

St Mark's CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103836
Local Authority	Dudley
Inspection number	336173
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Kath Campbell

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	272
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jane Price
Headteacher	Mr Ian Walker
Date of previous school inspection	25 June 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 15 lessons and observed 10 teachers. One lesson was jointly observed with the headteacher. The inspectors also held meetings with the headteacher, staff, governors and pupils and spoke informally to parents and carers. They observed the school's work and scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including information about pupils' progress, child protection and safeguarding procedures and an analysis of standards. They sampled pupils' past and present work and scrutinised 100 pupil and 52 parental questionnaires.

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

- standards and progress, particularly in mathematics throughout the school, science in Key Stage 2 and reading in Key Stage 1
- how successful the strategies to improve teaching have been and their impact on the progress of the more able
- whether the school's systems for tracking progress are sufficiently accurate and effective in identifying and supporting pupils who make less than satisfactory progress
- whether leaders at all levels and governors monitor and evaluate the impact of initiatives with sufficient rigour.

Information about the school

St Mark's is a larger than average school that serves an urban community. Almost a third of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is above average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who do not have English as their first language is below average. Over a third of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, which is above average. The school has received Healthy Schools' status in recognition of its work.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

St Mark's is a satisfactory and rapidly improving school. Its most notable strength is the good quality of teaching and learning. In recent years standards as shown by the school's results in national tests have been low. Actions taken by the school have begun to make significant inroads into this history of underachievement. The pupils' workbooks, the results of recent tests conducted by the school and the good quality of learning in a high proportion of lessons all show that pupils' achievement is improving. Standards are currently close to average, although there is some variation between subjects. Standards in English are higher than those in mathematics and, in particular, science. In mathematics, too little attention is given to problem solving and the development of independent skills, while in science, the curriculum does not have a high enough profile to allow pupils to develop their skills.

The good quality of teaching and learning is key to the school's success. It has improved markedly since the previous inspection. Expectations of work and behaviour are high. The curriculum is satisfactory; a strong focus on improving literacy skills has had a positive impact, especially on reading in Key Stage 1. Planned opportunities to consolidate and develop skills across different subjects are not yet strongly developed. Attendance is greatly improved and is close to average. Good systems for tracking progress have also made a significant contribution to recent improvements. Potential underachievement is identified early and well targeted support quickly gets pupils back on track.

Parents rightly appreciate the Early Years Foundation Stage which provides particularly well for the school's youngest pupils. The care, guidance and support offered to pupils and their families are also strengths that make a major contribution to pupils' good personal development. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have successfully steered the school through difficult times. They have created a good climate for learning where staff have a strong commitment towards improvement. There is a warmth and friendliness that greatly enhances pupils' enjoyment. Parents strongly support the school. One parent expressed the views of many commenting, 'The staff are fantastic'.

The school has moved a long way in a short space of time through the drive and determination of all staff, combined with substantial local authority support. Although senior leaders have an appreciation of the school's strengths and weaknesses, shortcomings in the arrangements for self-evaluation result in some inaccuracies in their judgements about the quality of provision. The governing body is well led and highly supportive of the school. The role of subject leaders is not yet strongly developed and they do not have enough opportunities to monitor standards and progress.

Nevertheless, the overall picture is positive. Increasingly effective tracking systems,

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combined with much improved teaching and accelerated progress, give the school a satisfactory capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend the success of the school in raising standards in English to mathematics and science, particularly in Key Stage 2, by:
 - providing challenging work in mathematics for all pupils, but especially the more able, to improve pupils' problem solving and independent skills
 - giving greater prominence to the science curriculum and focusing sharply on skills and knowledge in this subject
 - increasing the opportunities for pupils to develop literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - fostering the development of subject leaders more effectively
 - adopting procedures to improve the accuracy of self-evaluation.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils typically start school with very limited skills and experience. Until recently, after a good start in Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils did not make enough progress as they moved through the school and standards remained low at the end of Year 6. Rates of progress were uneven and there was a legacy of underachievement brought about by staffing changes and too much inadequate teaching. Well-targeted staff training led to a significant upturn in literacy and numeracy standards, particularly in 2010. Inspection evidence shows the rate of progress is now accelerating very rapidly because the quality of teaching is markedly improved. Currently, all groups of pupils make good progress. This is a real success story and the school is moving firmly in the right direction.

Participation in the 'Big Write' strategy is increasing pupils' enjoyment of writing and is playing a major role in improved achievement. Pupils' books reflect a growing ability to write at length, in a style that engages the reader. In mathematics, one-to-one support is successfully accelerating learning. This was observed at its most effective in an excellent lesson for Year 1 pupils who are in danger of falling behind. Interesting activities, detailed planning and accurate assessment all contributed to some outstanding learning.

Pupils of all ages value their school and care for each other. They say they feel safe and show a good awareness of healthy lifestyles. Behaviour in lessons and around school is good, although a few pupils present challenging behaviour on occasions. Pupils relish opportunities for taking responsibility by, for example, keeping the school courtyard

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well-tended. However, the work of the school council is underdeveloped and, as a result, pupils are not always given sufficient opportunities to demonstrate initiative or decision making skills. By the time pupils leave at the end of Year 6, their highly developed moral and social skills, combined with improved academic outcomes, ensure they are soundly prepared for their future lives. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils have a very secure sense of fair play and show respect towards each other. Although their understanding of the richness and diversity of culture is adequate, it is not as strong as other aspects.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
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	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

There are many strengths within teaching and learning. A quarter of lessons observed were of outstanding quality. Teachers' enthusiasm and professionalism shine through in lessons. Planning is good and teachers' clear explanations ensure that pupils undertake their work with confidence. Assessment is of a high quality and is used far more effectively than in the past. Marking is good and successfully moves pupils on to the next step. Excellent learning was observed in a Year 6 lesson on fractions. Very strong

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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relationships, high expectations and good questioning led to highly attentive, motivated pupils who made very rapid progress because they were totally absorbed in their learning. Work was matched perfectly to their needs and the input from teaching and support staff was pitched at exactly the right level. Occasionally, in less effective lessons, teachers talk for too long, leaving pupils with too little time to practise skills. Although teaching assistants are of high calibre, their skills are not always fully utilised in some lessons.

