

Long Marston VA Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117459
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326617
Inspection date	6 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	135
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mike Watkin
Headteacher	Mr Peter Dickenson
Date of previous school inspection	22 February 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Station Road Long Marston Tring Hertfordshire HP23 4QS

Age group	4–11
Inspection date	6 March 2009
Inspection number	326617

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspection focused on:

- the impact of action to raise the proportion of pupils at higher levels in mathematics
- how effectively teachers ensure all pupils achieve their best in mixed-age classes
- the success of action to improve Reception children's writing.

Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons, school assessment data, a scrutiny of pupils' work and school documents, discussions with pupils, staff and the vice chair of governors, and from the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors 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 this report.

Description of the school

The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds in this below average sized school, although the community it serves is becoming more diverse. Free school meal eligibility is low. The proportion of pupils identified as needing extra help with their learning is average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. The number with a statement for their special educational needs is below average. Pupils are taught in five mixed-age classes. Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is through a mixed Reception and Year 1 class.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Long Marston Primary is a good school. It has some outstanding features, such as the curriculum and the way all staff care for each pupil. It makes a very considerable contribution to village life and to wider community cohesion. Parents' very positive responses to the inspection questionnaire show their delight with all the school offers and the values their children develop. One parent summed this up when writing: 'Long Marston is a truly marvellous school, which I feel has strong traditional values. These are passed onto the children who fulfil them in all areas.'

The pupils' learning is promoted through a series of lively and interesting experiences that do much for their outstanding personal and good academic development. They thoroughly enjoy school as shown by their high levels of attendance and their keen participation in the wide range of clubs and other activities. Art plays a major part in the life of the school and the pupils. The murals in the hall of 'Earth, Wind, Fire and Water' show how well pupils of all ages worked together for an extended period. The focus on physical education, including opportunities for competitive sports, helps the pupils to develop a very positive approach to exercise and teamwork. Much of this is possible because of specialist provision provided through close links with the local secondary school. Pupils also develop a sharp understanding of how attention to diet can help them to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

The pupils are tremendous ambassadors for themselves and the school, helping to make it a happy and harmonious place in which they can thrive. Their behaviour is exemplary because they understand the school's consistently applied expectations of them. The pupils are proud of the contribution they make to school life such as looking after each other or organising clubs and activities themselves for others. They have an increasing voice in the school, and can point to several areas where their input has led to improvements, such as in playground equipment and the adventure playground. Pupils take part in many village activities and take the initiative when organising charity fund-raising events. The school is successful in its aim of turning out well-rounded pupils who are thoughtful, considerate and show great respect for each other and for the customs and cultures of others.

The pupils' good achievement can be attributed directly to good teaching that makes learning enjoyable. There is a buzz of excitement and sense of purpose in classrooms because lessons are interesting. The pupils have many opportunities to show how well they can work as part of a team and take delight in sharing their ideas with their classmates. Teachers' questioning is often probing and challenging, but there are times when not enough is expected from the pupils' responses or teachers do not give them time to contribute properly. Teaching assistants are deployed carefully to have the maximum impact on the learning of the pupils they support. In spite of the many qualities to teaching, learning is not consistent in the mixed-age classes. This is largely because assessment information is not always used well enough to plan lessons that move all pupils forward rapidly. This manifests itself in the slower learning of some more able younger pupils in some classes.

The detailed systems for checking the pupils' progress enable the school to implement sharply focused and successful programmes to eliminate any potential underachievement. This is particularly effective in supporting the good progress of pupils with moderate learning difficulties. At its most effective, marking indicates the next steps for pupils to take to meet their targets and improve their work. This is more effective for pupils at Key Stage 1.

Standards are generally well above average. The 2008 Year 6 cohort was particularly able, and test results in all subjects were very high. All pupils reached nationally expected standards in English, mathematics and science. Very considerable numbers exceeded this level. The pupils are adept when using new technology to support their learning. Their outstanding personal qualities and good academic achievement give the pupils a very firm foundation for success at secondary school and beyond.

