

# St Mark's Church of England Primary School

## Inspection report

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Unique Reference Number	114552
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	326036
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Patricia Davies

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	74
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Wendy Coleman
Headteacher	Claire Rivers
Date of previous school inspection	27 June 2006
School address	School Lane Hadlow Down Uckfield East Sussex TN22 4HY
Telephone number	01825 830375
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## Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. The inspector visited six lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, a group of pupils and, in addition, talked with pupils during lessons and parents before school. The inspector observed the school's work and scrutinised a range of information, which included assessment information, school documentation, pupils' work and 31 questionnaires from parents.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work, and looked in detail at the following:

- the impact of current initiatives on progress in writing by Year 2, especially for boys at the higher Level 3
- how far the increased focus on use and application of mathematical knowledge and skills is improving achievement in this subject
- the quality and impact of monitoring by subject leaders and governors, including consultation with parents and pupils
- how successfully the school's work to promote community cohesion has extended pupils' awareness of the diversity of faith and belief, especially in the United Kingdom.

## Information about the school

Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage at St Mark's into a Reception group, which also contains the pupils in Year 1. The other two classes also have more than one year group, currently containing Years 2 and 3 in one and Years 4, 5 and 6 in the other. Almost all the pupils are from White British families. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The present headteacher joined the school in April 2007. Substantial improvements to the school's accommodation have just been completed.

## Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

1

## Main findings

St Mark's remains an outstanding school with considerable capacity for sustained improvement. Its exceptional qualities are marked by high standards, the excellent progress that pupils make and its conspicuous strength as a warm and supportive community. Parents and pupils alike think a great deal of their school. As one pupil commented, 'The school is like one big family where everyone knows each other.' Diversity and equality are highly prized and, where necessary, carefully tailored support for pupils' particular personal and academic needs ensures that all succeed. This detailed attention to the individual marks out the school's high level of pastoral care.

The headteacher has worked tirelessly, not only to preserve the school's tradition of consistent academic success, but also to expand further the breadth and richness of pupils' experience. The impact of this endeavour has proved especially successful for the youngest pupils, whose progress has been accelerated by the benefits of exciting topics, a new outdoor space for activities and greater opportunity for independent learning. The headteacher's passion and enthusiasm are not alone, however, but replicated right across the staff and governing body. Responsibilities for increasing the school's effectiveness are shared equally. Importantly, there is considerable scope for staff to develop highly stimulating and exciting projects in, for example, the use of new technologies. The monitoring of performance is comprehensive and robust and gives leaders and governors a very clear view of the school's work and priorities for moving forward. Its constant commitment to improvement has led the school to expand its links extensively within the local community, and also to schools and pupils in this country and abroad. Such projects give the oldest pupils in particular a strong insight into faiths, traditions and experience beyond their own.

In addition to excellent teaching, pupils' exemplary behaviour and hugely positive attitudes continue to play a crucial part in their high level of achievement. Learning and enjoyment are particularly lifted where natural links are drawn between subjects to make work interesting and relevant. The school is very conscious of the need to increase the use of this approach in mathematics, where there are fewer opportunities for pupils to use and develop their skills and knowledge in 'real' contexts.

The considerable popularity of the school's sports clubs clearly reflects pupils' ready adoption of a healthy lifestyle. Equally, a mature understanding of the need to

restrict access when using the internet, even amongst the youngest, shows pupils' extremely strong sense of personal safety. In turn, these careful measures are illustrations of the school's great attention to ensuring pupils' welfare and protection.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Expand pupils' experience in mathematics by:
  - giving them frequent opportunities to use their mathematical knowledge and skills in 'real' contexts
  - drawing links between mathematics and other subjects to make learning more interesting and relevant.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

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The highly individual written work and closely focused levels of attention of pupils at the higher end of the school powerfully encapsulate the excellent quality of pupils' progress as they move through the school. Willing and ready enthusiasm is a marked feature of pupils' learning. Swift progress from Reception onwards maintains above average standards at Year 2, and leads on to high levels of attainment at Year 6. The school is particularly effective at moving pupils on to the higher Level 5, including those with particular talents and gifts. However, the school equally ensures that the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also keeps pace with that of others, so that these pupils also make considerable gains.

