

St Mark's CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125185
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	322783
Inspection dates	14–15 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Ramesh Kapadia HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	96
School	
Appropriate authority	Interim executive
Chair	Mr S Barker board
Headteacher	Mrs L Christie and Mrs D Eaton
Date of previous school inspection	28 November 2006
School address	Franklyn Road Surrey Godalming GU7 2LD
Telephone number	01483 422924
Fax number	01483 425225

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Mark's is a small school with a mission to include all children in the community. It serves a community with a high level of social deprivation compared to the rest of Surrey. A high proportion of pupils have learning difficulties mainly relating to literacy and behaviour. The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage and few are at an early stage of speaking English.

The school was placed in special measures in an inspection in November 2006 and has had three monitoring visits before this inspection. Two interim joint Headteachers have been appointed this year. The school is subject to a radical realignment in September 2008, whereby all pupils in the current Years 2 to 6 will leave in the summer and the school will cater only for infant children in September and then build up to a full primary school. There are plans to re-name the school and virtually all staff will be new.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005 Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools is of the opinion that this school no longer requires special measures. This is because there are clear and sustainable signs of improvement this year and planned improvements for the autumn term. However, the school's overall effectiveness remains inadequate. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could be reasonably expected to perform. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' achievement in writing and mathematics, and in the quality of teaching.

St Mark's CofE Primary School has had a chequered history leading to its current inadequacies. However, clear signs of a concerted effort with a range of careful measures and strengthened support from the local authority (LA) indicate a sustainable capacity to improve the quality of education for the community it serves. Calm and purposeful leadership rescued the school from a potential crisis in the autumn term when parents and pupils were losing further confidence in the school and its leadership. Swift and decisive action was taken by the LA to appoint two senior staff with proven experience in supporting schools in difficulties. They have restored staff morale, made some key leadership changes and enabled staff to work co-operatively and collaboratively. They have not yet been able to rectify a legacy of low standards and slow progress, so that these aspects remain inadequate. The quality of teaching has improved but there are still inadequacies in relation to lesson planning, targeted support for different groups of pupils, and marking.

The curriculum is satisfactory and heavily weighted towards literacy in order to rectify weaknesses in the achievement of some pupils. Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory, as is the quality of care, support and guidance. Attendance is inadequate, though vigorous action has led to significant improvements recently. Behaviour is adequate.

The LA has replaced the governing body with an Interim Executive Board (IEB), which has been in place since January 2008. The board has been meeting regularly and is monitoring the school's progress carefully. It has also made effective plans for September by appointing an executive headteacher for the school. The school's self-evaluation is satisfactory. At present, because its overall effectiveness is inadequate, the school does not give satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Standards in the Foundation Stage are average, as shown by detailed assessment using the Foundation Stage profile, which also lists points for action for each child. Two thirds of the children are working securely on most of the goals and about half are working securely on all the goals. Work is well organised and structured carefully; this is also evident from good displays and the progress made by these children over the year.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing and mathematics
- Tackle the inadequacies in teaching and raise its quality
- Improve attendance and standards of behaviour in the school

- Ensure a smooth transition for all children with the formation of the re-aligned school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Standards in the school are well below the national average and progress is slow. However, a marked decline in standards in autumn 2007 has been reversed and there are recent signs of improvement in many parts of the school recently.

Over the last year, a significant number of pupils have left the school from various year groups because of uncertainty about the school's future, including some more able pupils. The prior attainment of pupils on entry to the school is below the expected levels for their age and, in some year groups, they start with well below average attainment.

The latest teacher assessments in Year 2, which have been moderated, show that about half the pupils are working at Level 2, the expected level for this year group, in writing, reading and mathematics. In Year 6, about two thirds of pupils are likely to reach the expected Level 4 in English and three-fifths that level in mathematics, with none at Level 5. These results indicate an unduly high degree of variation and slow progress over time; however, clear progress has been made this year in both English and mathematics. Pupils with difficulties in literacy have also made progress, although their progress overall is still inadequate. Data for pupils' progress in science is incomplete.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. However, a few pupils, mainly in Year 6, have been unsettled by the many changes in the school over the last two years, and remain disaffected, with unsatisfactory attitudes.

Pupils have a reasonably healthy lifestyle in school. They are encouraged to eat a balanced diet and are given a piece of fruit daily. New play equipment involving physical activities has been acquired and is used sensibly at lunchtimes. After-school clubs include football and basketball. Snack times in the Foundation Stage are used well to develop pupils' social skills.

The overall attendance rate is inadequate and remains below the national average. It has been adversely affected by the non-attendance of a few children who have left the area and who have only recently been removed from the school's roll. Attendance is tracked carefully, with a display in the school hall to ensure that it is of a high profile and there are secure signs of recent improvements. Nonetheless, there is still more to do.

