

St Mary's Voluntary Controlled Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123784
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	314716
Inspection dates	4–5 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Joanna Pike

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	295
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Hampson
Headteacher	Helen Rooks
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2004
School address	Oakfield Road Bridgwater TA6 7LX
Telephone number	01278 422691
Fax number	01278 431794

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's is slightly larger than most primary schools, and the number on roll is slowly rising. Increasing numbers of pupils join the school other than in the Reception class. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to that of most schools, but the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is low. Almost all pupils are of White British origin. None speaks English as an additional language. There is a private nursery on site. The school has gained the Basic Skills Quality Mark, Healthy Schools Status and Intermediate level of the International Schools Award and Sports Active Mark. As an extended school, families are advised of activities and services which are available in the locality.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Mary's is a satisfactory school with notable strengths. The headteacher has successfully developed an outstanding enthusiasm for learning across the school so that all pupils really enjoy their lessons and work hard. Behaviour is outstanding because of the transparent and consistent behaviour policy. Pupils have an exceptionally strong sense of right and wrong, and behave very responsibly towards each other. The excellent care and support pupils receive contribute significantly to their personal development and well-being. The school has quite rightly identified the need to develop further pupils' understanding of the diversity of cultures in today's society.

Standards are in line with national expectations. In 2007, results in the national tests dipped because there was a large proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In addition, the much higher than usual number of pupils (approximately 30%) who joined the school after Reception, together with staffing difficulties, contributed to breaks in the continuity of some pupils' learning. Pupils make good progress in the Reception class and in Years 1 and 2 where they reach above average standards. However, evidence from their previous work and the school's records shows that pupils presently in Years 5 and 6 made slow progress in Years 3 and 4. Their progress, whilst improved, is not yet rapid enough to fully make up for their previous slower progress. Therefore, overall, their achievement is satisfactory.

Teaching is satisfactory, with much that is good. However, the quality is inconsistent. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good, and lead to pupils being willing to 'have a go'. Pupils thoroughly enjoy most of their lessons because teachers plan lively and interesting activities. Teaching assistants contribute significantly to supporting learning, resulting in pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities making progress similar to that of other pupils. But in some lessons, because teachers do not manage group work effectively, pupils lose concentration and their learning suffers.

The school has worked hard to create an exciting and good curriculum to enthuse pupils. The successful thematic approach is valued by pupils. It is well planned to develop their skills across different subjects. For example, the 'Roman Day' gave pupils a memorable learning experience, with a good range of skills being promoted in a range of contexts.

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school, which all share, but the school's self-evaluation is inconsistent. It has strengths in the monitoring of teaching, identifying whole-school priorities and the role of subject coordinators in analysing test results. The school is constantly reviewing the way pupils' progress is tracked and has developed a new tracking system to monitor pupils' progress more closely. Some of this information is used well to target teaching and learning and this is beginning to have a positive impact on achievement, especially in reading. However, some information is not clear enough to help teachers identify which pupils are at risk of not making progress as expected.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

When children start in the Reception class, their knowledge, understanding and skills are slightly below expectations. However, they make good progress and achieve well because of the effective teaching they receive. By the end of the Foundation Stage, most children reach the expected levels. However, children's writing skills are not so strong. Children greatly enjoy the well-planned

and exciting activities which adults provide, including the well-resourced outdoor area. Adults are adept at extending children's skills by their questioning. Strong emphasis on developing personal and social skills leads to children making particularly good progress. They are quick to share and play well together. Recent training is helping adults to fine-tune their assessment of children's progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement in Years 3 to 6 through consistently good teaching
- Identify early, and closely monitor, pupils at risk of underachievement by developing more effective procedures for tracking pupils' progress
- Develop pupils' understanding of the diversity of cultures in today's society.

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

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are in line with national expectations and achievement is satisfactory. Standards have been slightly higher in reading and writing than in mathematics and science. Children get off to a good start in the Reception class and make good progress. This good progress continues in Years 1 and 2, especially in reading. In Years 3 to 6, progress slows and is only satisfactory. The school has taken appropriate action that is beginning to raise further standards and achievement in Years 3 to 6. These include introducing new systems to monitor pupils' progress more closely. One of these systems is helping teachers to target support for groups of pupils more effectively. There are some indications that this is having a positive impact on the achievement of pupils in these groups. However, work seen in lessons and in pupils' books showed that achievement remains satisfactory overall. The school has put a strong emphasis on improving reading and school data show that achievement in reading has improved.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good overall, with many outstanding features. Pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school, and this is reflected in their good attendance. They work very well together and are quick to share with others because of their excellent social skills. Their understanding of the need for healthy exercise and a balanced diet is outstanding because of the extremely effective programmes the school has developed. Pupils' spiritual development is also outstanding because of the wide range of opportunities they have to develop self-awareness and reflect on their own beliefs and those of others. Pupils feel extremely safe and secure. They are confident that any bullying is swiftly dealt with. Members of the School Council feel that they have an effective voice in the school. Pupils relish the many ways they have of contributing to the school and community, such as acting as Peer Mediators. Pupils learn about other cultures and religions around the world, but as yet, their understanding of the diversity of cultures in Britain is only satisfactory. Pupils are gaining a good understanding about government and the world of work and their satisfactory achievement in developing their literacy and numeracy skills means they are being soundly prepared for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

