

St Mary's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114681
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	326053
Inspection dates	13–14 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Anne Duffy HMI

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

Boarding provision	
Social care URN	
Social care inspector	Angela Gunning

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	9–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	48
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Margaret Southworth
Headteacher	Frank Stanford
Date of previous school inspection	6 July 2006
School address	Horam Heathfield TN21 0BT
Telephone number	01435 812278
Fax number	01435 813019

Age group	9–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two social care inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's School is part of a federation with another school in the local authority. Originally designated to meet the needs of students with moderate learning difficulties, this changed in September 2007 to behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. It is able to admit boys from ages 9 to 16 although at the time of the inspection there were no students aged 9 to 10 (Year 6). The school has flexible boarding provision for up to 20 places. All students attending the school have statements of special educational needs. A small minority are looked-after children. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The population is predominantly White British. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is significantly lower than average as is the proportion for whom English is not a first language.

The school gained the Healthy Schools Award in 2005. The school was also awarded Sportsmark in 2008 and Activemark in January 2009. It has successfully gained Financial Management Standards in Schools accreditation.

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 has undergone significant changes since its last inspection. The school, which now forms part of a federation, is satisfactory and improving. Much has been achieved in the past year, and the early impact of this can be seen in rising standards by the end of Year 11. Progress is as yet more variable lower down the school.

The decision to bring the school into a federation with an outstanding provider has brought about a change of ethos that has impacted positively upon the behaviour, personal development and well-being of students. Students have reacted well to this and attendance has improved significantly so that it is now good. They make a strong contribution to the school and local community, and have a good understanding of how to keep healthy. One parent's view, 'I am happy for my son to come to this school because he is safe, secure and respected', is echoed by a member of staff describing the improvement in staff morale: 'We feel safe, secure and supported.' Overall, students make satisfactory progress during their time at the school. Almost all students enter school at a level that is significantly lower than their chronological age, and some have learning difficulties and/or disabilities in addition to their social, emotional and behavioural needs. As a result, they reach standards that are well below those found nationally. A key factor in the drive to raise standards and achievement is a curriculum that is well tailored to meet the needs of the students. This has had significant impact upon the numbers entering employment, further education or training. The new tracking system is now well used to identify the progress of individuals. As yet, whole-school analysis of progress is not sufficient to fine-tune development planning.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The school has introduced a robust system for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and has taken, and continues to take, effective action to improve teaching as a whole. Relationships between students and staff are extremely positive, contributing to students' good enjoyment of lessons. The school's focus on emotional and behavioural development ensures that behaviour around the school is generally satisfactory. Students are increasingly responsive to encouragement to 'be in the right place, at the right time, doing the right thing'. Students and parents alike value the level of care shown by the school and the opportunities that boarding offers to gain and extend independent skills. Appropriate systems are now in place for staff to set targets and monitor progress, and the use of these is showing an early impact on standards. However, some care targets are too general and some academic targets for students in Key Stage 3 do not clearly identify what they need to learn next. In addition, information provided to parents about their child's academic progress is not sufficient. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall.

Although many initiatives are too new to have had their full impact, the executive headteacher and head of school provide clear direction and manage the school well, effectively supported by increasingly strong senior and middle management and the governing body for the federation. Through a period of rapid change, the school has gained an increasingly accurate awareness of its strengths and areas for development and has demonstrated good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 3

The residential provision at St Mary's School is satisfactory and all the key National Minimum Standards are met. The school has been proactive in addressing most of the shortfalls that were identified during the previous inspection in October 2007. As a result, physical interventions are now recorded appropriately and the young people feel that their behaviour is managed fairly by staff. The complaints and anti-bullying procedures are now effective and the school council has become a helpful forum that ensures the young people feel listened to. A more consistent and robust system to monitor which young people are staying overnight has been implemented. A Statement of Purpose has been developed and improvements made to the outdoor lighting. Progress is being made in care planning, external monitoring and the availability of an independent visitor for the young people.