Curriculum initiatives such as 'Every Child Counts', combined with targeted small group teaching, have had a good impact on learning and the subsequent rise in standards. The school's strong personal, health and social education programme contributes greatly to good personal development. In discussion, pupils express a high level of enjoyment. They value the enrichment opportunities on offer and visits greatly enhance pupils' learning. Currently, the creative curriculum and opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills through other subjects are not firmly embedded.

Pastoral care is good and there is a strong determination to nurture potentially vulnerable pupils, resulting in a significant improvement in their behaviour, confidence and relationships. The good work of learning mentors and support staff enables pupils who sometimes find learning difficult to attend regularly and participate fully in school life.

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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders successfully instil the drive and ambition needed to raise standards. In recent times, the school has gained much from local authority support, particularly in its drive for better teaching and assessment. It is now increasingly confident in its own ability to sustain improvement as the level of external guidance decreases. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have taken a strong lead in data analysis in their determination to tackle underachievement. Governors are becoming increasingly involved in monitoring the performance of the school. However, there is a lack of tight procedures and systems for assessing the impact of initiatives. Safeguarding is satisfactory but some policies are in need of updating. The school is strongly inclusive and every pupil feels valued. All groups of pupils make good progress because the school keeps a careful check on the performance of every individual. Pupils are made very aware of how to tackle discrimination through, for example, their numerous

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partnerships with other schools where pupils come from different backgrounds. Partnerships created through, for example, the Black Country Challenge initiative have had a significant effect on raising standards. Community cohesion is strong at a local level, particularly through the school's good links within the parish. It is a well-integrated, harmonious community where adults and pupils get along well together. At a global level, links with other schools and communities are in their infancy.

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	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Many children enter the Nursery with particularly weak language skills and some find it difficult to express themselves clearly. They grow in confidence through a well-structured personal and social development programme. The school fosters good relationships with families. Parents greatly appreciate being involved in their child's education right from the start. All staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage work together well as a team. Routines are well established and children experience a rich and diverse range of rewarding experiences. Occasionally planning for Nursery children lacks detail and does not focus sufficiently on what children are expected to learn, particularly in their independent activities. The outdoor area is a great source of enjoyment and a good environment for learning. Children are inquisitive and animated as they talk about the chickens that they look after. Those in need of extra support flourish through effective one-to-one attention. All staff promote language and literacy skills well. Children gain a good early understanding of how to stay healthy and safe. 'Learning Journey' books provide a valuable insight into how well individual children are

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progressing. Leadership and management are good. There is a strong, cohesive approach towards improvement and the co-ordinator has a good grasp of strengths and areas for development.

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

Parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire are very supportive of the school. They particularly like:

- their children's enjoyment of school
- the fact that their children feel safe
- the quality of teaching
- the way in which the school meets their child's needs
- that their children are well prepared for future life.

A few parents/carers expressed concerns. They feel that the school:

- does not help their children to have a healthy lifestyle
- does not help them to support their child's learning
- does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour
- does not take account of their suggestions and concerns
- is not led and managed effectively.

The inspection team followed up the concerns raised. It found that the school promoted healthy lifestyles well. With regard to parental support and involvement, inspectors found that the school engaged the parents/carers of younger pupils well but had further to go in its involvement of and communication with the parents/carers of older pupils. Behaviour was good in lessons and around school. However, there are a small number of pupils whose behaviour is potentially challenging. The leadership and management of the school were judged to be satisfactory.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mark's CofE 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 52 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 272 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	48	27	51	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	27	52	24	46	1	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	26	50	24	46	2	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	21	40	29	56	2	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	27	52	25	48	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	24	46	24	46	4	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	17	33	30	58	5	10	0	0
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)	18	35	30	58	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	21	40	30	58	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	21	40	24	46	3	6	2	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	29	30	58	6	12	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	20	38	28	54	3	6	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	25	48	26	50	1	2	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



10 July 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's CofE Primary School, Brierley Hill, DY5 4DZ

Thank you for looking after Mr Westall, Mr Jones and me so well when we visited your school. We liked talking to you about your work and know how much you enjoy growing plants and looking after your chickens.

You go to a satisfactory school that is improving all the time.

These are some of the things we liked most:

- most of you really enjoy coming to school
- you get along well together and you like the grown-ups who look after you and teach you
- you smile a lot and are friendly to visitors
- your work is getting better, especially your reading and writing.

These are the things we have asked your headteacher and other members of staff to do to improve your school:

- help all of you, but particularly those of you who are in Key Stage 2, to develop better skills to solve problems and think for yourselves
- help pupils in Key Stage 2 to develop the skills you need to be good at science
- give you more chances to practise your literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects
- give some teachers more time to see how well you are doing in the subjects for which they are responsible
- set up some good ways of checking whether the school is making enough progress.

You can help by coming to school every day on time and always doing your best.

Best wishes to you all.

Yours sincerely

Kath Campbell

Lead inspector

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