

St Mark's Church of England Primary School, Eccles

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118618
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313017
Inspection date	7 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	136
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	25
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rosemary Henn-Macrae
Headteacher	Wendy Skinner
Date of previous school inspection	11 October 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Eccles Row Eccles Aylesford ME20 7HS
Telephone number	01622 717337

Age group	4–11
Inspection date	7 November 2008
Inspection number	313017

Fax number

01622 790740

Age group 4–11

Inspection date 7 November 2008

Inspection number 313017

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

In this small school, children join the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in the Reception Year with skills and capabilities a little below the levels expected for their ages. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities varies quite widely from year to year but is average overall. Most of those with learning difficulties have moderate learning difficulties or emotional difficulties. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. The school's provision for mathematics was separately inspected in March 2007.

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. It is popular with parents, who particularly praise the strong links that the school has developed with pupils' homes and with the wider community. As one explained, 'The school fosters a partnership with parents to ensure learning continues seamlessly from the school into the home.'

The headteacher, governors and leadership team, who lead the school well, have a very accurate picture of the school's strengths and of those areas where improvements have been needed. Their careful monitoring has focused sharply on the progress that pupils are making in their learning, with action put into place where any pupil is identified as falling behind. It is this that has helped to dramatically raise standards in Years 1 and 2, so that pupils are now helped to build well on the good start they make in the EYFS. This is a considerable improvement since the last inspection, when pupils were identified as underachieving during this stage of their education. Initiatives which supplement the curriculum, such as Reading Recovery for younger pupils struggling with their reading, have contributed to the raised standards by helping these children to make often quite exceptional progress.

Standards are broadly average by the end of Year 6. This represents good progress from Years 3 to 6 in relation to these pupils' low Year 2 test scores and shows that they have caught up on previously lost ground. Standards are lowest in science, which has hitherto been given less priority than literacy and numeracy. School leaders have correctly identified that their pupils' science results in the national tests in 2008 were depressed because the pupils had not been well enough equipped to tackle challenging questions on investigations. Parents and pupils appreciate that St Mark's does not just concentrate on the 'core' subjects of English, mathematics and science. As a result, they achieve well too in other subjects, including art and information and communication technology (ICT).

The progress that pupils make in their learning is due to good teaching that motivates pupils to try hard and do their best. Pupils like and get on well with their teachers. Their good personal development is evident in their polite confidence as well as their good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. Pupils feel safe at school because they are well looked after. Parents point out that 'older pupils look out for the younger ones' so that there is a real sense of community at St Mark's. Pupils take a pride in their school, but they do not all take the same pride in their work. Too much of their work in the older classes is untidy and poorly presented.

School leaders have had particular success in creating an attractive, well-equipped learning environment that is exciting and stimulating for the pupils. They have ensured that pupils benefit from a topic-based curriculum that fires their interest and broadens their horizons, so that they learn, for example, about Hollywood and Bollywood in the Year 5/6 class. The improvements secured since the last inspection show the school's good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children join the Reception Year with skills that are below the levels expected for their ages, particularly in communication, language and literacy, and emotional development. Children make good progress and, by the end of the EYFS, most are working securely within the early learning goals. The close working partnership with parents helps children to quickly settle and

learn the school's orderly routines. The emphasis on learning through purposeful play and games and well-targeted activities that link sounds and letters is helping to develop children's knowledge of sounds, preparing them well for the development of early reading skills. Staff interact positively with the children and supervise them well during activities. This ensures their safety and well-being. Children play well independently and in groups. Leadership and management of the EYFS have correctly identified as a priority for further improvement plans to redevelop the outdoor area to increase opportunities for children to practise their climbing and balancing skills. Although staff visit the pre-school settings which children attend before starting at St Mark's, they acknowledge that these links are not as strong as they could be to ensure children make the very best possible progress through the whole of their pre-school education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Plan more opportunities for pupils to develop their investigative and problem-solving skills in science.
- Raise the quality of pupils' written work by encouraging older pupils to take a greater pride in its presentation.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well during their time at St Mark's. Standards have risen sharply in Year 2. Standards in the Year 6 tests are not as high as they were in the last inspection report. However, the average standards still represent good progress in relation to these pupils' test results when they were in Year 2. Results therefore exceeded the challenging targets the school set for itself. Pupils' good progress in literacy, numeracy and ICT skills prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education. It is only in science where standards remain below average. In this subject, pupils have not all done as well as they should because they have not had enough opportunities to develop their investigative and problem-solving skills. Pupils with emotional and moderate learning difficulties make similar progress to their peers because they benefit from good support. Some of the pupils who receive extra support with their learning make exceptional progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are attentive in lessons and they work with effort and concentration, although older pupils are too careless over the presentation of their work. Pupils enjoy school, not least because, as one pupil explained, 'Teachers organise activities and trips so that we can learn and have fun at the same time.' Pupils feel safe at school and are aware, for example, of the importance of safe use of the Internet. They have a good awareness of the benefits of eating healthily and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. They actively participate in the extensive range of extra-curricular activities, which includes a family fitness club. Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities, including as play buddies and members of the school council. They actively contribute to improving the quality of the school environment and are particularly proud of their individual designs used in constructing the sensory garden. Pupils certainly have a good sense of community. They keenly support local and international charities, and they enjoy learning about their own and other cultures, as is very evident in the quality of their artwork and the interest they take in a school in Malawi.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers help to build pupils' confidence by giving them lots of opportunities to develop their speaking and listening skills. In turn, this is contributing to improvements in writing. Lessons generally start with a clear indication of what it is the pupils are expected to learn. Teachers' good relationships with their classes mean that pupils are well motivated and keen to take part. Frequently, the pace of learning is brisk because teachers vary activities to keep pupils interested. They generally make good use of the interactive whiteboards that are in every classroom. Good questioning helps to draw out more detailed answers as pupils are encouraged to explain their thinking. The pace of learning is slower in lessons where teachers do not expect enough of their pupils and where pupils are not all clear about what they should be doing. Teachers do not all press pupils to take care in presenting their work. They do not insist, for example, on pupils using rulers to draw lines and graphs in mathematics.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

