

St Mark's CofE (A) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124308
Local Authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	328106
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Susan Walsh

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)	370
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	Des Cotton
Headteacher	Samantha Cross
Date of previous school inspection	27 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Wood Terrace Shelton Stoke-on-Trent ST1 4LR
Telephone number	01782 234411
Fax number	01782 234411

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is larger than most primary schools and is continuing to expand. Current building work reflects the growing pressure for places. Most of the pupils are of Pakistani heritage but other minority ethnic groups are represented with an increasing number of pupils whose parents are from Eastern Europe. The percentage of pupils who do not have English as the first language is well above average. A high number of pupils either join or leave the school during the school year. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average and the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average. The school provides for the Early Years Foundation Stage in two Reception classes which work as a unit. The headteacher and other senior managers have recently been absent. The school has had difficulties recruiting senior posts. The school is in receipt of intensive support from the local authority.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Although pupils make a satisfactory start in the Reception class, achievement is inadequate in the rest of the school. Pupils make insufficient progress in Key Stage 1 and, as a result, standards at the end of Year 2 are exceptionally low. This is because of inadequate teaching and learning. Pupils do not catch up in Key Stage 2. Although there are pockets of good teaching in Key Stage 2, there is not enough high quality teaching to accelerate pupils' progress. Therefore pupils make inadequate progress in a significant number of classes. By the end of Year 6, standards are also exceptionally low. Teaching and learning are inadequate because teachers' expectations of all groups are not high enough and the pace of learning is often too slow. Teachers are not always well organised in lessons and as a result teaching time is lost. Furthermore, the inadequate curriculum does not meet the needs of all pupils and there are too few opportunities to relate learning to the local area and pupils' everyday experiences.

Recent absences of senior managers including the headteacher, the necessity to manage building works, and recruitment issues have contributed to inadequate leadership and management. Some improvements have been made to provision, including strengthening the support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and other pupils who find learning challenging. Additionally the way mathematics is taught and the marking of pupils' work have improved. However, these developments have not yet boosted achievement or raised standards, and recent intensive support from the local authority has not yet had enough time to have an impact.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Behaviour is also satisfactory and pupils say they feel safe in school. They report that there is very little bullying and they establish friendships with pupils from a variety of different backgrounds. Satisfactory care, guidance and support contribute to pupils' well-being because staff focus well on pupils' personal needs. Attendance rates are improving and are satisfactory overall. Safeguarding procedures meet requirements. Links between the school and the local community, particularly the mosques, are improving. The Respect Programme and the football coaching project are helping to promote harmony in the immediate locality. Pupils have a satisfactory understanding of how to keep healthy. They say that they enjoy school, especially meeting their friends.

The headteacher is fully aware of the school's weaknesses. Although other leaders and managers are enthusiastic, they are not rigorous enough in the way they check the work of the school. Lesson observations do not identify how provision has an impact on pupils' learning. Consequently, the school's judgements are too high. Data are not used well enough to analyse achievement, including that of different groups of pupils, or to hold teachers to account. Improvement has been too slow and the school is providing inadequate value for money.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Most children start the Reception class with skill levels that are below those typical for their age, especially in mathematics, communication and language. Those children who have had no

previous educational experience often have very limited social skills. Children make satisfactory progress and this is accelerating because of an increasingly successful focus on helping children to link sounds and letters, and the active encouragement of writing. Despite this satisfactory progress, children are still reaching standards which are below age expectations by the end of Reception. There is a good range of interesting activities that engage children and make learning fun. Good use is made of the limited outdoor facilities. Adults work hard to encourage learning but occasionally they do not respond quickly enough to those children who are having difficulties when learning independently. Children are encouraged to play together but some still prefer to work alone. The systems for checking children's learning have improved and there is more emphasis on direct observations of the children learning through play. Parents are generally happy with provision in the Reception class. They find the staff warm and welcoming and clearly recognise that their children enjoy school. All welfare requirements are met and adults work very well as a caring team. This, together with satisfactory leadership and management, is helping provision to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and improve pupils' achievement in Years 1 to 6 by:
- improving the quality of teaching and learning, particularly by raising teachers' expectations of all groups of pupils, accelerating the pace of lessons and improving organisation so time is used more effectively
- increasing the rigour of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching by focusing it clearly on pupils' learning
- analysing data more effectively to check on pupils' progress, including the progress of different groups, to enable managers to hold teachers to account for the progress of pupils in their classes.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Pupils make inadequate progress through Key Stage 1 and achieve exceptionally low standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2. Although there were some improvements to Key Stage 1 results in 2008, standards were still too low, with few pupils reaching the higher Level 3. Progress through Key Stage 2 is uneven and in too many classes pupils make slow progress. The school has not built upon the improvements to standards that were seen in 2007. In 2008, standards slipped back and were exceptionally low in English, mathematics and science. The proportion of pupils reaching the nationally expected Level 4 was particularly low. Girls achieved less well than boys. Pakistani pupils and those for whom English is an additional language did not do well and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and others who find learning difficult also underachieved. The school failed to reach its targets in 2008 and is not on course to do so in 2009.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is satisfactory. During the inspection, pupils in Year 6 responded well to opportunities to reflect on their feelings. Furthermore, they were able to relate their own strong morals to the play *Macbeth*. Assemblies and church visits contribute well to pupils' spiritual growth, however, pupils' cultural awareness is often limited to their own backgrounds. When lessons are interesting and fun, pupils enjoy themselves and behave