The young people enjoy a healthy balanced diet. There is good liaison with healthcare professionals to support the staff in meeting the young people's healthcare needs. First aid is well managed. Healthcare plans have been introduced, although these do not outline the specific care required to meet the young people's health needs or the health monitoring required by staff. The arrangements in place for the young people to receive medical treatment when residing at the school are unclear. Medication procedures are in place, although these are currently not adequately monitored or robust. However, staff are proactively developing new medication procedures.

There are proper procedures in place so that information about the young people is handled confidentially and their privacy is respected. The young people are aware of the complaints procedure; they feel able to raise their concerns and are confident that they will be listened to. They are also helped with their emotional and behavioural development through good behaviour management strategies. Physical interventions are recorded appropriately, although the record is not always signed by a senior staff member to demonstrate that each incident is being monitored. Appropriate recruitment procedures are in place and good child protection, anti-bullying and unauthorised absence procedures also ensure the young people are safeguarded. Positive steps are taken to manage health, safety and security; however, fire safety procedures are not robust, for example not all care staff have had fire safety training and fire drills have not been undertaken within the residential provision since its refurbishment.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. All the young people are given individual support from staff who know them well. Excellent mechanisms are in place to support the young people; the staff access specialist external services when required, including advocacy. The school is embracing a 24-hour curriculum whereby the care staff support each young person's individual learning needs and encourage their personal, social and educational development. One parent explained that their son 'really enjoys staying overnight at the school' and considers that 'he is learning more than he ever has'.

There are good procedures to ensure young people are admitted and leave in a sensitive and planned manner. Each young person has a care plan, which reflects the targets they are working towards, and in some cases gives the details of the steps needed to achieve them. However, the progress the young people are making is not clearly recorded. There are many opportunities for the young people to express their views and their opinions are valued by staff. All of the young people are flexi-boarders and stay at the school for part of the week and whilst boarding, there are good contact arrangements with family and friends. The contact and communication between care staff and parents about the young people's progress is good. One young person's

representative said, 'Communication is excellent; the people here take us very seriously and feedback a lot about what is happening.'

The refurbishment of the residential provision used for the younger pupils is excellent. The house which is situated within the school grounds provides good accommodation and offers the young people the opportunity to develop independent living skills.

The Statement of Purpose is now in place and adequate information is given to the children and their relatives about the services and facilities provided. However, it does not contain the correct information regarding the inspectorate of the residential provision. Staffing arrangements are satisfactory and training opportunities are available, although the required percentage of care staff are not yet trained in the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at Level 3. There are good quality assurance processes in place and the governing body plays an active role in supporting the school's leadership. However, their termly monitoring of the residential provision is not yet fully in place, although steps are being taken to meet this standard.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the new processes for setting targets make a clear and measurable difference to the progress that all students make.
- Ensure that full use is made of a comprehensive tracking system so that it supports detailed analysis of the progress made over time by groups of students and fully informs future planning.
- Improve the quality of reports to parents so that they contain a concise description of progress made, targets set and what their child knows, understands and can do.
- Ensure all young people have a healthcare plan that outlines their specific healthcare needs, the health monitoring required of staff and the arrangements for medical treatment whilst they reside at the school (National Minimum Standard 14).
- Implement a robust system for the storage, administration, disposal and recording of medication (National Minimum Standard 14).
- Ensure the record of physical interventions is signed by a senior staff member to demonstrate that each incident is being monitored (National Minimum Standard 10).
- Ensure the staff and young people know the emergency evacuation procedures, including those for use at night in the event of a fire and confirm that they have regularly practised such evacuation through organised fire drills (National Minimum Standard 26).
- Ensure all staff have had fire training as recommended by the local fire authority during their inspection of the school in October 2008 (National Minimum Standard 26).
- Ensure individual progress is monitored in relation to each young person's care plan (National Minimum Standard 17).
- Undertake a termly monitoring visit of the residential provision and complete a written report on the conduct of the school (National Minimum Standard 33).
- Update the Statement of Purpose to reflect the change of inspectorate from the National Care Standard Commission to Ofsted (National Minimum Standard 1 and National Minimum Standard 4).
- Ensure 80% of care staff are trained in the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at Level 3 (National Minimum Standard 31).

