

St Mary's CofE (VA) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135057
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	329020
Inspection date	11 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Mike Capper

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	148
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	Owen Bell
Headteacher	Lynne Hill
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Stoney Lane Kidderminster DY10 2LX
Telephone number	01562 824327

Age group	3–11
Inspection date	11 May 2009
Inspection number	329020

Fax number

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Age group	3-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This smaller than average primary school is a new school, opened after the closure of St Marys CE (VA) First School as part of local authority reorganisation. Pupils, some staff and the headteacher transferred to the new school in September 2007. This is the school's first inspection.

Pupils come from a socially and culturally diverse community in Kidderminster. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is slightly above average, with just a few learning English as an additional language. The main home languages for these pupils are Polish and Bengali. A well above average number of pupils have been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most, but not all, of these pupils have moderate learning or behavioural difficulties. Nursery and Reception children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught together in an Early Years unit.

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.

Pupils' achievement overall is inadequate because they do not make enough progress in Years 3 to 6. The headteacher and staff have not taken strong enough action to ensure inconsistencies in the quality of learning across the school have been tackled quickly and eliminated. Teaching and learning are inadequate because, in years 3 to 6, expectations are too low and pupils' differing needs are not met well enough. This leads to significant underachievement in these year groups for all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Consequently, standards by the end of Year 6 are exceptionally low in English, mathematics and science. The school's poor performance in the 2008 national tests for eleven year olds put it in the bottom 1% of all schools for achievement. Currently the pupils' attainment in Year 6 is well below average for their age. Although progress for these pupils has improved slightly, they have not made fast enough progress to compensate for previous underachievement.

The picture for pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2 is more positive than in Years 3 to 6. Teaching is stronger for the younger pupils and there has been fewer changes in teaching staff in these year groups since the school opened. Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, benefiting from a vibrant curriculum that effectively supports the development of basic skills. In Years 1 and 2, there is a strong focus on providing practical activities that build on pupils' interests. This has been successful in promoting good levels of motivation and engagement and has led to pupils making good progress in reading and writing this year.

The curriculum overall is inadequate. It is much weaker in Years 3 to 6 than it is in the rest of the school. This is because pupils' work in Key Stage 2 does not build well enough on their different starting points and as a result, they quickly begin to fall behind. There are too few opportunities in the curriculum for pupils to use basic literacy and numeracy skills in different subjects and topics are not always covered in sufficient depth.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are inadequate. Pupils leave Year 6 with very weak basic skills in literacy and numeracy and a poorly developed work ethic. Consequently, they are not being prepared well enough for the next stage in their education and for later life. Although there have been some recent improvements, rates of attendance are still well below average and too many pupils frequently miss school. Despite this, most pupils enjoy being at school, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2. They are happy in lessons and the majority behave well most of the time.

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Pastoral care is a real strength of the school. Leaders rightly place a high priority on this and together with other members of staff they ensure that the school provides a calm environment for pupils. For example, a nurture group for pupils in Years 1 and 2 has a positive effect on social development in these early years. The school works very closely with outside agencies to safeguard pupils' well-being. Academic support is improving, with teachers beginning to make sharper use of marking and target setting to help pupils understand how to improve their work. However, this is not yet consistently good

across the school, and recent improvements in Key Stage 2 have not been in place long enough to have had a sustained impact on improving pupils' progress.

Leadership and management are inadequate. The pace of change has been significantly affected by a high staff turnover in Years 3 to 6 and ongoing building work. Although the headteacher and other senior leaders acknowledge that progress in Years 3 to 6 is inadequate, they have not taken decisive action to ensure that the quality of provision has improved sufficiently. The school has a wealth of data about pupils' progress but this is not used well enough to identify and tackle underachievement as soon as it arises.

Most parents recognise that pupils are well cared for pastorally and that, in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2, they learn new things quickly. However, a few parents are concerned about the rates of progress in Years 3 to 6, and although they see some recent improvements, they rightly identify that much more needs to be done to ensure that all pupils achieve well enough.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

When they join the school, nearly all the children are working below the levels typical for their age. They make good progress from these very low starting points, although standards rise to below average levels by the time they start Year 1. Members of staff work together well to plan a wide range of interesting and meaningful experiences around a common theme. As a result, children are keen to take an active part in learning. For example, in the Nursery, children enjoyed collecting wood of different sizes to build a fire for the forest school, and in the Reception class children were enthusiastic about making and playing a counting game involving firemen. Children's personal, social and emotional development is promoted well and as a result, children know how to share, are confident and are keen to try things out for themselves.

