

Laddingford St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118637
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313024
Inspection date	13 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Susan Orpin

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	71
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rachel West
Headteacher	Yvonne Harris
Date of previous school inspection	31 March 2003
School address	Darman Lane Laddingford Maidstone ME18 6BL
Telephone number	01622 871270
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Laddingford St Mary's is a small primary school. Pupils are mainly White British. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. Very few pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school has gained the Gold Artsmark, the Healthy Schools Award and Eco-school status (three times). The recently appointed headteacher has been in post for seven weeks.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Laddingford St Mary's Primary School provides its pupils with a satisfactory standard of education. Pupils are caring and confident. The new headteacher, overwhelmingly supported by pupils and parents, has already improved behaviour so that it is now good. Achievement is satisfactory and standards by Years 2 and 6 are average. Standards in reading are above average in Year 2. Throughout the school, pupils do less well in mathematics and science than in English because they have too few opportunities to develop their skills in problem solving and investigation.

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development, are good. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay healthy and safe. They value each other and readily express their views about school life and undertake responsibilities. They make a good contribution to the wider community through local events and fundraising. However, there are too few opportunities for them to show initiative in lessons. Pupils enjoy coming to school because they know they are safe and secure. Attendance is satisfactory but too many parents take their children on holiday in term time.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers use praise and encouragement well and relationships between adults and pupils are good. Teachers and their assistants work effectively with groups of pupils. However, at times, the pace of the lesson is too slow, and the work set is not always sufficiently challenging for the more able pupils. Teachers' assessment of pupils' work is generally satisfactory, but is more accurate in English and less consistent in mathematics and science. The curriculum is satisfactory, providing good opportunities for creativity and good enrichment through trips, visitors and clubs after school. However, the planning for mixed-age classes is not always effective and there are too few opportunities for pupils to use their skills in information and communication technology (ICT) in other subjects.

The pastoral support pupils receive is good, but their academic guidance is not so secure, although satisfactory. Pupils know their targets but are not sufficiently involved in setting them, so they are less clear about how to achieve them. As a result, the care, guidance and support they receive are satisfactory overall.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The recently appointed headteacher has a secure understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. She has begun to develop the senior management team, although its role in strategic leadership is still at an early stage. The monitoring of teaching and pupils' progress is satisfactory and areas for improvement are clearly identified, but it is too soon to see any impact on provision. The role of subject leaders is developing. School targets have been generally based on pupils' attainment, so for some pupils they were not sufficiently challenging. However, they are now being set more rigorously. The governance of the school is satisfactory.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children make satisfactory progress in the Reception class, so that by the time they join Year 1, they are achieving the goals expected for their age across most areas of learning. Children have good attitudes towards learning and enjoy school because they feel secure. Teaching is satisfactory. Lessons are organised well, but at times, there is a lack of stimulation and too few opportunities for children to learn how to improve their work. The curriculum is broad and

covers all areas, providing a good balance of adult-directed activities and opportunities for children to choose their own tasks.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop pupils' problem-solving and investigative skills in mathematics and science and provide more opportunities for pupils to contribute to their learning.
- Improve teaching, especially in mathematics and science, and sharpen the planning for mixed-age classes.
- Extend the role of subject leaders and the work of the senior management team in contributing more effectively to school improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children's standards are slightly above those expected for their age when they start school, although it varies from year to year. In the Reception class, children's skills are highest in the areas of personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy, and mathematical development. Children make satisfactory progress in the Reception class and by Year 1, most achieve the goals expected for their age.

Pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2 overall, although their progress in writing and mathematics is slightly slower than in reading. Over recent years, standards in Year 2 have risen, especially in reading, where they are above average. Standards in writing and mathematics are average.

In Years 3 to 6, pupils continue to make satisfactory progress, although the rate slows in Years 5 and 6, especially in mathematics. In recent years, standards in Year 6 have fluctuated, but current Year 6 pupils are attaining average standards. Progress in English is satisfactory overall, but slightly weaker in writing than in reading. Progress in mathematics and science is also satisfactory but weaker than in English. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils really enjoy school. Despite their positive attitudes towards school, their attendance is average, as too many parents choose to take their children on holiday during term time. Pupils have good awareness of healthy eating and the need for exercise. They enthusiastically take part in physical education lessons and school clubs.

