

# St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior School

## Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Unique Reference Number</b> | 116350          |
| <b>Local Authority</b>         | Hampshire       |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 326367          |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 6 February 2009 |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b>     | Graham Lee      |

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

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|---|---|
| <b>Type of school</b>                     | Junior  |
| <b>School category</b>                    | Voluntary aided   |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                | 7–11  |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                   | Mixed   |
| <b>Number on roll</b>                     |   |
| School (total)                            | 352   |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>              | The governing body                                      |
| <b>Chair</b>                              | Mrs Andree McLean                                       |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                        | Mrs Tracey Brunton                                      |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b> | 14 March 2006   |
| <b>School address</b>                     | Belle Vue Road<br>Old Basing<br>Basingstoke<br>RG24 7DE |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                   | 01256 465092  |
| <b>Fax number</b>                         | 01256 358195  |

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. He evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the extent to which the school's leadership and provision enable all pupils to achieve as well as they can in mathematics
- the impact of curriculum enrichment on pupils' enjoyment and achievement
- the strengths of the school's care, guidance and support and of pupils' personal development and well-being.

Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons and other aspects of the school's work, discussions with various groups of pupils, governors and staff and examination of school documentation. The views of parents, expressed in questionnaires, were also taken into account. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

## Description of the school

Most pupils in this large school come from relatively advantaged backgrounds. Most are of White British heritage and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. The school has achieved a number of awards including Enhanced Healthy School Award and Artsmark Gold. At the time of the inspection, the headteacher was on maternity leave and the assistant headteacher was leading the school in an acting capacity.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

St Mary's is an outstanding school, as it was at the last inspection. This is also the view of the vast majority of parents, reflected in comments such as, 'This is a super school which is full of enthusiasm and ideas.' Not content to rest on its laurels, it has continued to improve under the highly effective senior leadership team and governing body, supported by a committed and talented staff team. At the heart of the school's work is a strong Christian ethos which ensures that pupils are well cared for and supported. One pupil, to the obvious agreement of others, commented that 'St Mary's is very loving and kind.' The school has cultivated an effective partnership with most of its parents. Views such as, 'It is like a big family' and 'It feels like it belongs to all of us' were typical of parents' comments. Staff have high aspirations for their pupils and expect them to achieve well both socially and academically. An exceptional feature of the school is the wide range of activities that enhance and enrich the curriculum.

Consequently, pupils really enjoy their education and are very proud of the school. They are enthusiastic and reflective learners, their behaviour is exemplary and they achieve outstandingly well.

Pupils begin school with standards that are well above average. They make very good progress and, by the time they leave, standards are exceptionally high. Standards rose year-on-year between 2003 and 2007, when the majority of pupils reached the higher National Curriculum level in English, mathematics and science. Standards dipped slightly in 2008 because a number of pupils did not make as much progress in mathematics as they should have done. School leaders identified weaknesses in pupils' ability to solve problems and apply their learning in mathematics to other contexts. Staff training has addressed this very effectively and the quality of teaching in mathematics is very strong. In addition, the new theme-based curriculum is helping pupils to see the links between aspects of their learning and to apply their mathematical skills in more meaningful contexts. For example, in a Year 5 lesson on solving money problems, pupils were 'buying' ingredients to make curry, which linked to their topic on India. As a result of this successful focus on mathematical skills, all pupils are now making very good progress and pupils in Year 6 are working at very high levels. Pupils' very good level of basic skills and very positive attitudes to learning mean that they are very well prepared for secondary education and the world beyond.

Systems to track pupils' progress have become more robust and ensure that any pupils who are in danger of falling behind are identified at an early stage and given the additional support they need to help them to catch up. Those with moderate learning difficulties are provided with very effective support and this ensures that they make as much progress as other pupils. Teachers enjoy excellent relationships with their pupils and plan interesting activities to meet the full range of abilities within their classes. Teaching assistants complement their work very effectively in this regard. As a result, learners are highly motivated believing that, 'Teachers really encourage you in your work and are very supportive.' Pupils' work is marked regularly and conscientiously. Teachers use a range of strategies to involve pupils in assessing how well they are doing and to set targets for improvement. However, the extent to which this feedback helps pupils to improve is variable.

