

Mark Church of England VC First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123811
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	314727
Inspection date	11 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Tom Simpson

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4-9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	144
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lesley Stephenson
Headteacher	Wendy Nelder
Date of previous school inspection	3 February 2003
School address	The Causeway Mark Highbridge TA9 4QA
Telephone number	01278 641262
Fax number	01278 641681

Age group	4-9
Inspection date	11 September 2007
Inspection number	314727

© Crown copyright 2007

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

Mark is a below-average-sized school serving a largely rural community. The pupils are nearly all White British. Children's attainment on entry varies from year to year but is broadly in line with the levels expected for their age. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The percentage entitled to free school meals is also below average. The school has recently achieved 'Healthy School' status and the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This very popular school provides a good education for its pupils. It has a number of specific strengths. Very committed staff at all levels are successful in maintaining and raising academic standards while still providing an interesting and relevant curriculum. Staff know and value each pupil as an individual and consequently provide very effective care, guidance and support for them all. This has a successful impact on pupils' good personal development. Pupils feel safe at school and value all it has to offer them. They thoroughly enjoy coming to the school, a fact substantiated by many very positive parental comments on questionnaires. One parent wrote, for example, 'My child loves the school and is making brilliant progress'. Another commented, 'My husband and I have always been very pleased with all aspects of this school, especially the quality of the teaching and the nurturing atmosphere which is apparent in all areas'.

Teaching is good throughout the school and the pupils' good achievement is supported well by a good and enriched curriculum. Provision for children in the Reception class is good, which means that they get off to a good start in their schooling and are well prepared to begin the National Curriculum. By the time the pupils leave the school they have made good progress and standards are above average in all the key subjects. However, standards in boys' writing, although improving as a result of the school's concerted efforts, are still not as high as those of the girls because some boys, particularly in Years 3 and 4, do not do as well as they could. The school has a high level of commitment to the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Leadership and management are good overall and have a significant impact on all aspects of the school's work. The school has successfully addressed the issues raised by its last inspection. For example, monitoring of teaching is now rigorous and pupils have many opportunities to develop their writing skills in a range of subjects. Standards in English have improved and above-average standards in other subjects have been maintained. A particularly good feature is the way that the school evaluates its strengths and relative weaknesses and puts in place effective strategies to resolve the latter. In view of these past successes and the enthusiasm and commitment of staff at all levels, the school has a good capacity to improve even further in the future.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage are good and this class is well led and managed. As a result, children make good progress in all areas, including their personal development. Most reach the standards expected of them by the time they reach Year 1 and are confident, articulate children who enjoy learning. The curriculum is broad, balanced and stimulating and keeps them well motivated. Outside play, for example, takes place in a safe and well-equipped area. Planning is appropriately based on the nationally recommended Foundation Stage curriculum. However, it is geared towards adult-led rather than child-initiated activities. The school is aware of this and is successfully working towards a better balance.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in boys' writing to the same level as those in other subjects by challenging boys in Years 3 and 4 more effectively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well and consequently standards are above average. Children get off to a good start in the Reception Year and by the time they start Year 1 they have reached or exceeded the goals expected for their age and are well prepared for their future education in all areas of learning. Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 1 and 2 and standards have been significantly above average in Year 2 assessments for a number of years. The school's tracking data shows that these high standards are maintained in Years 3 and 4, but also indicates that the progress made in the recent past, while often still good, has not been quite as fast as that in other parts of the school. Boys and girls leave the school with similar standards in reading and mathematics, but girls do better in writing. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally make good progress against their individual targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, with a particular strength in their social development. A strong Christian ethos at the school is reflected well in the caring attitudes the pupils have towards one another and in their good behaviour. The pupils have a good understanding of the multicultural dimension of the United Kingdom but are less clear about more global issues, an aspect which is currently being addressed through participation in a UNICEF project exploring the rights of children across the world. They thoroughly enjoy coming to school and feel that 'school is a fun place where we have lots to do'. Their attendance is consistently above average. The pupils feel safe at school and have a good understanding of how to maintain healthy lifestyles. They enjoy taking on responsibilities, helping to keep everyone safe and happy at playtimes, for example. They appreciate the opportunities they have to contribute to the local and wider communities through taking part in village activities and supporting charities such as 'Children in Need'. They feel well supported by staff, appreciating the way that their views, as expressed through the active school council, for instance, are taken seriously by the adults at the school. Pupils gain a good range of social and academic skills which prepare them well for the adult world.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

