

# St Mary the Virgin CE VA Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	134020
<b>Local Authority</b>	Dorset
<b>Inspection number</b>	328801
<b>Inspection dates</b>	9–10 June 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Diane Wilkinson

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.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	187
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
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Graham Lloyd
<b>Headteacher</b>	Amanda Christopher
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 May 2006
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Pheasant Way Shaftesbury Road Gillingham SP8 4LP

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<b>Age group</b>	4–11
<b>Inspection dates</b>	9–10 June 2009
<b>Inspection number</b>	328801

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<b>Age group</b>	4-11
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

## Description of the school

St Mary the Virgin is a small primary school which is growing in size and popularity. About half of the small number of pupils who come from minority ethnic groups speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average due to the school's reputation for providing for these pupils. Their needs cover specific and moderate learning and speech and language difficulties together with multiple sensory impairment, autism and emotional and behavioural needs. Two years ago, the governing body set up a Nursery unit for children from two to five years of age. This setting works very closely with the school's Reception class and was also inspected. As a relatively new school, a significant number of pupils have joined after the Reception Year. The school has Investors in People and Rights Respecting School status together with the Healthy School Award and awards for outdoor learning and self-evaluation.

## 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 the Virgin is an outstanding school. It has continued on an upward trend since it opened five years ago. The major reason for this is the inspirational leadership of the headteacher and the quality of teamwork she has established involving not only staff and governors, but also parents, pupils and the local community. One parent put the views of many when writing, 'I cannot fault St Mary's as a school and as a community. Every child has a voice and opinions are always listened to.' The headteacher has the ability to get the very best out of all who work with her so staff are enabled and supported exceptionally well to contribute to development work. The very effective senior leaders and subject leaders involve all staff, including those in the Nursery, in successfully moving the school from strength to strength. Self-evaluation is of the highest quality and is at the heart of all the school's work. The constant checking of provision and pupils' progress ensures that provision is continuously being improved and that any weaknesses in progress are speedily addressed. Governors, parents and pupils themselves are very effectively included in this process and pupils are extremely competent at judging how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

These processes have led to the development of an exciting and innovative curriculum which engages and inspires pupils, helping them to do their very best. Consequently, pupils' progress is very good throughout the school, including in the Nursery. Standards have risen year on year to above average. The excellent school grounds, which the whole community helped to design, are used in a very imaginative way by staff to support learning exceptionally well. Pupils agree that, 'Learning outside is fun'. Information from the outstanding assessment and tracking of pupils' progress is used exceptionally well to set up special programmes to help pupils who have fallen behind catch up. This is of especial benefit to those who have specific learning, language, physical or behavioural needs. Likewise, the more able pupils are provided with challenging tasks which help them to do their best. Consequently, these groups achieve as well as their classmates. The excellent arrangements for staff development ensure that many of those who have taught at the school for a few years are outstanding teachers. However, the school has experienced a considerable number of staff changes and lengthy absences so a number of staff are relatively new. Although not all teaching is of such a high quality, it is good overall and the school is working very successfully to promote outstanding teaching in all year groups.

This is an exceptionally caring school and pupils feel very safe and secure. They thoroughly enjoy their time in school and pastoral support is excellent. Pupils develop into very kind, mature and thoughtful young people who play an excellent part in the life of the school and community. For example, their work as Pupil Improvement Partners has led to pupils' themselves identifying the need to improve their spelling and handwriting and helping staff to set up a programme to achieve this. Most pupils behave very well, although the school has a small number of pupils who find this difficult. The recently instituted Nurture Group and lunchtime Fun Club are already having a very positive impact on this aspect of pupils' development.

## Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

### Grade: 1

The creation of an outstanding Early Years unit in which Nursery and Reception staff work very closely together supports children exceptionally well. Of especial note is the ethos in which every child does matter so that children make very good progress in both their personal and

academic development. As a result, although children enter the Nursery with standards below those normally seen at this age, by the time they leave Reception standards are above average.

The level of care given to children is outstanding and the arrangements to help them settle in to Nursery and to move on to Reception and then Year 1 are of the highest quality. Nursery staff are exceptionally good at involving parents in supporting their child's learning and this sets an excellent foundation for their involvement throughout the school. The organisation and management of both classes is outstanding and the cooperation and teamwork is especially good. Teaching assistants and nursery nurses make an excellent contribution to learning. The assessment and monitoring of children's progress is outstanding and staff are at the forefront of using electronic techniques to support this.

The imaginative and highly challenging curriculum encourages children to discover things for themselves. A recent project to develop children's early language and literacy skills has had a considerable impact on their progress. Children take great delight in their learning such as when Nursery staff used puppets to help 'bring the ducks to life'. Reception children loved their circus topic, enthusiastically performing as acrobats. Children make great strides in their personal development, exhibiting confidence and responsibility and working very happily independently or with their friends. Both the Nursery and Reception have improved exceptionally well since their last inspection, with all points for improvements identified then being fully addressed.

