

St Mark's CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100444
Local Authority	Islington
Inspection number	335541
Inspection dates	24–25 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Graham Lee

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	196
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chelsey Kouloumbri
Headteacher	Catherine Heels
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 12 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and pupils. They observed the school's work and scrutinised samples of pupils' books. They looked at school documentation including the excellence plan and tracking data and took into account the views of parents, staff and pupils expressed in their responses to questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following aspects.

- The extent to which the downward trend in attainment is being arrested this year, particularly in writing.
- The effectiveness of academic guidance in helping more pupils to improve their writing.
- The effectiveness of leaders in raising the attainment of more-able pupils.

Information about the school

Most pupils in this smaller than average primary school are of minority ethnic heritage. The largest groups come from White British and Black Caribbean and African backgrounds. About one in three pupils speak English as an additional language which is much higher than found in most schools. Many pupils come from economically disadvantaged homes, which is evident in the high numbers entitled to free school meals. Around a quarter of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities, a proportion that is higher than average. Most of these have moderate learning difficulties and some have emotional and behavioural problems. St Mark's has gained an Activemark award and is recognised as a Healthy School. The school offers childcare through the Sussex Way Extended School provision. Although this facility takes place partly on the school site it is registered with another local school and was not part of this inspection. The current headteacher was appointed in April 2008. There has been considerable changes in the school's leadership and governance in recent times.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

St Mark's is a good school of which pupils and the vast majority of their parents and carers are justifiably proud. At the heart of the school's work is a warm and caring atmosphere where everybody is valued and included. One parent, typical of other respondents, wrote, 'The school is very welcoming and provides well for a great diversity of children. My children feel that they really belong at St Mark's'. Staff know every pupil as an individual and look after them extremely well. Consequently, pupils feel safe and thrive in this supportive environment. One pupil, to the obvious approval of others, commented, 'The school is like a second home; everyone looks after you here.' Hence, St Mark's is a very harmonious community and pupils from a wide range of cultural backgrounds get on very well together. They are sensitive to one another's needs and their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is outstanding. Their enjoyment of all that the school has to offer is reflected in their high attendance levels and they become eager and enthusiastic learners. Their behaviour is good and they achieve well.

Children get off to a good start in the lively and stimulating Reception class. They continue to do well as they move through the school because the quality of teaching is consistently good and helps pupils of all abilities to progress well. Those who find learning more difficult, or who have emotional and behavioural problems, are given very effective support, tailored to their needs, which allows them to make as much progress as their classmates. In consequence, pupils' attainment is broadly average when they leave the school which represents good achievement from often low starting points. Their attainment dipped in English in 2009 and a number of more-able girls in particular, did not make sufficient progress in writing during their time in Key Stage 2. The school has responded by providing more opportunities for pupils to write and by developing its systems for assessment and academic guidance. There are some very good examples of how target setting and teachers' feedback are challenging pupils effectively to improve their writing, but some inconsistencies remain. Moreover, more remains to be done in extending writing opportunities.

A notable feature of the good curriculum is the wide range of enrichment opportunities provided, often by specialist staff in sport, music and the performing arts. The school is particularly proud of its singing and, in a memorable assembly, the hall rocked to the joyful singing of pupils and staff together! The school's work in these areas is reflected in its national awards and greatly enhances pupils' enjoyment of school and commitment to a healthy lifestyle. The school makes extremely good use of a wide range of partners to enhance its curriculum and contribute to the very high quality of care, guidance and support for pupils. This is illustrated by the school's exemplary safeguarding procedures

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and the level of support it provides in particular for its pupils whose circumstances have made them vulnerable. Most parents recognise this. One commented, 'I have always felt this school to be very supportive and caring, not only for students but also their families.'