The curriculum provides much more than the basics and caters for a wide range of pupils' interests and talents. Parents and their children comment on how much the new theme-based curriculum has enhanced pupils' enjoyment and helped them to see links between different aspects of their learning. There are many additional activities that take place at lunchtime and

after school. During the lunchtime of the inspection, for example, activities as diverse as art, cross-stitch, exercise cycling, orchestra and choir were on offer. At the same time, a number of pupils were busy cataloguing and organising the new library. The school has enjoyed an excellent reputation for the quality of its musical provision for some time, under the inspirational leadership of its music teacher, and this has strongly contributed to the Artsmark Gold award. All pupils have the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument and around one in three continue to do so. Most of these were involved in the orchestra practice, which demonstrated the high quality of the school's provision and the outstanding achievement of some accomplished musicians. The boys' choir sang delightfully and is reflective of the school's successful efforts to develop boys' interests and talents in this area. The school has good links with outside organisations and other schools to enable wide participation in many different sports. These activities contribute greatly to pupils' outstanding social, moral, spiritual and cultural development and to their enjoyment of school.

The sports activities form part of the school's very effective strategy to ensure that pupils adopt healthy lifestyles. This commitment is reflected in its Healthy Schools award. It is evident from the beginning of the day when pupils are involved in the lively 'activate' exercise sessions. Pupils also have an exceptionally good understanding of the components of a healthy diet and this is promoted very effectively by the school council. All parents believe that their children are safe and well cared for and this is echoed by pupils. They feel that if they have a problem there is always an adult to turn to. Pupils take their responsibilities as school councillors very seriously and are confident that their views 'are taken on 110%' by adults in the school. They also welcome the opportunity to take on other responsibilities, for example as librarians, prefects and peer mentors. The school makes a very strong contribution to community cohesion. It has very good links with the church and is at the heart of the village community. Pupils also develop a good understanding of other faiths and cultures. There are strong links with a school in Uganda which enables pupils to reach out as 'Global Friends' and to empathise at a personal level with the very different experiences of children at that school.

The strength of the school's leadership is reflected in the way St Mary's continues to operate successfully under the effective leadership of the acting headteacher. She is very well supported by other leaders in the school, who have a good grasp of what needs to be done in their areas of responsibility. Governors have improved still further since the last inspection. As well as continuing to be very supportive, they now have a sharper strategic focus and more effective mechanisms for holding leaders to account for the work of the school. Together, leaders, governors and staff have an accurate view of the school's strengths and have been successful in addressing any weaknesses that have been identified, for example in mathematics. Although the school had no major issues to address from the last inspection it has continued to improve. School leaders and governors are relentless in their pursuit of excellence and the school has outstanding capacity for further improvement.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure that approaches to marking and target setting are consistent and always help pupils to improve their work.

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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 |
|---|----------------|

**Overall effectiveness**

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 1   |
| 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   | 1   |

**Achievement and standards**

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

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<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>                          | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development                                     | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles   | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices   | 1 |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education  | 1 |
| The attendance of learners  | 1 |
| The behaviour of learners   | 1 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community                                    | 1 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 1 |

## The quality of provision

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>       | 1 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 1 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?   | 1 |

## Leadership and management

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>                                       | 1   |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 1   |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards  | 1   |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation  | 1   |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated   | 1   |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?   | 1   |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money  | 1   |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities  | 1   |
| 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**

23 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior School, Basingstoke, RG24 7DE

I am writing to you about my recent visit to your school. I was pleased to eventually arrive after all the delays because of the snow! I really enjoyed my day at St Mary's and I want to thank you for being so polite and helpful. A special thanks to those of you who took the time to show me round the school and to meet with me at break and lunchtime. I thought you would like to know what I found out.

You are rightly very proud of the school because it is outstanding, as it was at the last inspection. Your parents told me how much you enjoy school and this was clear in talking to you and seeing you in lessons. I noticed how hard you all work and how well you behave. Well done and keep it up! You told me that the teachers make learning interesting and fun. You all enjoy the many extra opportunities the school provides for you and I was really impressed with the orchestra and the boys' choir. The school helps you to understand the importance of eating healthily and taking plenty of exercise. Your work with the school in Uganda is helping you all to understand how those children lead very different lives from your own.

You are making very good progress in your learning and you are doing much better in English, mathematics and science than pupils do in most schools by the end of Year 6. This means that you are well prepared for secondary school. Those of you who find things a bit more difficult get lots of extra help with your learning.

Your acting headteacher is continuing to run the school extremely well in the absence of your headteacher. She gets lots of help from all the staff and governors. Even though the school is outstanding, they are determined to make it even better for you all. I have asked them to do one thing which will help.

- Your teachers mark your work regularly and ask you to think about how well you are doing. They also set you targets in different ways. I have asked them to make sure that this marking and target setting always help you to improve.

Good luck to you all.

Yours faithfully

Graham Lee

Lead Inspector