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

- Build on and extend the range of opportunities in place to improve the quality of teaching, especially by encouraging greater innovation in lessons.
- Although all pupils are well aware of how they should behave, a few need to try harder to concentrate and listen throughout lessons and get on with their work when they should.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 1**

Comparison across year groups is not possible as so many pupils have joined since the start of school, although it is clear that those who spend longer in the school do especially well. Progress in the Nursery is exceptionally good in developing early literacy, numeracy and social skills. By the end of the Nursery Year, virtually all children reach the level expected for this age. By the time children leave Reception, the vast majority reach above average standards. Progress is exceptionally well built on in Years 1 and 2 and standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above average. Standards in science have greatly improved also. Pupils make very good progress in the older classes. By Year 6, standards are above average overall and in English and mathematics. They are average in science, but this also represents very good progress across Years 3 to 6. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the future.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils' excellent personal development is underpinned by the outstanding relationships amongst pupils, and with staff, seen throughout the school. This is based on an ethos of mutual support and cooperation where each pupil knows they are valued that permeates every nook and cranny of this happy school. Pupils make an exceptionally good start in the Nursery and Reception. They like their teachers very much and greatly enjoy learning, with most being focused and attentive in lessons. Attendance is above average. Pupils have a very good understanding of

ways in which to keep healthy and safe and are confident that staff will look out for them at all times. Pupils are deeply involved in the life of their school and local community. They readily take on a great variety of responsibility at all ages. The school council is very active, especially as Pupil Improvement Partners, and peer mediators are skilled at helping to avoid playground disagreements. The school's religious identity contributes fundamentally to pupils' very well developed spiritual awareness and social conscience. Pride in the school is a very strong feature and the school's emphasis on emotional awareness and development ensures pupils leave St Mary the Virgin as very caring, thoughtful and mature young people.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Very good lesson planning is exceptionally well based on previous learning, encouraging pupils who are working at different levels to do their best. A significant strength of all lessons is the continual way in which pupils reflect on how well they are doing and what they need to do next. Marking is good, but there is a variation in quality and not all staff remind pupils about the need for good presentation, although pupils themselves are working hard to address this. Clear guidelines are set for how pupils should behave, but a few find it difficult to concentrate and get on with their work, especially in individual tasks. However, the advent of the Nursery has had a very positive effect on behaviour in the youngest classes. Some teaching is inspirational and highly challenging. For example, the atmosphere created by the 'witches cave' in the Year 6 classroom helped generate some outstanding writing based on a scene from Macbeth. However, not all staff are confident at using untried methods to stimulate learning.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 1**

The curriculum significantly underpins pupils' personal and academic progress. Continually evolving and developing, it takes full account of the information gained from the analysis of their progress. The programme for personal, social and health education, which also involves parents, is excellent. Activities are exceptionally well based on pupils' interests as pupils themselves are continually consulted about the themes through which they will develop new skills and knowledge. The practical and investigative tasks are especially good at enthusing the younger pupils and those who find learning difficult. A relatively new programme for developing pupils' thinking skills is having a very positive effect on learning. Enrichment, especially through a range of visits, visitors and the use of the school grounds, is very good.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 1**

In this exceptionally caring school, pupils feel valued and supported especially well. It fully complies with government requirements for the safeguarding of pupils. Personal and academic guidance is excellent. The work undertaken to achieve Rights Respecting status considerably helps pupils develop citizenship skills. Those pupils who have specific needs or talents are identified early and programmes quickly put in place to help them do their best. These have a very positive effect on progress, with most pupils reaching average standards and a good number beyond this. Pupils' individual improvement targets are consistently used throughout

lessons to encourage progress. Recent developments such as the Nurture Group are having a very positive impact on the support for pupils with social or behavioural needs.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 1**

The headteacher's inspirational leadership, identified at the last inspection, continues to drive improvement forward exceptionally well. She has been outstandingly successful in enabling and supporting staff to develop very effective skills to work with her in achieving the very best provision for pupils. There is a shared vision amongst the whole school community and all are working very successfully to achieve this. The school sets itself very challenging targets and regularly meets them. The systems put in place to keep a check on the school's work and pupils' progress are exemplary and considerably support development work. Improvement since the last inspection has been excellent and the school is exceptionally well placed to improve further.

Partnerships with parents, other schools and a range of agencies support pupils' welfare and learning exceptionally well. Many parents wrote of how approachable staff are and the school is continually responding to the ideas and suggestions from the growing number of parents. Its work to promote community cohesion has begun very well, with plans in hand to link with a Caribbean school. Under the leadership of their very knowledgeable chair, governors fulfil their role exceptionally well. They are very good at consulting with parents and holding the school to account, and provide considerable support for the school, most notably in its development 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
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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?	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

### Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
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?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
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

<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	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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>	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?	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?	2
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**

11 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary the Virgin Church of England VA Primary School, Gillingham, SP8 4LP

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and being so friendly and helpful. We very much enjoyed the time we spent with you and were very impressed by the things you showed us. We think your school is excellent and are delighted that you think so too.

Here are some of the things we found out were especially good about the school.

- You really enjoy school and make very good progress, so standards are above average.
- Children in the Nursery and Reception get a really good start to their education.
- The activities staff provide for you and the advice they give you on how to improve are excellent and help you to do your very best.
- Adults take very good care of you so that you feel safe and happy in school.
- You are very mature, kind and thoughtful young people and we are very impressed by the way you help your school, for example as peer mediators and Pupil Improvement Partners.
- Your parents are especially good at working with staff to help you do well and also to help your school improve. We were very impressed by the models they helped you make for the library area.
- We think the school accommodation is excellent and the whole school community including you and your parents have helped develop an outstanding outdoor area. Staff use it exceptionally well to provide lots of exciting activities.
- You have an excellent headteacher and together with all staff and governors she is working really well to help the school get even better.

Here are some of the things we would like to see improved.

- Although teaching is good, we also saw some excellent lessons and we have asked staff to try and make sure that most lessons are just as good.
- You are all very clear about the importance of good behaviour and most of you behave really well. However, a few pupils talk and waste time in lessons when they should be working. We want you all to try very hard to concentrate and get on with your work.

Yours faithfully

D Wilkinson

Lead Inspector