A particularly strong aspect of the teaching is the positive, effective and often humorous way in which the pupils are managed. Expectations are high. As a result, pupils are well behaved in lessons. They are keen to learn and relationships are very good at all levels. Lessons are thoroughly planned. Tasks are regularly stimulating and motivate the pupils well. Teaching assistants are deployed well, providing effective support in literacy, for example, for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Very occasionally, however, the pace of a discussion is too slow, which means that some pupils begin to lose interest. There are robust procedures in place for assessing and tracking pupils' progress as they move through the school. As a result, work set is well matched to the needs of pupils with different levels of ability.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a rich and creative curriculum which caters effectively for pupils' wider needs as well as developing their basic skills. For example, there is a strong emphasis on music, older pupils have the opportunity to learn French and good use is made of the community and the school's own outdoor facilities to support learning. One parent commented, 'The effort put into art, singing and drama productions is amazing and adds another dimension to an already great school'. A very good range of out-of-class activities, including clubs, visits and residential camps, further enhances the curriculum provision. The school has a good level of commitment to its provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This has been more focused in the past on supporting literacy skills and the school has correctly identified the need to re-direct this towards numeracy skills as well. Positive links with other schools to enhance the curriculum include a sports partnership with the local middle school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are exceptionally well cared for. For example, they are very well known to staff as individuals and are provided with very good pastoral guidance. This supports their personal development effectively and encourages their positive attitudes towards learning. Robust procedures are in place for health and safety, child protection and safe staff recruitment. The pupils themselves say that there is always an adult they can go to if they have a problem. Strong links have been forged with outside agencies, such as the school nurse, which support potentially vulnerable pupils well. There are a number of effective strategies in place to support pupils' academic development and these are contributing to the good progress they make. However, there is insufficient use made of marking to guide pupils about what they need to do to improve and what they need to learn next.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides very good leadership. She is highly committed to raising standards and the quality of provision even further and is highly regarded by all parties, including the pupils and their parents. She has created an ethos in the school where staff work very effectively together as a highly cohesive team and are mutually very supportive. There are stringent procedures in place to monitor all aspects of the school's work, including teaching and achievement. This means that staff are very clear about not only the school's strengths but also its developmental areas. For example, the school recognised that boys were not doing as well as they should in English and introduced a number of strategies to improve this. These have resulted in a significant improvement in boys' reading, but have not yet had a full impact on their writing. There have been a number of very recent changes to the management structure at the school, including the promotion of a member of staff to the role of assistant head and the re-designation of others to new subject coordination roles. Although the individuals concerned have very clear and appropriate views about how they intend their roles to develop, there has inevitably not been time for their impact on the provision for their subjects to be felt. The governing body is supportive, proactive and very well informed.

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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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	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	1
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the 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

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?	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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

11 September 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mark C of E First School, Highbridge, Somerset TA9 4QA

Thank you for making us so welcome at your school. We enjoyed meeting you and hearing about your work. This letter is to tell you about our findings. The school provides you with a good education.

Here are some of the things we found:

- You are making good progress in your work and reaching above-average standards in your work.
- You really enjoy school and are well behaved.
- Your personal development is good. For example, you are really keen to learn and to help others not as well off as yourselves.
- You are very well cared for by the adults at the school.
- You are taught well and regularly given interesting things to do, both in and out of lessons.
- The school is well led and managed and the headteacher and staff are working hard to make the school even better.

Here is what we have asked the school to do next to get even better:

- Ensure that boys, particularly in Years 3 and 4, do as well in writing as in their other subjects.

I hope that boys, particularly the older ones, will work very hard to make sure that they do as well in writing as they do in reading and mathematics.

Thank you again for your help.

With best wishes

Tom Simpson Lead Inspector

11 September 2007

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Mark C of E First School, Highbridge, Somerset TA9
4QA**

Thank you for making us so welcome at your school. We enjoyed meeting you and hearing about your work. This letter is to tell you about our findings. The school provides you with a good education.

Here are some of the things we found:

- You are making good progress in your work and reaching above-average standards in your work.
- You really enjoy school and are well behaved.
- Your personal development is good. For example, you are really keen to learn and to help others not as well off as yourselves.
- You are very well cared for by the adults at the school.
- You are taught well and regularly given interesting things to do, both in and out of lessons.
- The school is well led and managed and the headteacher and staff are working hard to make the school even better.

Here is what we have asked the school to do next to get even better:

- Ensure that boys, particularly in Years 3 and 4, do as well in writing as in their other subjects.

I hope that boys, particularly the older ones, will work very hard to make sure that they do as well in writing as they do in reading and mathematics.

Thank you again for your help.

With best wishes

Tom Simpson
Lead Inspector