As a result of sharing good practice, teaching has improved since the previous inspection, with a greater proportion of good lessons. However, the quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent. Classrooms have attractive displays which support learning well. Pupils are willing to contribute because teachers create a positive atmosphere. In the best lessons, teachers build learning progressively in small steps and use good strategies such as role play. This results in good progress. In addition, pupils are given frequent opportunities to explain their ideas and this helps extend their thinking. But in lessons that are only satisfactory, teachers do not always target questions to sufficiently challenge pupils' thinking, especially for the more able. Sometimes the pace of the lesson is too slow for learning to reach its maximum potential.

Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and give good advice on how to improve. In English, teachers occasionally use checklists for pupils to mark their own work or their partners. This is successful in helping pupils gain an understanding of their own learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The broad curriculum contributes very significantly to pupils' personal development and well-being. The curriculum is well enriched through special events, trips and visitors. Pupils greatly enjoy these activities. The recent energy workshops for Year 5 and 6 helped pupils gain understanding about alternative energy sources. Pupils are also gaining understanding of the world of work and about government through visitors such as the local MP. Many pupils attend the good range of clubs provided, including a drama club, gardening club and a variety of sports clubs. Additionally, the school teaches French and provides opportunities for pupils to learn to swim. Good links with other schools and the local church provide further good enrichment opportunities, such as pupils making Mother's Day posies for the local church. Information and communication technology (ICT) is being well used as a tool for learning and developing pupils' skills effectively. The school is building links with schools in other countries as well as England to improve pupils' cultural understanding.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall, but care and support are outstanding. The school has very rigorous safeguarding procedures to ensure pupils' safety. All adults in the school know the pupils very well, and pupils feel confident in approaching them for help. Effective links with outside agencies and organisations are well used to support more vulnerable pupils extremely well. The school is highly successful in settling into the school pupils who have experienced social and emotional difficulties. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are carefully provided for so that they make similar progress to others. Their individual learning plans have clear targets which helps teaching assistants support their learning effectively. Pupils know their mathematics and writing targets, and most can explain their progress with them. However, the school's tracking systems do not always identify when pupils may be underachieving. This makes it difficult for teachers to focus accurately on what pupils need to learn. Most parents are highly supportive of the school, although a few felt that using the same

sanction for different misdemeanours was not effective. However, the school does consult the governors and the School Council on this matter every year and takes their comments into account in its regular reviews of its procedures.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The outstanding strengths in the school have come about because of the headteacher's ability to get all staff and governors to work towards her vision. She has managed some difficult staffing issues effectively and has developed a rigorous approach to monitoring teaching. These strategies have improved the quality of teaching. As a result, pupils in Years 5 and 6, although still catching up, are now making better progress than they did in Years 3 and 4. Newly-qualified teachers receive good support. Teachers' professional development is well targeted. Although the new systems for tracking pupils' progress are mixed in their effectiveness, the more frequent meetings between senior leaders and class teachers are beginning to help target support more efficiently. It is too early to see the full impact, but some groups of pupils receiving additional support are making good progress. Because its tracking systems have not been robust enough nor consistent enough, the school has been too generous in its own analysis of its performance. However, the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve because the quality of its evaluation of its performance is improving. Middle leaders are monitoring their subjects well, for example through analysing tests, and senior leaders rigorously check teaching. Similarly, governors know the school well and provide effective support. Although their challenges are not yet sharp enough, they are increasingly able and willing to hold the school to account.

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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	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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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?	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

6 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's C of E VC Primary School, Bridgwater TA6 7LX

It was good to come and see you at your school! Thank you for making us so welcome, talking to us and helping us during the school's inspection. We especially enjoyed the good discussion we had with some of you from Year 6. We learned a lot. I think you would all make very good future inspectors! Right now, your school is giving you a satisfactory education and has many strong features. Here are some of the most important bits of the inspection report that I thought you might like to know about.

- You work hard in lessons and make sound progress. You reach expected standards. You and your teachers are making good efforts to improve this further.
- Your personal development is good. You really enjoy your time in school. You have excellent understanding of how to stay safe and keep healthy. Your behaviour is outstanding.
- Your teachers have been busy working hard to improve things. They provide satisfactory teaching, and much of it is good.
- Your teachers work hard to give you a good curriculum that is full of exciting events such as your Roman Day, which looked like a fantastic experience.
- The school does an outstanding job to make sure that you all feel safe, settled and secure.
- Your headteacher is doing a good job to help everyone work together and to make sensible plans with the staff and governors to improve things.

To improve further the school should now:

- help you to achieve even better by making even more lessons good
- track your progress more closely so that you can be helped to improve more quickly
- develop your understanding of the different cultures we have living in Britain today.

Thank you again for all your help.

Joanna Pike Lead Inspector