

St Matthew's High Brooms Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118709
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313056
Inspection dates	16–17 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Eira Gill

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	351
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Wicks
Headteacher	Mandy Crossan
Date of previous school inspection	3 February 2003
School address	Powder Mill Lane High Brooms Tunbridge Wells TN4 9DY
Telephone number	01892 528098
Fax number	01892 517694

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Matthew's High Brooms C of E Primary is a larger than average school where most pupils come from a White British background. A very small minority come from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average and varies from year to year. The headteacher was appointed in January 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school. It has successfully developed a good community ethos. Pupils make good progress in their personal development and well-being in response to the high expectations of staff. Attendance is now satisfactory. This is a significant improvement and reflects better links with parents. Pupils' behaviour in and around the school is good. Parents express good support for the school and share views, such as, 'Our son has progressed very well due to the time, effort and dedication of all staff at the school.' Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress due to good provision. A typical comment from parents is, 'My daughter had problems and has made great strides forward. If parents aren't happy they speak to the headteacher and things get done!' Achievement is satisfactory overall, including in the Foundation Stage. Standards are broadly in line with the national average overall but below average in English. In writing, standards are well below average with few pupils attaining at the higher levels, although pupils make good progress in Year 6. The new leadership team has ensured pupils have better opportunities to write in other subjects, like history, but these improvements have not had time to have a full impact in all year groups. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory because, in some lessons, teachers' introductions are too long and work does not always match pupils' interests and capabilities, especially the boys. In those classes where teaching is good, pupils make good progress because there is a real buzz of enjoyment. Marking throughout the school is mainly thorough. However, pupils are not given time to respond to it by correcting and improving their work and this limits its usefulness. The curriculum provides a satisfactory basis for pupils' learning, ensuring that pupils make sound progress in most of the basic skills. Pupils commented that the recently introduced cross-curricular weeks have made learning more enjoyable and interesting. Good use is made of the information and communication technology (ICT) suite and pupils' ICT skills are much better than at the time of the last inspection. Pupils say they feel very safe and secure in the school. They understand the importance of healthy living and get involved with the many sporting opportunities available to them both during and after the school day.

Care, guidance and support are good. Care is particularly strong and good links with other agencies ensure pupils receive good support, when necessary. Academic guidance provided for all pupils is good, and particularly for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All pupils know their targets and older pupils self-evaluate their own work. However, these improvements are too recent to have had an impact on all pupils' progress in writing. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the community through the school council.

The headteacher has high expectations of pupils and staff. In a relatively short time, she has brought about several improvements, including in the role of governors and in extending the responsibilities of middle managers so that they now feel totally involved in sharing the responsibilities of leading the school. As a result, governors and leaders at all levels now have a clear appreciation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This, plus the recent improvements in attendance and in the academic guidance given to pupils, demonstrates the school's good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children's skills are below average when they start in the Reception classes, particularly in their social, language and number skills. Because of the good care provided for them, most children settle into school quickly. They make good progress in their confidence and ability to sit quietly and to play with other children. As one parent noted, 'My son talks over dinner about what he is doing and gets very excited now about going to school.' In all other areas of learning, children make satisfactory progress, but standards remain below those expected for the end of the Reception Year. Children enjoy their activities, especially in the well used outdoor area, but the organisation of some teaching sessions does not always meet their needs. Children are sometimes kept sitting on the carpet for too long and the level of challenge is too high for the whole group. Teaching assistants are effective in supporting the children, especially those who find it difficult to adjust to expectations. One-to-one support by the assistants moves pupils' learning forward particularly well in writing and ICT.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing by ensuring that all teachers pace lessons appropriately with varied activities that capture pupils' interest, and especially that of boys.
- Ensure that work in all classes is matched to pupils' capabilities.
- Give pupils more time in lessons to improve their work in line with the marking comments made by teachers.

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's skills when they start school are lower than national expectations. They make sound progress in the Foundation Stage but most do not reach the goals expected nationally by the time they enter Year 1. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress throughout the school because of the well organised and professional support they are given. Pupils of all abilities make satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2 but standards are below average. At the end of the 2007 tests in Year 2, there was a further dip in standards, although standards in writing improved at the higher levels as a result of improved strategies introduced by leadership. Boys do not make the same progress as girls because the activities provided in lessons to improve their writing do not always capture their interest. The school has identified this as a priority for improvement.