well. However, when teaching is less engaging pupils grow restless and lose focus. There are times when girls are too passive and do not become actively involved in answering questions. Although behaviour is good when pupils move around the inside of the school, boisterous behaviour is often a feature of the playground. When opportunities arise, pupils are very willing to take on responsibilities, for example, through the school council, and they are proud to contribute to their school. Low academic standards are holding pupils back and not preparing them well for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are too low and too many teachers accept standards of work that are not good enough. A number of pupils commented that the work was too easy. Some teachers have a tendency to talk for too long at the beginning of lessons and this limits the time pupils have to practise their skills independently. During the long introductions, support staff are sometimes underused, although they often work hard with groups later in the lesson. Time can be lost when there is a change of subject because of organisational issues. There are pockets of good teaching, particularly in Key Stage 2, but overall there is too much inadequate teaching and learning. Recent appointments have strengthened the quality of teaching. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good and this gives pupils confidence. Teachers' planning is extremely detailed but what they have planned does not always come to fruition. The match of work to pupils' needs is improving, especially in mathematics, but there is still some way to go.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

Basic skills are not adequately promoted. This is particularly true of writing. The school has introduced strategies designed to improve the quality of writing, and in some cases these strategies have accelerated progress. However, not all staff have implemented these new methods effectively. In science, pupils complete too little work and there is limited coverage of the curriculum. The work set is not always meeting pupils' needs, although this is improving in mathematics and there has been a significant reduction in the use of worksheets. The school is aware that there are insufficient links made between subjects to make learning more relevant and fun. The school now employs a greater range of programmes that are designed to help those who find learning difficult, but has not yet looked carefully enough at the way these programmes are delivered or their impact on raising standards. Pupils are adequately informed about keeping healthy and safe. The curriculum is satisfactorily enriched through a range of extra-curricular activities including visits. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their trips to the museum in Birmingham and to London. They also appreciate the clubs, particularly those that promote sport.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pastoral care is effective in providing support for pupils; they are confident that staff will listen to them and, as a result, they feel safe in school. Academic guidance is broadly satisfactory. However, weaknesses remain in the analysis of tracking data and the systematic checking of

pupils' progress. Support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and other vulnerable pupils is helped by good links with other agencies. Better arrangements for inclusion have ensured that the school meets statutory requirements relating to equal opportunities. Support staff, especially those who have a mentoring role, know pupils particularly well and often make a good contribution to their personal development. They also provide effective support for those who are new to the school. Good liaison with secondary schools ensures that pupils feel confident about moving on. The school has worked hard to encourage pupils to attend school more regularly and this has led to improved attendance rates. There are some examples of good marking, although inconsistencies in practice remain. Some pupils are still not clear about how to improve their work because the use of learning targets remains underdeveloped.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Leaders and managers have not had sufficient impact on raising standards and boosting pupils' achievement. Improvement strategies have lost their effect over time or have not always been thoroughly understood and implemented by all staff. Although the headteacher is aware of the need for urgent improvement, other leaders and managers who are less experienced, do not always have a clear view of how to improve. Therefore the trend of improvement has been too slow. Judgements about many aspects of provision and outcomes are not realistic because the systems used to check the school's work are not effective. Judgements about the quality of teaching and learning are too high because there is insufficient focus on the impact of teaching on learning and pupils' progress. The school has some useful data but this is not used effectively to analyse pupils' progress, including the achievement of different groups. Teachers are not made fully accountable for the progress made by pupils in their classes. Although the school improvement plan identifies the areas of the school's work that are in the most urgent need of attention, weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation hamper the school in recognising exactly how to effect improvement quickly. Community cohesion is inadequate overall because despite improving links with the immediate locality there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to extend their knowledge of a range of cultures nationally or internationally. Parents have some justifiable concerns about the way the school communicates with them, for example, important documents are not always translated into home languages and there are few newsletters. Governance is unsatisfactory. Governors are very supportive and are starting to be more involved in looking at the school's work but they have been too accepting of low academic standards.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	3
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	3
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

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

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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4
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?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	4
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

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

15 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's C of E (A) Primary School, Stoke-on-Trent ST1 4QD

Thank you for being so friendly and polite when my colleagues and I visited your school. We liked talking to you and the school council. You clearly enjoy coming to school and being with your friends. You told us that you feel safe in school and that staff always try to help if you have any problems. Your visit to London sounded like great fun. It is good that you are trying hard to eat healthily and enjoy exercise. The children in the Reception classes have lots of interesting things to do and are making satisfactory progress. Provision for them is getting better all the time.

However, there is a lot to do to make your school as good as it should be. Your school has been judged to need extra help to improve. Teaching and the way the school has been managed have not been good enough but your teachers are working hard to improve the situation. You told us that the work you get to do is often too easy. We agree and think you could do much better. We would like teachers to make sure they always recognise your potential. We have also asked them to make sure that lessons move at a faster rate and to make certain that time is not wasted between lessons. You can help by behaving sensibly in all lessons and always trying to do your very best work.

We know that school leaders are trying hard to improve the school. We have asked them to keep a careful check on the quality of your lessons and the progress you make.

We are sure that you will do all you can to help your teachers improve your school.

We wish you all the best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Susan Walsh

Lead inspector