School leaders, in close partnership with staff, have been very successful in ensuring that some of the outstanding elements identified at the last inspection have been maintained. However, the headteacher and governors have not yet been able to establish a clear vision and sense of direction that is shared by all members of the school community. Moreover, self-evaluation, while increasingly accurate of late, is not yet incisive enough to focus the school's efforts on what needs to be done to improve even further. Therefore, its procedures for checking provision are not sharply enough focused on immediate priorities. Until these issues are resolved the school has only satisfactory capacity to build on the high standards it has set itself in recent years.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop leadership, management and governance by:
 - establishing a clear vision and sense of direction which is shared by the whole school community
 - enhancing self-evaluation to focus more sharply on the what the school needs to do to improve
 - ensuring that the school's systems for checking provision relate clearly to the school's priorities and lead to improvement.
- Accelerate pupils' progress in writing by:
 - embedding new assessment systems to ensure that target setting and
 - teachers' feedback consistently help pupils to improve
 - providing challenging writing opportunities for more-able pupils to achieve as well as they can.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' enthusiasm for learning is evident in their enjoyment of lessons and their positive attitudes to learning. Many pupils who responded to the questionnaire mentioned how much fun they have in their learning and how 'the school teaches you about how things will be when you grow up'. They respond well to the good teaching they receive and participate actively in lessons, for example responding thoughtfully to teachers' questions and working well in pairs and groups. Mostly they are able to sustain their interest and concentration for good lengths of time although younger pupils, in particular, occasionally lose focus when they are asked to sit for too long without active participation.

There are no significant differences in the performance of pupils from different backgrounds and girls are now doing as well as boys. Pupils with a range of moderate

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learning difficulties and emotional problems make good progress through the effective support they receive. While attainment at the end of Year 6 has fallen since the last inspection, notably in English, pupils of all abilities are now making good progress towards the challenging targets that have been set for them. Their good achievement in basic skills, supported by their high attendance levels and very good attitudes to learning, prepares them well for the next stage of their education.

Pupils' pride in the school is illustrated by their great enthusiasm to take on responsibilities. For example, during the inspection, large numbers of them had made formal applications to become 'St Mark's Saviours', which involves them in jobs such as librarians, office helpers and playground buddies. They also take their roles as school councillors very seriously and point out, for example, how their interest in improving the school grounds has led to the setting up of the gardening club. There are many links with the church and local community and pupils are very keen to develop their support of a school in Uganda. All of these activities contribute extremely well to different aspects of pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Teachers have excellent relationships with their classes and plan effectively to meet the widely varying needs of their pupils, resulting in good progress in the development of basic skills. Teachers use a range of effective strategies to interest and motivate learners, for example by making effective use of partner and group work. Occasionally, they talk for too long and pupils' progress slows because they do not have enough opportunities for active participation. Teachers use a range of strategies to help pupils to assess how well they are learning and this term the focus has been on improving writing. There is some good practice evident, but it is not yet fully embedded and the impact has not been evaluated.

Those who find learning more difficult or who are at the early stages of learning English are given effective support that meets their needs both in class and in smaller groups. Teaching assistants make a very effective contribution to the learning of these pupils through their enthusiastic and supportive work. The school has identified pupils with particular gifts and talents and sessions for these pupils in mathematics have helped to accelerate their progress, although this has yet to be replicated in writing. As well as the range of enrichment activities, pupils' enjoyment is enhanced through the International Primary Curriculum which helps them to see the links between different aspects of their learning, often with a global dimension. For example, valuable work has recently been done on the conservation of energy and sustainability. Teachers make good use of information and communication technology in lessons, but limited resources prevent computers being used routinely by pupils to support their learning in all subjects.

The support for vulnerable children and their families is illustrative of the high levels of care and nurture the school provides. Excellent support is provided through the home support worker and lead behaviour professional, and vulnerable pupils are linked to an 'adult buddy', who helps them to feel secure and settled at school. Those who find learning more difficult or who are at the early stages of learning English also receive sensitive and effective support which meets their needs. This is indicative of why parents and carers have great confidence in the school and has resulted in impressive improvements in attendance, for example.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The movement and absence of key personnel over the last year contributed to a weakening of leadership at all levels. The situation has now stabilised and some aspects

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of leadership are of high quality, notably in relation to inclusion and special needs. Subject leaders are also knowledgeable and committed and some of their work has brought about improvement. School leaders use tracking data well to identify trends in the performance of different groups of pupils. However, the school has been slow to re-establish a clear sense of direction that is understood by all the staff. Absence of rigorous self-evaluation has meant that the often good work of leaders has sometimes been conducted in isolation and not as part of a shared understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. It has, therefore, been less effective than it might have been. Governors have been through a similarly difficult period and are developing their systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school and its leaders.