In response to few boys gaining the higher Level 3 in writing by Year 2, more imaginative topics have been selected deliberately to stimulate their interest and motivation. This new strategy has been especially influential within Reception and Year 1, providing a highly effective start. In the current Year 2, attainment in writing has recovered from a dip last year and is, once again, above average. Progress in mathematics is spurred on by a substantial understanding of number and calculation, but is not quite as fast paced as in English and science. The reason for this difference rests with the relatively limited chances for pupils to apply their mathematical knowledge in meaningful circumstances and as an integral part of their everyday learning.

Pupils' kindness, considerable social skills and good sense, together with their high levels of academic success, prepare them extremely well for their future education and adult life. They recognise that the strength of their school community lies in mutual respect: the willingness, for example, to think about how what they say might affect the feelings of others. Such sensitivity creates excellent relationships and high self-esteem. They report no bullying, just the occasional silliness that is 'sorted out quickly'. Very productive relationships with parents have enabled the school to tackle the issue of absence due to holidays taken during term time, so raising attendance to above average levels.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	1
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	1
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	1
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

## How effective is the provision?

Pupils benefit from a rich range of experiences at St Mark's. Community projects – like working with the local playing fields committee to plan improvements to the village recreation ground, or alongside professionals to reduce the speed of traffic – widen their sense of responsibility. Visits to a school in London with a very different cultural mix and meeting teachers from 'twinned' schools in Africa and Germany extend that perspective even further. The school's own version of 'Dragons Den' allowed for considerable entrepreneurial effort in all classes.

These stimulating initiatives provide a very successful backdrop for teaching and learning. The innovative use of information and communication technology (ICT), for example, provides pupils with some memorable activities, whilst also acting as an everyday tool for research and writing. A strong emphasis on practical activity makes lessons fun and interesting, for example planting seeds as a prelude to writing instructions. Tasks are also routinely adapted to meet and challenge different levels of ability, so that one group may be writing simple instructions for children in Reception to follow, while another must give sophisticated detail about planting more unusual vegetables. Even where some boys in the middle years of the school find it hard to sit still, stimulating activities such as these ensure that they are listening and, therefore, quick to contribute to questions. Another underlying strength of teaching is rigorous assessment and high expectations of pupils' progress. Detailed tracking of achievement ensures that any at risk of not meeting the school's challenging targets are identified quickly and supported successfully. Regular marking and feedback invariably provide pointers for improvement and are always encouraging.

Parents of new arrivals speak with considerable warmth of the school's welcoming support. Special touches, like flowers on tables, help to make lunchtime a relaxed

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<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

and civilised social occasion. Regular checks on lunch boxes ensure that all bring fresh fruit, while the catering company has been especially selected for its focus on healthy eating. Pupils' friendliness towards each other also makes an important contribution to the school's highly diligent care of each pupil. More formal support includes the 'buddying' of older pupils with Reception children in advance of them starting school, not only to show new children the ropes when they join, but to maintain a point of contact for as long as it is needed.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

The quality of teaching	1
The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

## How effective are leadership and management?

Enormous enthusiasm and a passion for moving things on are the hallmarks of the school's leadership, and shared by all members of the school's community. Enterprise and initiative are actively encouraged. New technology has been embraced with open arms to enrich learning, extend links with parents and bring the school's curriculum into the home. Indeed, curriculum innovation has been at the forefront of development and the school is well aware that the same imaginative approach now needs to be extended even further within mathematics. Substantial improvements to the school's accommodation have given more possibilities for expanding the school's education. Such is parents' considerable support for the school, that they raised a large sum of money towards the refurbishment costs.

