

St Mark's C of E School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109328
Local Authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	337275
Inspection dates	26–27 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Michael Merchant

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	280
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roger Coombe
Headteacher	Cherril Pope
Date of previous school inspection	5 November 2006
School address	Baytree Road Bath BA1 6ND
Telephone number	01225 312661
Fax number	01225 429063
Email address	admin@bathnes.gov.uk

Age group	11–16
Inspection dates	26–27 January 2010
Inspection number	337275

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2010

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors spent 75% of their time looking at learning, visited 20 lessons and observed 20 teachers. They held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They also talked to some parents and carers who were present at the start and finish of the school day. They observed the school's work, and looked at its improvement plan, data on students' progress, records of the monitoring of the quality of teaching, and a range of school policies. They also analysed questionnaires received from 80 parents and carers and 29 students.

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

- students' attainment and progress, particularly lower- and middle-attaining students and all students in English
- how well the teaching takes account of the needs of groups and individuals, with a particular focus on girls and lower- and middle-attaining boys
- how consistently well teachers check the progress of different groups of students in each year group and how well they inform them about what they need to do to improve their work
- the effectiveness of the subject leaders in checking attainment, progress and teaching in their respective areas and sustaining improvements in the outcomes for all students
- how well the school meets its obligations to promote community cohesion and fosters an appreciation and awareness of other cultures.

Information about the school

St Mark's C of E School is very small in comparison with other secondary schools and there are far fewer girls than boys. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is much lower than is typically found. The number of students eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities, mainly behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, is very high and the proportion of students with a statement of educational needs is above average. The school is a specialist Business and Enterprise school was awarded Healthy Schools status in 2006 and joined the Gaining Ground initiative in 2009.

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

2

Main findings

There have been a number of notable improvements in St Mark's since it was last inspected. The headteacher's calm and thoughtful leadership has given the school a clear direction and has ensured that the school has continued successfully on its journey of improvement. School self-evaluation is accurate. Most importantly, the school knows exactly what to do further to sustain this improvement. This, together with improvements in attainment and progress, teaching and the curriculum since the last inspection, means the capacity to further improve is good. However, the roles and responsibilities of subject leaders have not been developed well enough for them to be fully accountable for standards and progress in their respective areas.

It is now a good school because students make good progress in most of their lessons and achievement is rising. Key to this success is the innovative curriculum that teaches 'by stage, not by age', and rigorous procedures for monitoring and evaluating the academic progress, personal development and well-being of each student. Well-targeted intervention strategies and good care, guidance and support enable students to meet challenging targets, including targets in the business specialist plan. The headteacher is passionate about promoting equal opportunity and tackling discrimination. As a result, all students, regardless of gender, ethnicity or ability, make good progress. By the time students leave at the end of Year 11 they are confident, well-rounded young people, ready to play their full part in the world beyond school.

Students join St Mark's with skills and abilities that are very low when compared with what is expected of their age, particularly their language and communication skills. Many join and leave the school mid-way through the year or come from schools where their previous education has been disrupted. From these low starting points, students achieve well to attain just below average results overall in GCSE examinations. The proportion of students who gain five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics is very close to the national average, and the progress students make in mathematics places the school in the top four per cent of schools nationally. There are, however, inconsistencies between subjects, especially at Key Stage 4, because time at the end of lessons is not always used well enough to check how well students have done and what they have learned.

A very positive atmosphere permeates the school and relationships are exceptionally strong. Consequently, behaviour is good and students have a high regard for both their classmates and for the adults who work with them. The school has worked effectively to promote more regular attendance, which is now average. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, give clear explanations and plan their lessons well to meet the needs of the mixed-age classes. In a minority of lessons, learning is held back because

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

teachers do not always ensure that students are given sufficient time to work independently, to learn in an active way and to talk about their findings. Staff recognise that there is still some way to go to make the fullest use of assessment data to ensure that the tasks they set in lessons provide maximum challenge for the high-flying students.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By December 2010, increase attainment and the rate of progress that students make in all their subjects to match that in English and mathematics by:
 - making sure that at the end of each lesson, students have a clear idea of what they have learnt, whether they have fulfilled their personal objectives and what they need to do to improve them further.
- Build on existing practice to improve the quality of teaching and learning by December 2010, so that it is consistently good or better in the great majority of lessons by:
 - ensuring that teachers specifically plan for and extend the learning of the highest attainers at a consistently good pace throughout lessons
 - giving students more responsibility for their own learning by encouraging them to be more active and inquisitive in class.
- Hold subject leaders to account for students' attainment and progress in their respective areas by:
 - ensuring that subject leaders carry out regular, focused monitoring and evaluation tasks that inform and update action plans
 - ensure that appropriate assessment and feedback to students are undertaken in their subject area, to track students' progress and identify potential underachievement.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Students greatly enjoy school, grow in confidence and develop very positive attitudes to learning, and the work seen by inspectors in lessons confirms the overall picture of good and improving progress, especially in English and mathematics. Most students, including girls in classes where they are in a minority, learn well because teachers expect much of their students and explain complicated ideas clearly. In a particularly effective mixed Year 8 and 9 English lesson, where students were studying gothic poetry, all groups of students made good progress because of the teacher's very high expectations and his searching questions, which prompted all to think and empathise. Attainment is above average in mathematics and just below average, but improving strongly, in English. The school has worked tirelessly to successfully improve the progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Detailed plans to support these students, coupled with thoughtful deployment of learning assistants and timely interventions, ensure that they make similar progress to that of their classmates.