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

Students enter the school at various stages in their school career and attainment on entry is exceptionally low. Students are working from below National Curriculum Level 1 to GCSE level and progress varies between individuals. This is due, to some extent, to target-setting and tracking of progress that was inconsistent across subject areas in the last academic year. There has been a rise in standards over the last two years although almost all students remain below national expectations because of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has made a good start in addressing the needs of students whom it has identified as gifted and talented, as well as those who are exceptionally vulnerable. Behaviour targets, now linked appropriately with targets for learning, ensure that the good progress made in the areas of social and emotional development increasingly improves achievement.

Taking into account the ability of the students when they joined the school, progress overall is satisfactory and for the most recent school leavers it was good. In 2008 the vast majority gained at least one A* to G pass at GCSE, a small minority at least one A* to C grade, and one student achieved 5 A* to C grades including English and mathematics. Predicted grades for students due to gain external accreditation at the end of Year 11 are in place and available data indicate that these are realistic with students on track to achieve them. Mainstream links and college placements help older students gain a broad range of accreditation and in some cases contribute significantly to good progress being made.

Progress made by students in Years 7 to 9 is the most variable, due in part to students' previous school experiences. In some cases progress is good, notably where the school's focus on improving attitudes to learning has had the greatest impact. For a few students progress is less secure. This is generally where academic targets are not sufficiently well matched to their abilities, or where social and emotional difficulties interfere too much with learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students speak positively about changes and developments in the school, especially with regard to behaviour, and say that they feel safer from physical or verbal abuse as a result. Student 'voice' is used effectively and linked well to citizenship. School council members are proud of the role they play and the changes that they have influenced, such as in the choice of school uniform. The school has been responsive to suggestions that have been influential in improving students' behaviour. For example, the use of withdrawal within the classroom area rather than leaving the class was introduced following a request from the students.

Relationships are very good between students and staff, and students enjoy both school and boarding. Their cultural, moral and spiritual development is good and enhanced by interesting and reflective assemblies and tutor times. Students make full use of the range of sporting opportunities available both within and outside school. They have responded well to the sex education modules they have received and demonstrate that they understand the risks associated with smoking or drug misuse, how to lead healthy lifestyles and how to keep themselves safe. Through many work-related opportunities, students develop social and information technology skills that will support them when they leave school. They respond well to behaviour expectations so that they are often good ambassadors for the school within the local and wider community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Although teaching is variable, there is some good and outstanding teaching and the proportion of this is increasing. This is because of the school's focus on teaching and learning as a priority area for the school. Students behave at their best where teachers use a variety of techniques to improve and support learning. The best lessons are well planned because teachers know the students well and the work matches the full range of abilities so that all make good progress. In these lessons there is a variety of well thought out activities which match different learning styles and include opportunities for practical activity. The best teaching engages the students well and their learning is carefully monitored through active questioning and good assessment of students' work.

Where learning is less secure, teachers allow the behaviour of one or two students to distract others or, in an effort to minimise this, play a more controlling role than is necessary. Nevertheless, students increasingly remain in class, supported well by teaching assistants. They understand the importance of their individual behavioural targets, such as beginning work straight away, and are motivated to gain the reward points that accompany their successful achievement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Although the establishment of some subjects, such as music and a modern foreign language, is relatively recent, the curriculum meets all statutory requirements and responds flexibly to the needs of all the students. There is an appropriate balance of subjects within a wide range of experiences, well tailored to the school population. The curriculum is further extended by out-of-school opportunities that include the offer of boarding provision in response to individual need. The school has prepared well for making provision at a primary level and although there are currently no students in Year 6, students in Years 7 and 8 benefit from the primary curriculum now also on offer for them. The introduction of a speech and language programme for students in Years 7 to 9 is having demonstrable, although early, impact upon students' speaking, listening and literacy skills. Provision for a curriculum personalised according to older students' needs, interests and ambitions, is a strength of the school. It has had a very positive effect both upon the standards reached by the latest cohort of school leavers and on the high numbers who now go on to further education, employment and training. This reflects the school's strong commitment to equality of opportunity for the increasingly diverse needs of its learners. The curriculum is enhanced further through a wide range of enrichment activities. Students are clearly enthused by the opportunities now available for them to take part in musical as well as sporting activities. They respond well to opportunities to learn about other faiths and cultures and particularly enjoyed the Thanksgiving dinner that was held last term.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides good levels of pastoral care and adequate levels of academic guidance. Staff know the students well and are increasingly committed to raising their achievements but the quality of feedback to students and their parents about their academic progress is