Children's welfare is supported well and all adults are careful about explaining potential dangers during activities. Adults use questioning well to move the children's learning forward. Leadership is good, because leaders evaluate children's assessments thoroughly to identify gaps in learning. This year, a focus on teaching letter sounds is having a positive impact on the children's knowledge. Leaders have correctly identified the need to extend opportunities for children to write and carry out mathematical calculations, particularly when working outside.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards and achievement by the end of Year 6 by ensuring that teachers expect more of the pupils and plan work that is pitched at the right level for them all.
- Ensure that the curriculum for pupils in Years 3 to 6 is responsive to their needs and includes sufficient opportunities for them to practise and improve basic skills in literacy and numeracy by using them in different subjects.
- Ensure that leaders and managers at all levels make better use of information about how well pupils are doing in Years 3 to 6 to identify and tackle underachievement as soon as it arises.
- Improve attendance by working more effectively with parents and pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Pupils do not achieve well enough because progress is very uneven across the school. Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. In Years 1 and 2, although standards are below average, pupils are now making good progress in reading and writing. The recently increased focus on teaching pupils the relationship between sounds and letters is beginning to have a positive impact. Progress in mathematics is satisfactory.

Work in Years 3 to 6 does not build well enough on pupils' starting points. Progress from Year 3 to Year 6 is inadequate and by the end of Year 6, standards are exceptionally low in English, mathematics and science. The school sets pupils reasonably challenging targets to aim for by the end of Year 6 but in 2008 they were not met.

In Years 1 and 2, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from working in small groups on an interesting range of practical activities. They also receive helpful additional support in a well-managed nurture group. As a result, they make good progress. However, in Years 3 to 6, work is not always pitched at the right level for pupils and therefore they do not make enough progress. Pupils in the early stages of learning English quickly develop confidence in spoken English, but make similarly slow academic progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 4

- While most pupils enjoy school, rates of attendance are low and not all pupils in Years 3 to 6 are keen to learn. Pupils are not prepared well for the next stage of education and later life because their literacy and numeracy skills are not good enough by the end of Year 6. Older pupils report a recent improvement in behaviour at the school and behaviour during the inspection was satisfactory. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils show concern for the needs of others and raise funds for charity. Pupils are good at taking responsibility within the school community as playground crew and eco or school councillors. Pupils enjoy learning about other faiths in religious education lessons, although there are some gaps in their knowledge about cultures other than their own. Pupils know how to stay safe when using the internet and have a good understanding of how to stay healthy. They take frequent exercise in 'activate' sessions up to the end of Year 2 and older pupils enjoy the good range of sports taught in lessons and clubs. They have a good understanding of why they need to eat healthy foods and try, most of the time, to do so.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The overall quality of teaching and learning is inadequate because pupils' progress in Key Stage 2 is far too slow. In this key stage, pupils have been taught by a great many different teachers since the school opened and pupils have not established a good work ethic. They are not given sufficient opportunities to work independently in lessons and teachers' expectations are too low. Consequently pupils struggle when they are required to work independently. Where teachers' explanations are not clear enough and time limits for tasks are not given, pupils do not concentrate well and the pace of learning is slow. Teachers do not meet pupils' differing

needs well enough and work is not pitched at the correct level for all pupils. Teachers use some resources such as the interactive whiteboards well to capture the pupils' attention.

In Years 1 and 2, where teaching is satisfactory and sometimes good, pupils are often taught in small groups, and interesting activities encourage them to take an active part in their learning. For example, in a good literacy lesson, pupils greatly enjoyed using a range of resources and working together to write stories based on Jack and the Beanstalk. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 enjoy talking about their 'passports' which give a clear picture of their progress over time.

Teachers mark pupils' work frequently, and are starting to provide some worthwhile guidance to pupils on how they can improve, although this is not yet of a consistently strong standard across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The school has made a start on improving the breadth and relevance of the curriculum and this now serves the younger pupils well. However, the school has rightly identified that the curriculum in Years 3 to 6 is inadequate. This is because it does not always inspire the pupils to take a full part in lessons or challenge them sufficiently. Topics in history and geography are not covered in enough detail to make them interesting and worthwhile. Pupils have too few opportunities to practise and improve their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects and curriculum planning does not take enough account of pupils' different starting points.

