

St Mary and St Chad CofE (C) First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124237
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314854
Inspection date	10 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Marion Thompson

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	115
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Megan Hartley
Headteacher	Angela Lunt
Date of previous school inspection	10 December 2004
School address	Church Road Brewood Stafford ST19 9BT
Telephone number	01902 850373
Fax number	01902 850373

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

Two Additional Inspectors carried out the inspection.

Description of the school

This is a small school where the great majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds. The proportion of children identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average.

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 school that provides a sound education for its pupils. The quality of education is improving steadily. Provision in the Foundation Stage is good and enables children to make good progress. Pupils enjoy school and attend very regularly, taking a full part in the wide range of extra-curricular activities which the school offers.

Over the last few years, standards and achievement in the school have declined because of severe staffing difficulties. The school has now turned the corner and pupils' achievement is satisfactory and improving. This is because the headteacher, staff and governors systematically address weaknesses in provision through sensibly prioritised plans. Pupils' progress now is monitored more closely than in previous years and the sound curriculum is increasingly adapted to match pupils' learning needs. Specific areas of weakness in reading, writing and mathematics are now tackled effectively. However, there is still more catching up to do in writing and mathematics. The school evaluates the impact of changes it makes and adjusts them when necessary. Governors have played a key role in supporting the school and the level of challenge they provide is increasing. Leadership and management are satisfactory and the school is soundly placed to continue to improve.

Satisfactory teaching contributes to the sound progress pupils make and the average standards they attain. However, improvement in teaching has been slower than elsewhere. Staffing problems have constrained the school's capacity to monitor teaching regularly enough and to provide guidance on how to improve. Whilst teaching has some strengths, too often, learning objectives are not sufficiently clear. Lessons occasionally lack pace and challenge, leading to some restless behaviour. Academic support and guidance is satisfactory overall and in literacy, are good. However, too often, teachers give too little indication, through feedback in class and marking, of what the pupils need to do to improve their work.

The school has the strong support of most parents, who particularly appreciate the accessibility of staff and the good quality of pastoral care and safe environment provided for their children. One appreciative parent wrote that 'We feel that our child has been treated as an individual, not just as another child in the class.' As a result, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their personal development are good. Pupils develop a good awareness of how to stay safe and healthy and love the 'Groovy Groovers' exercise sessions at the start of each day. Most pupils behave well. Even the youngest children accept responsibilities willingly and older pupils take their duties, for example organising playground games, seriously. Their satisfactory literacy and numeracy skills and good social skills prepare them soundly for the next stage of their education.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

When children join the Reception class, they usually have standards that match those expected for their ages, except in literacy and numeracy, where skills are lower. However, standards vary from year to year because of the small numbers involved, and are lower in the current class. Staff form good relationships with families and are responsive to children's personal and learning needs. This helps children to settle quickly and achieve well. By the time children enter Year 1, standards are average in all areas, because of a well-planned curriculum and good teaching. Staff ensure there is a good balance between the activities which children choose for themselves

and those directed by the teacher. This ensures children develop their independence and their awareness of others. Ongoing assessment is very good and used well to plan suitable work. However, initial assessment is undertaken too early to allow children to show the full range of what they can do. Leadership and management of the Foundation Stage are good.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Ensure lessons, especially in writing and mathematics, consistently have good pace, clear learning objectives and provide pupils with a high level of challenge.
- Provide pupils with clear guidance on how to improve their work, through marking and feedback in class.
- Enhance teaching and learning by providing staff with clear guidance on how to improve their practice, through regular monitoring of lessons.

