

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122024
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	314193
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Rajinder Harrison

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	251
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stephen Raine
Headteacher	Jonathan Gardiner
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2003
School address	Fuller Street Kettering NN16 0JH
Telephone number	01536 485500
Fax number	01536 411979

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized primary school. Three quarters of the pupils are of White British heritage and the remainder are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. A small number of these pupils are at the early stages of learning English. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

School leaders are accurate in their assessment that this is a satisfactory school. Pupils' personal development is satisfactory, but some aspects, including behaviour, are good. Pupils are happy at school, form good relationships and trust all the adults that work with them. Pupils show kindness to others and take on responsibilities willingly. They understand well the importance of staying fit and healthy and enjoy the many clubs and events the school organises. Links with parents have improved significantly since the last inspection and parents are very positive about the school.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Children enter the Foundation Stage with knowledge and skills that are well below the expected levels. Their personal and social development and communication skills are particularly weak because a significant proportion of children have little or no pre-school experience to prepare them adequately for school. Good teaching in the Reception Year helps children achieve well. However, at the end of the Foundation Stage, most are still below average, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Pupils in Years 1 to 6 make satisfactory progress. In Years 5 and 6, where the teaching is best, progress is better. In other classes, teachers make insufficient use of assessment information to match work to pupils' needs and challenge pupils enough, particularly the more able. Hence, pupils do not make as much progress as they could and standards are below average. Because of the good improvements since the last inspection, standards in mathematics are close to the national average. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive the help they need to achieve well when they work in small groups, but achievement is slower in whole class lessons. The school has an increasing number of pupils who are new to learning English. These pupils progress well when receiving individual support in small groups but progress is slower in whole-class situations.

Teaching is satisfactory. In the most effective lessons, teachers challenge pupils well through good discussions. However, too many lessons are not as demanding. Teachers' expectations are too low and too often pupils persevere but show little enthusiasm. There is good emphasis on developing basic skills but with too few opportunities for independent learning and the overall lack of challenge, the curriculum is satisfactory. The many activities beyond the classroom enhance pupils' learning well. Pastoral care is good. The new assessment procedures monitor pupils' progress closely but teachers do not provide enough guidance to show pupils how to improve their work.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Although slow to respond initially, the headteacher and senior managers have stemmed the decline in standards since the last inspection. However, improvement since the last inspection is no better than satisfactory because the school leaders do not convey clearly enough the school's key improvement priorities and ensure that everyone works effectively to realise these. Raising standards is now driving improvement. The 2007 test results at Key Stage 2 improved on those of 2006 and the 2008 targets are more challenging. Improvements in mathematics and, more recently, literacy show that school leaders, staff and governors have the capacity to improve the school.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

In a well organised environment, with good levels of individual attention, children settle quickly, enjoy learning and have fun. They make new friends quickly, behave well and work confidently. Good teaching and a well constructed curriculum that considers individual needs help children achieve well. Interesting activities with a good balance between those that are adult-led and those they choose for themselves, help children to gain confidence and independence. At times, expectations of the more able children are not high enough. Children progress well but very few achieve the levels expected by the end of the Foundation Stage, particularly in their literacy and numeracy skills. Effective strategies, such as more speaking, reading, writing and number activities, are in place to address this. The classroom accommodation is stimulating and well resourced but the outdoor area still requires further development. Good leadership ensures effective teamwork between teachers and support staff.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching by raising expectations of the quality and quantity of work that pupils can do.
- Make better use of assessments to match work to pupils' needs and challenge the more able fully.
- Ensure that all staff know and understand the key improvement priorities and that all are held to account.
- Provide pupils with clearer guidance as to how they can improve their work.

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

Although children's basic skills are below the expected levels at the end of the Foundation Stage, they progress well in all the areas of learning. Pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 are working at below average standards. Pupils make slow but steady progress in Years 1 to 4, and progress accelerates in Years 5 and 6 where teacher expectations are higher. Overall achievement is satisfactory. To address the below average standards in literacy, particularly reading and writing, the school introduced a new programme that is having significant impact on pupils' word building skills. Improved provision in mathematics, particularly problem-solving and investigations, has raised standards and pupils say they enjoy numeracy lessons. Standards are improving as these strategies take effect but pupils, particularly the more able, could achieve more. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve satisfactorily in class lessons, but where they are given more individual support they achieve well. Those learning English as an additional language achieve well when receiving individual instruction but less so in those lessons where their needs are not adequately met.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Most pupils attend regularly and arrive on time because they like being at school. They particularly enjoy the sports clubs and other special events but are less enthusiastic in lessons