All staff and governors play a strong role in evaluating the school's success, drawing too on the views of parents and pupils. Governors were firm and decisive about the appointment of a new headteacher and had a very clear and accurate view of what was needed to take the school further in its success. They remain extremely well informed and highly supportive and challenging of the school's performance. All responsibilities are taken very seriously, including comprehensive checks and assessment of risk to ensure pupils' safety. No stone is left unturned in the school's work, and it has been quick to follow up the notion of community cohesion. Links with the village and church have been greatly increased. Ever mindful of the characteristics of its community and the needs of its pupils, the school has provided an invaluable glimpse of the diversity of culture and circumstances in this country and beyond. A recent multi-faith day has deepened respect for other religions and given a springboard for further work in this area. This continuing search for improvement illustrates the school's ongoing commitment to giving every one of its pupils the very best experience it can provide.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

The effectiveness of leadership and management in communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
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The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

## Early Years Foundation Stage

Achievement has been significantly enhanced this year in Reception on what was already a good start. Attainment on entry varies from year to year with each small group. Last year it was broadly as expected. This year it was above expectations, and such has been the rate of progress that standards in this group are now well above that expected for their age in all areas of learning. A new decked area stretches learning outside whether it is fine or wet. Especially good use is made of these additional opportunities because independent learning has been greatly increased. From the moment of arrival at the start of the day, children experience a wide range of engaging activity. They immediately and enthusiastically take part, eased in by the routines of identifying their option for lunch and by the chat and support of adults. Levels of cooperation and friendliness among children are high. Induction arrangements are comprehensive and planned carefully to ensure a smooth and happy beginning to school life.

The selection of topics has appeal for both boys and girls, creating positive attitudes among boys for their academic work now and as a basis for the future. Activities are imaginative, with ICT at the cutting edge of children's achievement. This enables them, for example, to produce simple animated films of dinosaurs, taken inside the pre-historic 'sets' they have created. Photographs of ladybirds, taken from the internet, promote a wealth of observation. Underpinning such stimulating work is the close attention paid to basic skills, such as sounds and letters. Discussion with an adult in small groups really draws out children's ideas, although opportunities to participate are not always so readily given when the class is together as a whole group.

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1



## Views of parents and carers

Parents speak very highly of St Mark's. 'Always lots going on', wrote one parent, who went on to say that their child 'would love to go every day of the week, including weekends, as she enjoys lessons so much'. Very few concerns were raised and none of these reflected a common view. In summary, parents report a happy, caring school where pupils flourish personally and academically, and which is very ably led and managed. Inspection findings endorse parents' considerable satisfaction.

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mark's to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. If a parent has more than one child at the school, we asked them to record an answer against all the questions, for each of their children.

The inspector received 31 completed questionnaires. In total, there are 53 parents and carers registered at the school.

	Always	Most of the time	Occasionally	Never
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	28	3	0	0

## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

- Attainment:** the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
- Progress:** the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
- Achievement:** the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, training or development. This may refer to the acquisition of skills, knowledge, understanding or desired attributes. Attributes include qualities or personal competencies which are important to the development of the pupil; for example personal, social, cultural, emotional or health.
- Capacity to improve:** the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
- Leadership and management:** the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



12 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's Church of England Primary School, Hadlow Down, TN22 4HY

Thank you for welcoming me to your school. I very much enjoyed my visit and this letter is to tell you some of the things I found while I was with you. Your school is outstanding. It was clear that you thoroughly enjoy being there and many of your parents wrote to tell me that they are extremely pleased with the school too. Importantly, you all make rapid progress, not only in your work in the classroom, but also in your confidence and thoughtfulness towards others.

It was wonderful to hear about all the exciting projects you do – like 'Rivers Den' – and I enjoyed watching the little films those of you in Reception made about dinosaurs. It is also jolly good that you and your parents are able to watch them at home on the school's 'Learning Platform'.

Here are some other important things about your school

- The adults at school have high expectations of what you can achieve, and you rise to the challenge.
- Your behaviour is excellent.
- The adults take extremely good care of you, and also see to it that you understand how to keep yourselves safe– when using the internet, for example.
- Sporting activities are popular and you eat healthily at lunchtime, especially as you know your lunch boxes are checked!

Staff and governors do all they can to make learning fun and interesting, and are always very keen to do more. Therefore, in order to make the school even better, they have been asked to:

- widen your experience in mathematics, so that you use your knowledge and skills in 'real' situations and as part of your learning in other subjects.

With best wishes for the future

Yours faithfully

Patricia Davies  
Lead inspector

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