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

Standards are average and achievement is satisfactory overall. Children make good progress in the Reception class, especially in relation to weaker areas such as developing their language and number skills. Progress is satisfactory and is improving in Years 1 to 4. By the time they leave, pupils reach or exceed their realistic targets. Standards in reading, listening and speaking are above average and pupils achieve well, because of the effective actions the school has taken. Progress in writing, whilst satisfactory, is slower, especially in relation to sentence structure, punctuation and grammar. As a result, achievement in writing is improving, especially among boys. Progress in mathematics is satisfactory and pupils are beginning to make up lost ground. However, there is further to go, especially in relation to problem solving, which is a weak area of mathematics. Achievement in science is satisfactory. Pupils in need of extra support for literacy and numeracy make sound progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' enthusiastic and respectful participation in the daily act of worship reflects their strong spiritual development. Pupils also have a good understanding of their own and other cultures. They are aware of the importance of healthy lifestyles, such as the need for a balanced diet. Pupils feel safe around school. Despite the severe concerns of a small number of parents, pupils say there is little bullying and that it is dealt with effectively when it occurs. Pupils enjoy lessons and other school activities and have good relationships with teachers and other adults. Attendance is consistently above average. Behaviour is satisfactory. Pupils generally have positive attitudes to learning and are polite and welcoming to visitors. However, there is some off-task behaviour in lessons when pupils are not fully engaged by the teaching. Pupils make a good contribution to the school and the wider community. For example, older pupils help younger ones with reading. They help raise money for extra equipment for the school and for charity.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers' relationships with pupils are good and this plays an important part in motivating pupils to learn. Teaching staff and pupils respect each other and pay good attention to safety, for example when using equipment in science lessons. Pupils learn at a steady pace. Teaching assistants are deployed appropriately and support pupils effectively in their learning. Pupils benefit from the opportunity to talk and work collaboratively and to develop their work independently. However, learning objectives sometimes lack clarity, so pupils are not clear about the progress they have made and lessons occasionally lack challenge. When activities lack pace and interest, pupils sometimes become inattentive. In the Foundation Stage, where teaching is good, children have clear and careful guidance to help them get the most out of freely chosen activities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has taken effective action to adapt and bolster its provision where it has identified the need to improve pupils' progress. This is notable in the Foundation Stage, where work is closely matched to children's needs. Examples include the focus on the linking of sounds and letters, reading, and problem solving in mathematics. Activities designed to increase the motivation of boys who are reluctant to write are also beginning to have a positive impact. Pupil grouping is now more flexible, helping pupils to catch up when they have fallen behind. Occasionally, however, the curriculum does not provide challenging enough activities and it is not clear why some elements are included. Links between subjects are developing and increasing pupils' enjoyment of learning and developing their creativity, but this is in the early stages. Pupils appreciate and many join in the good range of extra-curricular activities, which promote their health, well-being and cultural development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

All staff provide good levels of pastoral care and support for pupils, especially when they leave or join the school. Many parents testify to their children's enjoyment of school, saying children feel safe and well supported. Links with outside agencies, for example to help children with hearing impairment, are good and support pupils' well-being. Sound procedures are in place to ensure pupils' health and safety. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Pupils know their targets and can see their progress towards them on displays in classrooms. Marking is generally thorough, but is too inconsistent. Some marking and feedback in class provide detailed, specific advice on how pupils can improve their work, but it is often too vague.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher, soundly supported by staff and governors, provides a clear sense of direction for the school. Self-evaluation is accurate and based on a sound analysis of the work of the

school. Actions taken have led to secure improvements in reading and in listening and speaking. As a result of strategies the school has put in place, achievement in writing and mathematics is beginning to improve, especially for boys. A recently introduced system for tracking pupils' progress has enabled the school to match the curriculum more closely to pupils' needs. Because of staffing demands, monitoring of teaching has not been frequent enough and, as a result, improvement in this area has been slower than elsewhere. Governors, some of whom are new, provide good support and sound challenge to the school.

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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	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	3
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

11 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary and St Chad CofE (C) First School, Stafford ST19 9BT

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. Many of your parents contacted us to tell us their views of the school, so please discuss this letter with them. Your school provides you with a sound education, which is improving steadily. The Foundation Stage provides you with a good education and you make good progress, especially in developing your language and number work. Most of you reach average standards by the time you go into Year 1.

You achieve well in the Reception class, because all aspects of the provision the school makes for you are good. In Years 1 to 4, you make satisfactory progress in your learning, reaching average standards by the time you leave. Your personal development throughout the school, from when you start in the Foundation Stage, is good. You do especially well in developing your reading, speaking and listening skills. Skills in writing and mathematics are improving, because of the changes the school has made, but there is more work to do, so carry on trying hard. Most of you have good attitudes to learning.

Your satisfactory progress is also a result of sound teaching and you enjoy a programme of activities in and out of school that interests you. Writing is becoming more interesting, especially for boys, because the school tries to plan topics that you want to write about. You enjoy taking part in the extra activities the school provides for you, for example in sport. Adults in school take good care of you, so you feel secure. The headteacher, staff and governors are working hard to make sure the school keeps on improving. We have asked the school to make sure that:

- learning intentions are clear, especially in writing and mathematics, and that lessons always make you think and work hard
- marking and feedback in class provide you with clear guidance on how to improve your work
- teachers have clear guidance on how to improve their work, through observing and commenting on each other's lessons.

Best wishes

Marion Thompson Lead inspector