inconsistent. For example, marking does not always provide guidance on how students can improve their work and reports to parents do not provide sufficient information about how their child is progressing.

Pastoral care is good for vulnerable students and those at risk of exclusion. There are effective systems in place to provide support for students whose engagement in their education shows signs of slipping. As result, the previously high levels of exclusion have reduced considerably. Appropriate training in child protection and safeguarding procedures has taken place for all staff. Good links with outside agencies, including the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service CAMHS and the school's police liaison officer, mean that there is a wide range of support available for students and their families. Students receive much helpful guidance about the options available to them for their future.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Since the last inspection, changes made to the leadership and management of the school have included the appointment of an experienced executive headteacher and a head of school. School leaders are now setting a clear direction for improvement and creating a common sense of purpose amongst a dedicated and professional staff. A very large majority of parents express satisfaction with the school and how it is led and managed, and the school contributes well to community cohesion.

The introduction of rigorous monitoring, coupled with well focused professional development, shows that the school is effectively addressing the need for more consistent practice in teaching. The school has benefited from the opportunity to plan and use resources as part of the federation. This ensures that resources are deployed effectively and has particularly supported the professional development of all staff within the school and across the federation. The positive ethos of the school is reflected in its effective administration as well as in the well kept and welcoming environment. Safeguarding arrangements fulfil statutory obligations.

Realistic self-evaluation has helped the school to address identified areas for development well. The very real impact is already evident in the curriculum, in improvement in behaviour and attendance, in reducing exclusions and in the improved standards reached by school leavers. Appropriately accurate and challenging targets have been introduced and school leaders now have a clear understanding of how well individual students are progressing. Data are not yet being used fully to monitor progress and drive forward improvement at a wider level.

The school's focus on raising its profile and that of the federation within the community has been very effective. The governing body is very supportive of the school. It has recently been reorganised to reflect the needs of the federation and has worked well with the leadership team and with other partners to steer the school effectively through a significant period of change and development. Its skilled and experienced members are able to provide a very appropriate level of challenge. As the executive headteacher rightly states, 'They clearly know the school's strengths and weaknesses and provide wise counsel and critical friendship.'

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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 boarding provision	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	3
The extent to which 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	2

The quality of provision

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

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	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

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

14 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St Mary's School, Horam TN21 0BT

Thank you very much for welcoming us to your school. We really enjoyed our visit, and it was good to meet so many of you. I am writing this letter to tell you what we found.

We think your school, including the boarding, is satisfactory, with a number of things that are good. Lots of you told us that you enjoy school and we could see that you have good relationships with the staff. We could also see that many of you have improved your behaviour and this has helped you to learn more. We think that there is a good range of things for you to study and to do inside and outside school.

Your headteacher and the staff have many ideas about how the school can get better. We have asked them to:

- set you all clearer academic targets
- use the information they have from tracking your progress to help you and the school to improve further
- make sure that your parents or those who look after you know how well you are doing, what you have learnt and what you will be aiming for next.

We have asked the care staff to:

- make sure that they meet all the rules which mean that you are safe and well looked after. I hope that you will all try your best and do well in the future.

Yours faithfully

Anne Duffy HMI