfactory because of several changes in teaching staff, particularly in Year 1, inconsistency in maintaining an appropriate level of challenge in lessons and weak teaching of reading. Across the school, progress in reading is weaker than in writing and mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' behaviour, attitudes in lessons and attendance are good. Pupils are attentive to their teachers and get on well with them. However, in the junior playground, boys are sometimes inconsiderate and boisterous. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Their adoption of healthy lifestyles is good as a result, for example, of the school's good provision for physical education and games, and participation in the national fruit scheme. Pupils mostly feel safe from bullying or intimidating behaviour and would confide in a trusted adult if they felt unsafe. Pupils' contributions to the school community are good. The School Council is influential, for example, making decisions to buy playground equipment and to organise the sale of poppies for Remembrance Day. They have also instituted a 'suggestions box' and are conducting a survey about pupils' experience of the playground at breaktimes. Preparations for the future economic well-being of pupils are satisfactory because of the emphasis on raising standards in literacy and numeracy. Opportunities for work in pairs, for instance, as 'talk partners', contribute well to the development of workplace skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The teaching of pupils in Reception and Key Stage 2 is good, leading to good progress. At Key Stage 1, the teaching and learning of writing is good and of mathematics, satisfactory. However, pupils' national assessments in 2007 show that teaching of reading at Key Stage 1 has been inadequate.

Typically warm relationships lead to a positive atmosphere in classes, where pupils try hard. Much teaching proceeds at a good pace, engaging pupils' interest. Positive initiatives have improved the quality of teaching and learning, for example, ensuring that the purpose of lessons is clear, that tasks are matched to pupils' differing prior attainment and that success criteria for pupils' work are provided. The diversity of practice in planning means these expectations are not always consistently applied. Pupils' work is marked constructively, highlighting what has been done well and how to improve. Older pupils relish the responsibility they have to evaluate each other's work, commenting on relevant targets for learning. This successfully deepens their understanding of their own learning. Children in Reception develop independence because the organisation allows them to make appropriate choices about their activities. Sometimes the adults undervalue this learning by intervening too early because they misunderstand what children are exploring and learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The development of pupils' understanding of healthy living and of personal safety is well supported by lessons in personal, social and health education and in physical education. Participation in the local School Sports Partnership has added breadth to work in physical education, enabling the school to offer a good range of dance, gymnastic and sporting experiences within the curriculum and through extra-curricular activities. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and includes targeted support by teaching assistants and by external partners. Across the year, a number of themed weeks promote a particular focus, for instance, on dance and art. The curriculum is enriched through a good range of visits and visitors. Participation is high in the broad range of extra-curricular activities, which includes music, computing and dance groups as well as a breakfast club. Currently, the curriculum for reading and the library provision are being improved to address the relatively slow progress pupils have made in the past.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support for pupils are good. The school has a positive ethos which pupils appreciate. One commented that 'the teachers support our ideas'. Parents agree that the quality of care is good and that their children feel safe at school. The school has effective procedures to ensure the proper recruitment of staff, to provide for child protection and to provide assurance that there are no health and safety issues with regard to the school premises. Risk assessments are undertaken before organised excursions.

The school has a well-devised arrangement to set targets for pupils in reading, writing and mathematics, and to track their progress. Targets are set termly and address a key aspect of

each subject for each year group, with appropriate adjustments for higher- and lower-attaining pupils. The quality of academic guidance for writing has led to good achievement. The recent focus on reading is showing benefit in good assessment and promotion of a range of reading strategies.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school enjoys the approval of parents and pupils, a result of the listening ear of the school leadership. School improvement drives the work of the leadership team and governing body, and the views of the community inform the agenda for change. There has been much to address. Aspects which have improved include assessment practices, provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, quality of teaching and the curriculum, and the teaching of writing and information and communication technology. Eradicating inadequate achievement in reading, especially at Key Stage 1, is the pressing priority in the school's plan. Already rigorous assessments are being made of pupils' reading strategies but it is too early to see the impact of actions taken on standards. The capacity of staff at all levels to lead this change is developing. This situation has been made more challenging by the lack of continuity in staff in a relatively small school. As a result, the headteacher and deputy headteacher carry a heavy burden of responsibilities which include leading English, mathematics and assessment and the support of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

There are rigorous systems for checking the quality of the school's work. Where provision is inadequate it is tackled tactfully and determinedly. One child summed up the staff as 'firm but fair'. This applies equally well to the leadership. The strategic plan for improving the school has the required priorities to raise achievement. However, analysis of some pupils' assessments is not timetabled early enough to inform teachers' planning for the beginning of the academic year.

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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?	3
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?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	3
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
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	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

9 November 2007 Dear Pupils,

Inspection of St Mark's C of E School, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 8LN

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to your school. We really enjoyed visiting your classes, looking at your work and talking to you.

St Mark's is giving you a satisfactory education and it is an improving school. We know that because most of you are becoming quicker each year in learning what you need to know. We think this is because the staff care for you so well, making sure you are safe and happy. They are also putting in a lot of effort when commenting on your work and showing you how to improve. Your behaviour in lessons helps you to learn and mostly you are well behaved out of class. We did notice some boisterous behaviour in the junior playground which was a bit inconsiderate. The people who run your school check carefully to see that you are being taught properly. The lessons are what you need and teachers make useful plans to improve the school. We were glad to see the School Council plays an important role in this work.

- There are three things we want the school to do to improve.
- The staff are going to help you to become better readers, especially in Year 1 and Year 2.
- Some of the staff are doing lots of jobs to make your school better and these jobs need to be spread out more fairly.
- All the tests you do are looked at very carefully so your teachers know what needs to be given more time in your lessons. This needs to be done soon after the tests are completed so that the teachers know in September what needs most attention.

We noticed how well you work in your lessons and I am sure you will do all you can to make sure the work of the staff is successful in helping you learn. Please thank your parents for kindly sending in the many notes and responses to the questionnaire. These helped us to understand how you are getting on.

With best wishes,

Brenda Spencer Lead inspector