Small classes, often with a teacher and a teaching assistant, have helped to improve behaviour in most classrooms. Inconsiderate behaviour at lunchtime has been tackled by a more equitable rota system to ensure that pupils from all year groups get a chance to engage in a range of supervised activities. This was introduced at the instigation of the pupils themselves through their representatives on the school council. The school council takes its responsibilities seriously including raising money for charity.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Though the majority of teaching is at least satisfactory, some inadequacies remain and the proportion of good lessons is too small for the legacy of underachievement to be dealt with quickly. Over the year, there have been a number of staff changes and changes in the organisation of classes that have restricted pupils' learning. Monitoring of teaching has also been inadequate in the past but is better now. There are clear signs of improvement, although there is some way to go to ensure teaching is of a consistent high quality.

Teachers have objectives for the learning to take place in most lessons and these are explained to pupils, along with the criteria to be used in deciding if these have been met. In the more successful lessons, the criteria are clear, enabling pupils to begin to use them confidently; in some lessons, objectives are simply tasks to be undertaken and so the rationale behind them is not clear to the pupils.

Collaborative working in pairs or small groups occurs in most classes. In good lessons, questioning is probing and offers an appropriate level of challenge and support to all pupils. However, there are too many occasions when teachers do not match the questions to pupils' needs and do not target pupils effectively who most need the support with their learning.

A good practical lesson was seen in mathematics where pupils learnt to use an appropriate range of measuring instruments; at the end of the lesson a number of pupils had the opportunity to describe their learning. Experimental work is taking place in science, where aspects of heat are being investigated in different situations, though results are not always recorded. Limited opportunities for practical work restrict the quality of work in technology.

The quality of marking of work has improved, though there is room for further improvement in the correction of spellings in subjects across the curriculum. Marking now gives better recognition of pupils' success and hard work, with some specific advice about how they can improve. In a minority of classes, there is also evidence of pupils subsequently improving or correcting their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is broad and reasonably balanced. Though numbers are small, all pupils, except those in Years 1 and 2, are in single-age classes in the mornings, usually supported by a teaching assistant. The limited literacy skills of many pupils has led to the provision of regular guided reading in all classes, sometimes in small groups; there is also a weekly writing focus to improve skills. A range of extra-curricular activities supports the curriculum. These include visits to a local estate and a farm and there is a residential trip for Year 6 to an Outward Bound Centre. Economic understanding is promoted through a strong emphasis on literacy. The use of computers is relatively limited, though there are discrete sessions in the computer suite for pupils, and teachers use interactive whiteboards well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The quality of care, support and guidance is satisfactory. There is productive, collaborative working with a range of external agencies. These include learning and language support, behavioural support, an educational psychologist, a speech and language therapist, and the educational welfare officer. A house system with achievement assemblies and reward stickers has motivated pupils. Teachers continue to work hard to deal with inappropriate and distracting behaviour consistently and firmly. The new approach to the way in which unacceptable behaviour is handled is proving effective in most year groups. Pupils' progress is very carefully tracked on a regular basis and care is taken to moderate results, particularly in English; this has not yet been done in the other core subjects. Safeguarding and risk assessments are satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The interim joint headteachers, who have only been in the school since January, have raised staff morale considerably. They have effectively assigned responsibilities that build on staff expertise. Both the co-ordinators for English and mathematics have assumed responsibility for monitoring pupils' books regularly and discussing the outcomes in meetings. There are clear signs of productive collaboration amongst staff, including teaching assistants. Moderation of assessment is being undertaken in English, resulting in greater consistency.

The interim headteachers have produced a self-evaluation form, encouraging all staff to contribute. They accept that achievement remains inadequate. They also note that whilst lessons are satisfactory, too few are good.

The IEB has held a number of meetings. There has been an appropriate focus on the school's current work and progress. Appropriate plans are also being made for the radical realignment of the school in September, with the appointment of an executive head; the teachers for the school have yet to be appointed, but interviews are planned. The overall quality of leadership and management is satisfactory, with secure signs of a capacity for improvement.

The LA officers recognise that the extensive support provided for the school varied in its impact. The LA, diocese and governors were slow in developing sustainable capacity for improvement internally in the school. Support this year from the LA has been targeted with more care and this is having a positive impact in a number of areas, including on the quality of assessment in English, and on behaviour and attendance.

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?	4
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	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

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	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	4
The behaviour of learners	3
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?	4
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	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
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?	Yes

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

17 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's CofE Primary School, Godalming, GU7 2LD

Thanks very much for your help during the inspection of your school. There have been a number of improvements in your school; we have decided that it does not require special measures but there are still further improvements needed, so we have given the school a Notice to Improve.

Your new joint interim Headteachers have helped establish a calmer and more purposeful atmosphere across the school. They have listened to suggestions from your school council and made changes at lunchtime. They have formed smaller classes for you in the mornings; this has helped to establish a calmer place for you to learn. The teachers and other adults are also working hard together to help you learn. After some problems in the autumn, your progress has improved this year. However, we think that your work in writing and mathematics could still be better; some of you could behave better and attend school more regularly. We have also asked the school to ensure that all teaching is of a high quality.

Most of you will be going on to another school next year and we hope that you settle in quickly. For those of you staying, there are a number of exciting changes planned and there will be some new teachers.

We wish you all the best.

Yours truly,

R Kapadia, HMI