

St Mark's Church of England Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116342
Local Authority	Southampton
Inspection number	326364
Inspection dates	2–3 February 2009
Reporting inspector	John Laver

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	323
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mark Purchase
Headteacher	Mrs Anne Steele Arnett
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2005
School address	Stafford Road Shirley Southampton SO15 5TE
Telephone number	02380 772 968
Fax number	02380 363 118

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This larger than average, oversubscribed school contains a high proportion of pupils from various minority ethnic groups. It also contains a high proportion of pupils at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. Almost one third of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, ranging from emotional vulnerability to physical impairment, speech and communication difficulties. A high proportion of pupils, often more than a third of any year group, join the school other than at the usual time. The school is currently involved in discussions with a view to joining a local federation.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Mark's provides a satisfactory standard of education for its pupils. Since the previous inspection, the nature of the school roll has changed considerably, as it has taken in considerably more pupils at an early stage of learning English. Also, many more pupils join the school at other than the usual time. The school has been very successful in meeting these two challenges, as inclusion is high on its agenda. Due to this level of care, pupils' personal development is good. Several parents attest to the success of this aspect of the school's work with comments such as, 'Since my children have joined St Mark's, I have watched them develop a great sense of self-worth and confidence.' The great majority of pupils settle in quickly, feel safe and enjoy school, both the lessons and the many enrichment activities. These activities, such as the popular after-school clubs, provide a good range of sporting and other opportunities.

A substantial minority of pupils make good progress in their learning. This is particularly true for those with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities, because of the high quality of the support that dedicated staff provide, both inside and outside the classroom. However, across the school, standards are below average and pupils' achievement overall is satisfactory. The school has not met its challenging targets. Where there is some underachievement, it is not related to any one particular group of pupils, but is mainly the consequence of inconsistent teaching. While there is no unsatisfactory teaching, sometimes there is a lack of appropriate challenge, and the quality of marking is variable, with insufficient indication to pupils of how they can improve their learning. There are good systems in place to assess and track pupils' progress through the school, but the resulting targets are not used consistently to drive up standards.

Other aspects of care, support and guidance are strengths of the school, and ensure that pupils feel safe, and confident that their personal needs will be met well. The provision for pupils who are vulnerable or have learning difficulties is very good. These pupils benefit in terms of their personal development. They also greatly enjoy the curriculum. This curriculum has some very creative aspects, as seen for example in a lesson in which pupils making 'pop-up books' used a variety of skills involving design, making and evaluation.

The headteacher is a driving force for improvement and has a realistic and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Planning identifies appropriate priorities for improvement, based as it is on rigorous and extensive monitoring. Governors also have a realistic view of the school's strengths and areas for development. Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory. The restructured leadership team is very new, and there has not been sufficient time to demonstrate its effectiveness as a means of further improving the school, and raising pupils' achievement. Nevertheless, the school has several strengths: its record of meeting challenges, its success in ensuring the good personal development of pupils from such diverse backgrounds and experiences, the accuracy of its monitoring and evaluation, and its much-valued care and support systems. All of these, and the careful changes made, combine to give the school a good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise pupils' achievement by ensuring a better match of work to meet their differing individual needs.
- Show pupils how to improve their learning by more consistent and constructive marking and the use of targets in the classroom.

A small proportion of schools whose overall performance 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

Although standards are below average, pupils achieve satisfactorily overall. Standards of pupils joining the school in Year 3 are variable. Although the school tracks all pupils' progress carefully, the overall picture is complicated by the high proportion of pupils who join the school at a later time, many of whom have very specific learning needs. The below average standards were reflected in the most recent national test results, and are also evident in current performance. In the core subjects, standards in reading are highest, while they are lowest in writing and mathematics. The school has strategies in place to address these weaknesses, and the gap once evident in achievement between girls and boys is narrowing. However, there is still underachievement, particularly by some boys in writing and some girls in mathematics. The achievement of some higher attainers is also variable. Many pupils with learning difficulties, and many with English as an additional language, who together make up a substantial part of the school roll, make good progress, due mostly to the very good support provided by well-trained and dedicated staff both inside and outside the classroom. The school has been successful in involving many parents in their children's education, for example through joint attendance at workshops.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of pupils' personal development are good. Good social development is very evident in the way that pupils work collaboratively in lessons, and that those from very diverse backgrounds support each other well. Pupils enjoy school, and although attendance is below average, it is improving in response to school procedures, which involve initiatives such as appointing an attendance officer. After-school activities have a very high take-up, and pupils also enjoy the breakfast club. Although a substantial minority of parents raised some concerns about how effectively the school manages behaviour, inspectors found that pupils behave well in the classroom, and the great majority of pupils say that they feel very safe in school. They have a good understanding of why it is important to have a healthy lifestyle. The school council is active, and pupils enjoy taking on responsibility, although they would like even more opportunities to be independent or to make a bigger contribution to the school through activities such as assemblies. Pupils have the opportunity to develop enterprise skills through various projects. There are excellent transition arrangements for pupils moving on to their secondary schools. The level of basic skills acquired by pupils is such that they are satisfactorily prepared for the next phase of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Pupils have a positive attitude towards learning, but teachers do not build upon this consistently. In the best lessons, teachers plan the work well to meet the needs of different groups of pupils, they deploy support staff well, they use a good range of resources, and they give pupils