Leaders have been very successful in maintaining high levels of care and support for pupils and this is a priority for everybody in the school. Their commitment to equal opportunities is evident in the good progress of all groups of pupils. Leaders and governors are rightly proud of their exemplary procedures for ensuring that all children are properly safeguarded and the high diligence with which these are carried out. The school has a very good partnership with parents and reaches out to them in many ways, for example through an international evening and through coffee mornings on topics as diverse as 'keeping up with numeracy' and 'helping the family to stay emotionally healthy'. This is indicative of the school's good contribution to community cohesion. It has a very clear understanding of the locality it serves and engages successfully with different groups in the local and wider communities.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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When children begin in the Reception class their knowledge, understanding and skills are wide-ranging but mostly below the levels typical of children of that age. They quickly settle into the warm and welcoming environment where they feel very safe and are well looked after. They make good progress because of lively teaching that effectively takes account of their varying needs. Learning is clearly fun for children and adults alike and there are plenty of smiles and laughter! Children's personal development is fostered particularly well and they learn to play amicably with others, to take turns and to behave sensibly. Adults have a good understanding of how young children learn and plan a range of stimulating activities, both indoors and out, with an effective balance between activities led by adults and those that children choose for themselves. In the latter, adults sometimes miss opportunities to move learning on even further. Although they make good progress, children's attainment remains below average when they join Year 1 and their skills in language, communication and literacy often remain weak because of their low starting points. Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is effective and based on good teamwork.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

There was a high response to the questionnaire with more than half of the school's parents and carers offering their views. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school as can be seen in the table below. Where they added comments, parents tended to commend the warm and caring atmosphere in the school, the quality of teaching and the way the school caters for the diverse needs of its pupils. Inspection evidence fully supports all these positive views. A few parents expressed concerns about the way behaviour is managed. As the school is very inclusive it does have pupils who present challenging behaviour from time to time. However, inspectors found that these pupils are managed very well, allowing them to make the most of school and minimising disruption to others. A few parents also expressed concerns about leadership in the school. Inspectors found that while leadership has been successful in maintaining high quality care and provision, there are some issues to be resolved around the strategic direction of the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mark's C of E Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 109 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 194 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	74	68	33	30	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	69	63	32	29	3	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	64	59	39	36	3	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	68	62	31	29	9	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	68	62	36	33	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	66	61	39	36	2	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	74	68	28	26	4	4	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	59	54	43	39	2	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	62	57	41	38	3	3	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	62	57	37	29	8	7	3	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	54	49	45	41	8	7	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	57	52	39	36	7	6	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	73	67	30	27	4	4	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



26 November 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's C of E Primary School, Islington N19 4JF

You may remember that I visited your school recently with two other inspectors. I am writing to thank you all for being so welcoming and friendly. I thought you would like to know what we found out.

You and your parents are right to be proud of St Marks' because it is a good school. You told us how safe you feel and we agree that the staff look after you very well. We were really impressed with your behaviour and politeness. Well done! You are very keen to take on responsibilities around the school and we were very impressed by the number of you who applied to be St Mark's Saviours. You probably know who has been successful by now!

You are making good progress because the teaching is good. You told us that you enjoy your learning and that was very clear to us in the lessons we saw. Those of you who find learning a bit more difficult get lots of extra support to help you to do well. You also told us how much you enjoy the extra things you have to do in sport and music for example. You clearly enjoy your singing and I loved the assembly where you and all the staff sang together.

All the staff and governors work hard to make the school welcoming and safe for you. They are keen to make it even better. We have asked them to do a couple of things that we think might help:

- The school has been through some changes recently. We have asked your headteacher and governors to make sure that they are clear about what they want for the school and what needs to be better. We want them also to make sure that all the staff know about this as well.
- Last year some pupils did not do as well as usual in writing. We have asked teachers to make sure that their marking always helps you know what to do to improve and to give you even more challenges in your writing.

Yours sincerely

Graham Lee

Lead inspector

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