Throughout the school, the curriculum is enhanced by a number of visits, visitors and clubs. These contribute to pupils' enjoyment of school. Pupils are particularly enthusiastic about art lessons. They also participate in a wide range of musical activities including singing at Worcester Cathedral. Pupils' health and safety are promoted well through campaigns to walk to school and the cycling proficiency programme.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Most pupils feel safe and are confident that members of staff will help them when necessary. The school works closely with parents and outside agencies to support pupils' welfare. Procedures for safeguarding pupils meet government requirements. Good induction arrangements for children joining the Nursery help them settle quickly. A special nurture class for pupils in Years 1 and 2 enables those pupils who need it to receive extra attention and helps build their confidence and self-esteem. The school is taking more steps towards improving pupils' attendance, for example, by providing breakfast for those pupils who want it, by awarding certificates to pupils with good attendance records and by liaising with community leaders to help parents understand the importance of their children attending school regularly. The school's leaders are aware that these actions are not yet having a sufficient impact on improving attendance rates.

Assessment procedures are improving. They provide teachers with helpful information about how well pupils are doing and are used to set individual targets. However, in Years 3 to 6, teachers do not use assessment information well enough when planning pupils' work. Consequently, the tasks that pupils in Key Stage 2 are required to complete do not take sufficient account of their different capabilities. Throughout the school, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given clear goals, although they are not always reached by older pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Over the last two years, the school has undergone significant change, and progress has been hindered by a number of factors, including ongoing building work, staff absences and illness, and difficulties with teacher recruitment. During this time, the school's leaders have managed to maintain a strong focus on providing good quality pastoral care. However, not enough has been done to ensure that all pupils achieve well enough by the end of Year 6.

Procedures for checking how well the school is doing and seeing through effective change are inadequate. The wide range of assessment information about pupils' standards and progress is not used well enough to set targets or to monitor the progress being made by different groups in Years 3 to 6, so that weaknesses can be identified and dealt with quickly. Although the innovative approach to curriculum planning in Key Stage 1 has been successful, the pace of change in Key Stage 2 has been much too slow, even though the school is aware that pupils in Years 3 to 6 are not achieving well enough. Governance is satisfactory. The new governing body has quickly got to grips with the need to improve provision. It is working closely with the headteacher and the local authority to get extra help such as bringing new and experienced staff into school, although the impact of this thus far is relatively limited in Key Stage 2.

The school's contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory. Pupils learn to respect different beliefs and leaders work hard to be responsive to the needs of the local community. They work closely with parents to help overcome the barriers between home and school. For example, governors and staff are working with the local Bangladeshi community to help improve attendance. The school has rightly identified that to improve community cohesion further, the pupils need more opportunities to learn about the world beyond Kidderminster, for example, through residential visits and links with other schools.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA
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?	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?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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?	4
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	4
The behaviour of learners	3
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	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	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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	3
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**

12 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Primary School, Kidderminster
DY10 2LX

Thank you for welcoming us and for sharing your work with us. We found some good things in your school

- Here are some of the best things about you and your school.
- You make a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes. You are very lucky to have such a lovely forest school where you can work and learn outside.
- Teachers work hard and manage behaviour well.
- You are polite and friendly and behave sensibly most of the time. You make a good contribution to the school community through the school council. It is great that the eco council is helping you learn to look after the environment.
- All adults in school are kind and caring and they help you to sort out any personal problems quickly. They are beginning to use targets to help you understand how to improve your work.
- Your headteacher, teachers and governors are keen to make your school better.
- Most parents and carers are pleased that you come to this school.

What we have asked your school to do now.

- Ensure that in Years 3 to 6, teachers always pitch work at the right level for all of you.
- Build on the good work in Years 1 and 2 so that you have more exciting things to do in lessons and get more opportunities to learn literacy and numeracy through different subjects.
- Make sure that the headteacher and governors rigorously check your progress so that they can give more help to pupils who are not doing well enough.
- Work closely with you and your parents to help improve the attendance at school.

Inspectors will visit the school regularly to see how things are improving. We wish you all the best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Mike Capper

Lead inspector