Fewer pupils have been working at higher levels in mathematics than the school has felt should be the case. It is a priority this year to tackle this matter. Action taken has focused on improving learning. This is leading to sharper basic skills including better mental arithmetic skills, but opportunities are limited for pupils to investigate mathematical situations, become independent in their thinking and establish their own lines of enquiry. The limited use of open-ended investigations is also the case to a certain extent in science.

Parents are very pleased that the commitment to the welfare of their children is at the heart of all that the school does. The strong family feel is tangible: the personal needs of all pupils are known and the utmost done to promote their well-being. Consequently, pupils feel very safe and secure in school. They are happy to confide in any of the adults and are confident that any problems will be dealt with sensitively and constructively. They learn how to deal with risks in their everyday lives and are quite aware of how to cope with dangers posed by the internet.

The school is about to go through a period of change with the headteacher leaving after 20 years at the school. The school's success and its improvement since the last inspection are down to the commitment of the headteacher, governors and the staff team. There is a continual drive to strive for higher standards and a better quality of provision. The headteacher is much respected by all concerned with the school, and pupils speak very warmly about him. One boy reflected the views of many when asked what he would do to make the school better saying, 'I don't want Mr D to leave'. Governors have planned for this transition very carefully. They are very much involved in school life, providing support, shaping its direction and making sure that they keep staff focused by challenging them to do even better. Roles within the staff team are clear and enable everyone to contribute to the school's improvement. The school has an accurate view of its qualities and uses this to identify the key priorities for further improvement. This and its recent record of improvement mean the school is well placed to improve further, and is rightly ambitious in its aims for the future.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The youngest children get off to a good start in Reception. Provision is developing well because of good leadership, which has a clear understanding of how children of this age learn best. Their outstanding personal development stems from the children having many opportunities to work together and to develop their independence and initiative. Expectations for their behaviour are high. Routines are well established so that children are very clear about what is expected of them. High quality care and attention to the children's welfare also contribute to them feeling very settled and secure in the classroom. As one pupil, now in Year 2, said when reflecting on starting school: 'You settle and soon feel safe because you make friends quickly.' Relationships are excellent amongst children and between children and adults.

Children make good progress from skills on entry at least as expected for their age. Almost all reach, and many exceed, goals expected of them by the time they move into Year 1. This is

because focused input from the adults in the classroom moves learning on at a good pace. While adults are skilled at responding to an individual child's needs, the school recognises that there is potential to improve the match between adult input and the focus of activities initiated by the children themselves to promote even better academic progress. The staff team is seeking to extend outdoor learning, as the use of this space is not planned sufficiently into the children's learning. Over the last year, the staff team has focused on writing, as this has been relatively weaker than other areas. Skills here are improving by making better use of the writing table, stimulating writing through role-play and paying close attention to the spelling of simple words. Pencil control is taught well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Plan lessons that both meet the learning needs of all pupils and also challenge the more able pupils to develop their own lines of enquiry.
- Use marking more consistently to involve pupils in identifying the steps they need to take to meet their targets and to learn more effectively.

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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?	2
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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?	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

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
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?	2

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	2
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

7 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Long Marston CE VA Primary School, Long Marston, HP23 4QS

Thank you for your help and cooperation when inspectors visited your school. We spoke with many of you in lessons, in groups or around the school. It was great to hear how much you enjoy school. It was also good to hear how safe you feel and that there is always someone to talk to if you are worried. You are right in thinking that yours is a good school.

You make good progress during your time at Long Marston Primary School. Nearly all of you reach the standards expected by the time you move on to secondary school and very many of you do much better than this. You work hard and behave very sensibly. Your teachers make learning very interesting and you clearly enjoy extra activities such as those for art and sport. Your teachers and other staff are successful at helping those of you who find learning difficult to do well. All staff help to make sure you are safe and cared for outstandingly well. You have an excellent understanding of the importance of diet and exercise for a healthy lifestyle.

Your headteacher, other staff and governors are trying hard to make the school even better. Two things would help to improve the school. We have asked them to make sure lessons challenge all of you, including those who are capable of the highest standards, and for all of the teachers to use marking which will better help you to identify the steps needed to meet your targets.

We are sure that you and your teachers will work hard to make this improvement. You can play your part in helping the school to get even better by continuing to show such pride and enthusiasm for learning.

We wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale

Lead inspector