much-appreciated opportunities for both independent and group work. Where lessons are satisfactory, there is not such an effective match of work to enable all pupils to achieve well, and the appropriate level of challenge is lacking. The quality of marking, and the use of pupil targets as ways of showing them how to improve their work, are inconsistent. Learning objectives are not sufficiently explicit, which contributes to the underachievement of some pupils in mathematics.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has several strengths. The school makes excellent use of local schools to provide extra resources. There is a creative approach, seen, for example, in a project on the Blitz, which greatly inspired the pupils. Similarly, there is an imaginative approach to teaching the Tudors through linking a wide range of subjects including drama, dance and music. Pupils love the school visits, such as those to the Imperial War Museum and the theatre at Southsea, and also the residential trips. The range of after-school enrichment activities is another strength. There is a well-organised programme of personal, social and health education. The provision for vulnerable pupils and those with specific learning needs is very well led and is monitored effectively, leading to good progress for many pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school has rigorous child protection procedures and other safeguards in place to ensure the safety of pupils. Parents greatly appreciate the quality of care for pupils of all abilities and backgrounds. The links with outside support agencies, and the work of support staff, are considerable strengths in making this an inclusive community. The school has developed thorough tracking systems since the previous inspection. These are based on regular assessments, and lead to targets that are regularly reviewed. However, teachers do not use them consistently to improve learning, and not all pupils are sure of their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school's thorough monitoring and evaluation has helped to make this an improving school. The leadership's greatest success to date has been in developing support systems for both pupils and parents, making this a genuine community school that helps to develop pupils well as budding citizens. While the headteacher is a strong driving force for change and is committed to improvement, progress in improving academic standards and achievement has been slower. The school uses a wide range of resources well. The school works very hard and often successfully to involve parents. It also has very strong links with other schools and the local community, which are used extensively as a resource, for example in teaching pupils about different faiths. There is good provision for community cohesion: although pupils do not have an extensive understanding of their place in the wider global community, they contribute extensively to the school and the local community. This is another strength of the school and contributes well to pupils' personal development.

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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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/or disabilities make progress	2

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	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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	3

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?	2

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	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	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

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

13 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's Church of England Junior School, Southampton, SO15 5TE

Thank you for welcoming us into your school and allowing us to see you at work. We enjoyed listening to you telling us about your school, and we were very impressed by the way you behaved, particularly during the very difficult weather conditions during the two days of our visit.

You behave well and you work hard for your teachers. We agree with your parents, who told us that the school looks after you very well. We also understand why you enjoy coming to school, because we know that there is lots for you to do. You do some interesting things in lessons, as we saw, for example, in the 'pop-up books' project and in learning about animation. You told us about how much you enjoy the trips, for example to Southsea, and many of you take part in the after-school clubs. Your headteacher and other staff work very hard to give you these opportunities. They also make sure that you are well cared for, and they deal well with any problems you have.

St Mark's gives you a satisfactory education. Many of you do very well in your work. This is particularly true for those of you who get extra help, for example those learning English for the first time. Some others of you are making satisfactory progress, but could probably do even better, particularly in mathematics and writing.

We know that the school has worked hard to help you succeed. In order to help you do even better, we have asked the staff to work on two things. First, we have asked that you always get work that is at the right level for all of you, so that you do not find it too easy or too difficult, and can therefore learn well. Second, we have asked the teachers to use your targets more and give you more information when marking your books, so that you know exactly how you can do even better. You too can help by always working hard for your teachers.

Once again, thank you for your welcome and good luck for the future.

Yours faithfully

John Laver

Lead Inspector