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

Students feel safe in the school and adopt healthy lifestyles. Fund-raising activities, links with international communities, imaginative and thought-provoking assemblies and The Sanctuary, a place of quiet contemplation for all, serve to develop good moral, cultural and spiritual awareness in students. The school's business specialism has done much to increase students' interaction in the wider community which is substantial and valued highly. Students are developing secure workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being through the curriculum, work experience and enterprise activities. Clear curriculum pathways help them to understand their future options and most go on to further education.

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	2
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The school has made bold and radical changes to its Key Stage 3 curriculum recently which are beginning to have a big impact on students' attainment and motivation. To maintain a broad, balanced and rich curriculum in such a small school, students move through a number of 'tracks' which are determined by their aptitude and speed of learning, rather than their age. High-attaining students move through these tracks

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

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

speedily. For instance, in 2009, four Year 9 students gained four A*s each at GCSE. There is a good balance of academic and vocational choices at Key Stage 4. Effective partnership with another specialist business school as part of the Gaining Ground initiative, together with local authority shared provision through a local college and the 14'19 Diploma Partnership, mean the school is well placed to further develop its work related and vocational courses so that the needs of all its students can be more fully met. The school's specialist status in business has led to successful initiatives and enterprises such as its newspaper, 'Larkhall News', and business conferences, which enhances students' learning-to-learn skills.

Good attention is given to all aspects of care, guidance and support. Students are known to staff as individuals. The school works closely with families, students and a range of agencies to sustain the academic and personal development of those facing challenging circumstances. As a result, behaviour and attendance have improved and vulnerable students progress as well as their peers.

Teaching overall secures good progress and learning. Teachers use assessment well to match teaching styles, questions and activities to the range of students' needs. Students are given opportunities to apply and extend their knowledge and skills independently and in groups, and thus to progress well at their own pace. Regular feedback from the teacher, and peer and self-assessment challenge them to improve further. In all lessons, students know their target levels or grades. However, in many lessons all students work at the same pace, as directed by the teacher, and this leads to insufficient challenge for more able students. Teachers sometimes talk too much, which limits the time students are actively and independently learning, resulting in slower progress and less time for students to articulate and build upon what they have learnt by the end of the lesson. Teachers do not always use the time at the end of lessons well to ensure students have understood the lesson's aims.

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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Clear-sighted leadership and management are at the heart of the school's success. The headteacher works tenaciously to improve students' educational opportunities. With strong support from her deputy headteacher, she has set a precise path for improvement based on accurate self-evaluation and embedding initiatives, which have made a positive difference to students' achievements. Leaders communicate high

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

expectations persuasively to staff so that all have a shared sense of direction and feel part of a successful team. Middle leaders are eager to take real accountability for their respective areas but have too little responsibility for monitoring standards, learning and teaching, and this is holding back improvements in students' achievement.

The promotion of equalities is good as the school rigorously monitors students' outcomes at both individual and group level, and much emphasis is placed on valuing differences in other cultures and religions. The governing body fulfils all legal requirements and gives good attention to the welfare of pupils and staff, with all safeguarding arrangements found to be effective at the time of inspection. The school has carefully considered plans to encourage pupils to become involved in the wider community and beyond. However, the school is at an early stage of evaluating how well it fosters an understanding of others from different ethnic groups and cultures and so community cohesion is no more than satisfactory.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Views of parents and carers

The school and its headteacher clearly enjoy the confidence and support of those parents who returned the questionnaire. Almost all respondents felt that the school keeps pupils safe and helps them to maintain a healthy lifestyle. A number of individual comments reflected parents' and carers' support for the school's curriculum and the good quality care, support and guidance given to pupils, particularly to those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The inspectors totally agree with these views. A small minority of parents and carers speak of concerns regarding instances of

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

insufficient information being given to parents and carers about their child's progress. These were not supported by many other responses, which indicated that meetings held between the school and parents and carers to discuss aspects of progress were regular and informative.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at St Mark's C of E 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 80 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 280 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	31	39	37	46	9	11	3	4
The school keeps my child safe	40	50	38	48	2	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	43	54	35	44	1	1	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	27	34	44	55	4	5	2	3
The teaching is good at this school	27	34	48	60	4	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	30	38	36	45	13	16	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	23	29	48	60	9	11	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)	31	39	39	49	8	10	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	33	41	38	48	6	8	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	24	30	46	58	8	10	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	27	34	39	49	11	14	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	40	50	31	39	5	6	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	41	51	30	38	4	5	1	1

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.



28 January 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St Mark's C of E School, Bath BA1 6ND

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons, looking at your work and talking with you, and were impressed by how courteous and polite you were. It is clear that you go to a good school. Here are some of the things we found out that we would like to share with you.

- You make good progress as you move through the school and your achievement is getting better all the time. The proportion of you that gain five or more grades A* to C at GCSE which include English and mathematics is about the same as seen in other schools. This is because your teachers teach you well and you also work very hard.
- Your personal development is good. You behave well around the school and in your classes and you look after each other so well.
- Your teachers and other adults take good care of you. They make sure that everyone feels safe and secure. They also give you a lot of advice about how you can improve your work.
- Your headteacher, the governors and all your other teachers know exactly how to make sure that your school continues to improve. The very carefully thought through curriculum is helping many of you progress quickly at a pace that suits you.

There are three things that I have asked the school to work on to help with this.

- Ensure that more of you gain higher grades in all your subjects at GCSE by planning work for you that really makes you think.
- Make sure that you are able to learn more things on your own.
- Teachers who are responsible for subjects must check more thoroughly on how well you are taught and how well you are doing.

I am sure that you will help them by always working hard and aiming really high.

Yours sincerely

Michael Merchant

Lead inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.