An exciting curriculum helps to stimulate pupils' enthusiasm for learning. Pupils enjoy the way subjects are linked together into topics because they say it 'makes learning fun'. Those who need extra help with their learning benefit from activities that are specifically targeted to meet their needs. This has helped to raise standards in Years 1 and 2, where there have been, for example, focused programmes of help for pupils who initially struggled to get started with their reading. Pupils benefit from the school's good facilities for ICT and the introduction of specialist music tuition. The focus this year on art, including naming each class after a famous Western artist, has helped to broaden pupils' awareness of the work and styles of different artists and has contributed to the high standard of pupils' artwork around the school. Pupils have not, however, had sufficient opportunities to develop their investigative skills in science.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There are rigorous systems in place to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils. Pastoral care is very strong and positively impacts on pupils' personal development. Pupils confidently approach staff to express any worries they may have and feel assured that these will be promptly addressed. Robust risk assessment procedures ensure pupils' safety during educational trips. The school has well-developed links with external agencies to help ensure it fully meets the needs of vulnerable pupils. All children are aware of their targets and use them regularly to help them move to the next stage of their learning. Teachers' marking also helps to focus pupils on what they need to do to improve. Often they pose questions to pupils in their marking but these are not always followed up. Too often these questions go unanswered.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Parents comment positively on the many improvements they have seen in recent years. They identify school leaders' initiatives such as the sensory garden (a recent addition to the very

attractive and environmentally friendly premises) as being 'inspirational and motivational' and as helping to create 'the positive outlook' that pupils have. School leaders have secured improvements through careful monitoring of provision, including teaching and learning, that involves governors as well as the headteacher and leadership team. Although they accurately pinpoint areas for development, these are not always followed up with enough rigour. For example, not all marking follows fully the school's agreed marking policy. St Mark's is viewed as an important part of the village community, and there are close links with local people and groups, such as senior citizens who receive Harvest Festival boxes.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------

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

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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	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 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

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

7 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's Church of England Primary School, Eccles ME20 7HS

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school. St Mark's is a good school. It is well run, and the good teaching is helping you to make good progress, particularly with your reading, writing, mathematics, ICT and art. Your headteacher and school leaders know that you have not all done quite so well in science and we agree with them that they need to give you more opportunities to develop your scientific investigation and problem-solving skills.

You are all justifiably proud of your school. We were just a little disappointed, though, that you do not all show as much pride in the way you present your work. You don't want scruffily presented work to let you down and we have therefore asked the school to push you much more to be neater and tidier in your written work. Of course, this is something that you can all individually help to improve. Do make sure, for example, that you always use a ruler to underline and to draw graphs in your mathematics and other books.

We were pleased to see how well behaved you are and how well you get on with each other. You certainly make St Mark's a friendly and happy place to be. You enjoy all the interesting things you get to do and some of you told us about all the exciting clubs that you take part in with such enthusiasm. Staff look after you well. Some of you told us about the several first aiders there were in the school to help patch up any bumps and bruises. We were pleased to see that you know your targets and that these are helping you to improve your work. Your teachers' marking is also giving you much helpful guidance. You may have noticed that President Obama was elected earlier this week in the United States with the slogan 'Yes we can!' which is almost the same as the one you all use when assessing your work! You can help to make even better progress, though, by making sure that you always write an answer when teachers pose questions to you in their marking.

With best wishes.

Yours faithfully Selwyn Ward Lead inspector