that many often find 'easy' and uninspiring. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils respect other cultures well and work comfortably with each other. Many visitors and visits help pupils gain a good understanding of the wider world. Pupils demonstrate consideration to others and, through an effective 'buddy' system, they befriend new arrivals and help them integrate quickly. The highly motivated school councillors are committed to improving their own and other environments, and their good efforts have gained them the Silver Active Young Citizen Award. Pupils are very aware of safety issues and understand the dangers of drugs. They have a clear understanding of the need for a healthy lifestyle, with many attending extra exercise activities and selecting healthy lunches. Pupils develop good social skills that will benefit them in later life, but with too few opportunities to develop independence in their learning and their below average basic skills, their readiness for the future is just satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school offers some good, lively teaching that captures pupils' interest and helps them achieve well. In these lessons, teachers have high expectations and ask demanding questions that make pupils think about and express their views confidently. Pupils particularly benefit from working in small groups where they feel more confident in their contributions and receive individual attention. Skilled teaching assistants lead these small groups well but their expertise is not always maximised in whole-class teacher led sessions. Many of these lessons, while satisfactory, are less stimulating and result in pupils learning at a slower pace. In these lessons, teachers direct learning too much, do not involve all pupils enough, offer pupils too few opportunities to work independently and the tasks are not matched well enough to pupils' needs to challenge them fully, particularly the more able. Too often, the emphasis is on giving pupils information rather than encouraging enquiry. Frequently all pupils do the same work, regardless of their ability, and resources to challenge the more able are insufficient.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is planned well and the quality of the documentation is good. However, not all teachers use these good plans to prepare lessons that build successfully on pupils' previous learning. In many lessons, what teachers provide does not challenge pupils enough, especially to think and develop their own ideas. Provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) has improved since the last inspection. The impact of these improvements has been greatest in numeracy at Key Stage 2, where standards are highest. Provision to support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good, and it is satisfactory for more able pupils and those new to learning English. The accommodation restricts the opportunities for pupils to work uninterrupted in small groups. Improved provision for personal, social and health education supports pupils' personal development satisfactorily by boosting their confidence and self-esteem and providing an insight into the world beyond school. Additional activities enrich the curriculum well, with particular strengths in sport.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care arrangements are good. The procedures for child protection, health and safety and safeguarding are all secure. Pupils know who to go to if they are worried or upset and know staff will help them. Pupils new to the school, often with specific educational or social needs, are supported sensitively with external agencies involved where appropriate. Arrangements to prepare pupils for secondary school are good.

Improved procedures have been introduced to monitor pupils' progress and identify at an early stage when pupils are falling behind so the necessary arrangements can be made to help them to catch up quickly. In some classes, pupils have individual targets but these targets are frequently too general, not always understood by pupils and not referred to enough during teaching and learning. Similarly, teachers fail to mark work regularly or in sufficient detail to help pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher ensures the school runs in a smooth, orderly manner and that pupils feel happy and secure. He has established a sound leadership team that has the ability to effect improvements. However, senior managers do not state clearly enough the priorities that are most urgent nor check that everyone understands what they have to do. As a result, the impact of initiatives introduced to enhance pupils' achievement is not always fully realised.

Self-evaluation is led largely by the headteacher and he knows the school's strengths and weaknesses. Subject leaders regularly review their subjects and pupils' progress but their actions lack rigour, particularly in checking that all staff challenge pupils fully and follow the school's policies, for example, regarding planning and marking. Governors see the school as an important part of the community and work hard to secure its good standing in the area. They are supportive but do not provide enough critical oversight because they do not have the pertinent information to challenge staff. Sound financial management ensures that priorities such as staff training are adequately resourced.

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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?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
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?	3
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	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?	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	4
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Kettering, NN16 0JH

I am writing to tell you what we found out when we came to your school recently to look at the work you do and to talk to your teachers. It was good to meet you. Thank you for making us feel welcome and for being so friendly and polite. We enjoyed talking to you about school, the good friends you make and the clubs you can join. We particularly liked the way you are kind to each other and like helping.

- Your school is satisfactory but with some good aspects. These are the things we particularly liked.
- The standards you achieve are not as high as we would expect but you make satisfactory progress; the school's results were better in 2007 than in 2006, so things are improving.
- Most of your lessons are satisfactory, but where teaching is good you really enjoy what you do, work hard and learn more.
- You work best when teachers give you challenging work and some of you could do harder work.
- The activities teachers plan are satisfactory and the trips and clubs are good.
- Your behaviour is good; you know about staying safe, fit and healthy.
- You make good friends and can go to someone if you are worried or unhappy.
- The headteacher and all the staff take good care of you.
- These are things we have asked the school to do to become even better.
- Make sure that teachers expect more from you so that more of your lessons are good.
- Make sure teachers check what you can already do so that they plan work that challenges you to learn more, especially those of you who could do harder work.
- Make sure that all the staff and governors know what needs to be done urgently to improve the school and that they do this.
- Give you better information as to how you can improve your work.

There are things you could do to help too. For example, you could make sure you always do your best and ask for harder work if you think your work is too easy.

I hope that you will all do well in the future. Yours sincerely

Rajinder Harrison Lead inspector

21 January 2008

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Rajinder Harrison
Lead inspector