The 2007 Year 6 National Curriculum test results show standards are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory. In science and mathematics, where the number of pupils attaining higher levels increased, pupils' achievement is good and is the result of effective leadership by the mathematics leadership team. In English, standards are below average, though they are rather better in reading than in writing. In writing, very few pupils attained Level 5 and there was a long tail of pupils attaining at the lower level. Nevertheless, pupils develop a satisfactory range of skills in Year 6 to prepare them for the next stages of education and the world of work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Older pupils work well together in pairs and groups. They enjoy the extra responsibilities they are given and said, 'You have to get a bit more independent when you get in Year 6.' Pupils say they really enjoyed their work during the cross-curricular weeks when they were given more time to understand the links between subjects, such as history and geography. Pupils enjoy problem solving in groups and their social skills improve noticeably during these lessons. Behaviour is good. In assemblies, it is exemplary. Pupils show respect for each other and play well in the playground. In lessons, pupils can be very attentive and show good concentration when the teaching is lively, but some lose interest when they do not find the lessons engaging. Pupils are very polite and happy to chat to visitors. Pupils' self-esteem is promoted by acting as buddies to the younger children and also by their work in the school council. Members are proud to have improved the playground for other pupils. 'We have the chance to express our ideas.' Pupils contribute less to the wider community. However, leadership has already begun to forge official links with community leaders and members to improve this. All pupils feel valued, safe and secure. They talk knowledgeably about healthy diets and safe lifestyles, and they practise what they preach. Attendance figures are now average after being below for several years. This is having an effect on improving pupils' achievement.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Throughout the school, relationships are good and pupils behave well. In Year 6, teaching is good, with activities that appeal to all groups of pupils. They are lively and excited about their learning. Successful lessons were observed when teachers used appropriate and imaginative resources such as the rich text, 'The Owl Babies', that totally engaged the Year 1 pupils. All groups of pupils were eager to work and moved forward well in their learning. In some lessons, introductions are too long and the level of challenge is inappropriate, so that it is too easy for some and too difficult for others. The texts and methods used by teachers are sometimes dull. This results in pupils who are unenthusiastic about their learning. Expectations for the quality of presentation and accuracy of written work are not always high enough. The best use is not always made of teaching assistants whose contribution to pupils' learning in the opening sessions of lessons often lacks a specific focus.

In all year groups, the system in place to withdraw pupils for extra phonic tuition is very efficient and is one of the reasons why pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. Marking is thorough, although pupils are not given time to respond by correcting and improving their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Cross-curricular weeks, introduced this year, have improved the curriculum and given more opportunity for pupils to write in other subjects. Pupils confirmed they enjoy their learning more when it is topic based. However, despite recent improvements, curriculum planning does not include enough time for the teaching and learning of writing. The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of after-school clubs, including good opportunities for pupils in Years 5 and

6 to complete their homework in school. The sport, music and craft clubs, as well as the annual residential visit for older pupils, all contribute to the pupils' good personal development. Links with other providers are good and ensure that, in particular, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support and achieve well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school knows and cares for its pupils well. Pupils know there is always someone who will listen if they have problems. A typical view is, 'Teachers are really helpful and we can always ask for help.' The school provides good opportunities in assemblies to celebrate pupils' good attendance, punctuality and behaviour. Procedures to safeguard pupils are robust, including vetting of staff and others who have contact with them. There are good procedures in place for supporting all pupils. The good links with parents include sharing their children's targets with them and ensuring they are kept well informed about their children's progress. This also gives parents the opportunity to contribute to their children's education. The assessment and recording of pupils' academic development has improved considerably since the last inspection. As a result, achievement has improved in reading and mathematics but assessment procedures have not had as much impact on achievement in writing throughout the school. Pupils know their targets well and what they have to do to move forward in their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher encourages a supportive atmosphere where expertise is shared. The clear action plan in place to bring about improvement is based on accurate self-evaluation, and school leaders have a good understanding of what needs to be put into place to bring about further improvement. All pupils now have more challenging long-term and short-term targets to guide their progress. Management of the mathematics curriculum is good and there are indications that the newly formed English and assessment for learning teams are beginning to have a positive impact on raising standards. Their capacity is developing well as a result of their enthusiasm, good professional development and strong support from the headteacher. The significant improvement in the leadership of inclusion during the last year has resulted in good achievement for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Governors are well informed. They are supportive and are generally aware of the need for improvements in specific areas. An important improvement has been to implement a more efficient system for tracking pupils' progress. Although teachers formally assess their pupils' achievements, they do not always use the information well enough to ensure that the work they set matches pupils' learning needs. Procedures are in place for monitoring that includes middle managers, but there is not enough day-to-day checking to keep all teachers really focused on improving pupils' progress, and especially in their writing.

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	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?	2
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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
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	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

22 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Matthew's High Brooms C of E Primary School, Tunbridge Wells TN4 9DY

This letter is to tell you what we found out during our recent inspection. We really enjoyed coming in to the school to meet you and would like to thank you for talking to us and showing us what you do.

- Here are the things that we found to be best about your school:
- Your headteacher, senior teachers and the governors take good care of you.
- Your behaviour is good and you have good attitudes to your work.
- You enjoy school and your attendance has really improved this year.
- You have a good understanding of a healthy lifestyle and how to keep safe.
- Those of you who find it a little more difficult to read and write are making good progress with the help of the special teaching assistants.
- The way you take responsibility, for example, the buddies at lunchtime.
- Here are the things that the school could do better:
- We have asked the headteacher to make sure that you do not have to sit for too long in lessons and to ask the teachers to think of things to do in lessons that boys as well as girls will find interesting, and which will help you learn how to write better.
- We have asked that your school makes sure that you are not given work that is too easy for some of you and too difficult for others.
- We noticed that your teachers always mark your work so that you know how well you have done. We have now asked if they would give you more time in lessons to do what they have suggested in the marking so that you can make better progress.

You can help, too, by continuing to work hard and doing your very best.

With very best wishes

Eira Gill Lead Inspector

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