Pupils' behaviour is generally good, they are confident and they work together amicably. Around the school and in lessons, pupils are safety conscious and are concerned for the welfare of others. They make a good contribution to the community, for example productions for the local community and raising funds for Starfish Malawi and Demelza House, a charity for children. The school council fulfils its role well. Older pupils help those who are younger and pupils care for each other generally. However, whilst there are opportunities to show initiative and undertake duties around the school, these are too limited in lessons, where there is over reliance on teachers at times. Pupils' ability to work constructively with others and their satisfactory progress in literacy and numeracy mean that pupils are soundly prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The classroom and activities in the Reception class are organised well, but sometimes staff do not provide enough stimulation and give children too little help on how they can improve. Throughout the school, teachers are encouraging and relationships between adults and pupils are positive. For example, in a Years 3/4 mathematics lesson, the teacher ensured that pupils felt confident not to worry about 'getting it wrong'. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning and all staff work effectively with groups of pupils. Sometimes, the pace of the lesson moves too slowly or pupils have to listen to the teacher for too long, so they become restless.

Teachers do not always plan work to meet pupils' differing needs, especially the more able, and there are too few opportunities for pupils to use their initiative, for example when solving problems in mathematics. At times, there is overuse of textbooks and teachers do not recognise when pupils need additional explanations, especially in mathematics. Teachers mark books regularly, but there is not always sufficient guidance on how pupils can do better. The assessment of English is accurate and informative, but in mathematics and science, it is less consistent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Creative opportunities are plentiful and the specialist music teacher makes an exciting contribution to pupils' learning. A good programme of personal, social and health education contributes well to pupils' personal development. Links between subjects are effectively planned in Years 1 and 2 and are beginning to be developed in Years 3 to 6. The curriculum is enriched well by a good range of extra-curricular clubs and activities, such as gardening, sugarcraft, choir and basketball. There are also frequent trips and visitors to the school, such as a guest from Malawi, a Muslim parent and a residential trip.

Planning for mixed-age classes is not always effective and sometimes leads to lack of challenge for older, more able pupils. Pupils have too few investigative and problem-solving activities in mathematics and science. There are also too few opportunities for them to use and develop their skills in ICT through other subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school is a caring community where pupils feel safe and secure. They know who to go to if they have any worries. Procedures to ensure their safety are robust and regular safety checks are made. Effective procedures help children settle when they start school and prepare Year 6 pupils for secondary education. Strong links with external agencies provide support for pupils when required. The pastoral care for pupils is good and academic guidance is satisfactory. Whilst pupils know their targets, they are not sufficiently involved in assessing their own progress towards them. Additionally, a few pupils sometimes need more focused guidance in lessons, especially in mathematics. The marking of pupils' work sometimes misses opportunities to inform pupils about how to improve their work. The school's action to reduce absence, especially term time holidays, is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The recently appointed headteacher has already secured a sound grasp of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. She recognises correctly that in the past the school has tended to overestimate its effectiveness. In the short time she has been at the school, pupils report that behaviour has improved and parents' questionnaires demonstrate their overwhelming support. The partnership between the senior teacher and the headteacher is developing well and together they have written a school improvement plan that identifies pertinent priorities for action. The monitoring undertaken by the headteacher and the senior teacher is satisfactory, providing staff with useful feedback, although there has not yet been enough time to see the impact on improving teaching. The role of subject leaders is at an early stage of development, as they do not yet have a sufficiently strategic view of improving provision in the school.

The school's use of targets is adequately challenging. Its targets are usually realistic and based on an analysis of pupils' attainment, although there has been insufficient challenge for some pupils. There is now a more rigorous approach to target setting than in previous years, when there was occasional inaccuracy. Data are now being analysed carefully and used to establish priorities for action. The work of the governors is sound. They are highly committed and very supportive. However, they sometimes need to ask the school more challenging questions to hold it to account. The school's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

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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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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	3

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	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?	3

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	3
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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

14 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Laddingford St Mary's Primary School, Laddingford, ME18 6BL

Thank you for making us so welcome in your school. We enjoyed talking to you and were very impressed by how friendly, polite and confident you are. Your school is giving you a satisfactory standard of education.

These are some of the other things we found out about your school.

- You make satisfactory progress and reach broadly average standards, but at times, some of you could be given harder work to do.
- You enjoy school, behave well and look after each other.
- You are taught soundly, but lessons are sometimes too slow and there is not enough challenge for some of you.
- You have good opportunities to be creative, for example in music, and the school arranges a good range of trips, visitors and clubs that make learning more interesting.
- Adults at the school take good care of you but you need to know more about your targets in English and mathematics and how to achieve them.
- The school is led satisfactorily and the adults know what to do to improve it.

To help your school get even better, we have asked your teachers to do three things.

- Give you more opportunities for investigations and problem solving in mathematics and science.
- Make sure that lessons are not too slow, the work you are set is not too easy for you and you receive the help you need in lessons.
- Make sure that senior teachers help the headteacher improve the school so you can learn more.

Your attendance is satisfactory, but you can make it even better by making sure you do not miss school unnecessarily.

Yours sincerely

Sue Orpin Lead inspector