

The Mary Towerton School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110208
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	337449
Inspection dates	4–5 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Alison Cartlidge

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	42
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jez Butwell
Headteacher	Sarah Leighton
Date of previous school inspection	9 September 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. The inspector visited six lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. The inspector observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' books, information on pupils' progress, safeguarding and other documents. Questionnaires from 24 parents were scrutinised.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work and looked in detail at the following:

- how well pupils, especially the more able, develop and use their writing and information and communication technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum
- the balance of child-initiated and teacher-led activities in the Early Years and its impact on the children's personal development
- how well teachers use marking to show pupils the next steps in learning
- the effectiveness with which leaders use information on pupils' progress to drive whole-school development.

Information about the school

Pupils come to this small infant school from Studley Green and the surrounding area. The proportion entitled to free school meals is very low. The school has a well-below average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and several from around the world join the school while their parents attend a nearby Christian College. Despite this, the proportion who speak English as an additional language is below average and very few are at the early stages of learning to speak English. Provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage is in a mixed Reception and Year 1 class. The headteacher joined the school in September 2008.

The school has received several awards including the Healthy Schools Award.

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

Pupils thrive in this friendly and fun loving school. Excellent care, guidance and support from all members of staff ensure that pupils feel very safe at school, behave well and want to learn. Pupils show their thorough enjoyment of learning by being very lively and enthusiastic; as one pupil said, 'I like working hard.'

Children make a good start to their education in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They learn basic skills quickly but have too few opportunities to take the initiative in their learning and are not always helped to develop their own ideas. In Years 1 and 2, good teaching enables pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to learn quickly leading to high standards by the end of Year 2. Teaching is effective because teachers develop good relationships with the pupils and provide a wide variety of tasks and games to make learning interesting. Attainment in writing is slightly lower than in other subjects because opportunities are missed to challenge more-able pupils when they are writing in subjects other than literacy. Teachers mark pupils' work frequently with positive comments but they do not consistently show pupils how to do better next time.

Pupils are friendly and articulate because they are given good opportunities to share their ideas during discussions and their contributions are respected and followed up. The recent promotion of 'wow' words is bearing fruit in the pupils' conversations and creative writing. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to boost pupils' motivation and support their learning.

Pupils are exceptionally good at taking responsibility in school and the community by making suggestions about how to make the school even better and how to raise funds for charity. They show considerable respect for other cultures by taking interest in stories from around the world and playing together harmoniously.

The school has a good capacity to improve further. Good procedures for self-evaluation and monitoring enable leaders to know what needs to be done next to make the school better and high standards have been successfully maintained. Pupils' high literacy and numeracy skills and opportunities to make and sell gifts prepare them exceptionally well for the next stage of their education and later life.

Leaders are aware that the way information is kept on pupils' progress does not enable them to be able to check at a glance that all pupils are learning quickly enough. This makes it more difficult than it should be for each leader to monitor success and tackle slight dips in performance as soon as they arise.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- By autumn 2010, to improve writing, especially of the more-able pupils, by:
 - always providing writing tasks that are purposeful and relevant
 - ensuring that pupils are consistently challenged when writing in subjects other than literacy
 - using marking to provide clearer guidance on how to improve
 - helping pupils to check and improve their work and follow up advice swiftly.
- By spring 2011, to develop independent learning indoors and outside in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - providing children with more opportunities for taking the initiative in their learning through purposeful play
 - helping members of staff to provide the right level of intervention so that children can develop their ideas.
- By autumn 2010, to develop a central system for checking up on how well pupils are doing so that all leaders can be fully involved in monitoring success and slight dips in progress.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Pupils enjoy school very much and their achievement is outstanding because they develop excellent relationships with members of staff and other pupils and enthusiastically take part in a wide range of interesting activities. They make very positive comments such as, 'I like playing with my friends' and 'doing a bit of work every day'. Pupils behave well and are very keen to learn. Pupils cooperate with each other sensibly when working in pairs or in small groups. For example, in one mathematics lesson in Years 1 and 2, pupils worked well with a partner to find answers to mental addition and subtraction sums.

Attainment is high by the end of Year 2. For example, pupils are able to suggest a wide range of words with a similar meaning to help make their conversations interesting. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress across the school. They learn rapidly in most lessons because teachers effectively provide them with work that meets their differing needs. Sometimes when pupils are writing in subjects other than literacy, they are not all challenged enough, and consequently, more-able pupils occasionally develop their writing slightly more slowly than other skills.

Caring and supportive members of staff enable pupils to develop spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness exceptionally well. As a result, pupils show great respect for cultures other than their own and genuine interest in the wider world. For example, pupils in Years 1 and 2 were very impressed when learning about French culture during a virtual tour of Paris shown on the interactive whiteboard. Pupils enjoy greeting each other in a wide range of languages learnt from classmates who have joined the school from abroad. Pupils are keen to share their views and to listen to other people's ideas. They are proud of their school and are exceptionally good at making suggestions to

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improve it and raise funds for charity. They have recently helped to improve the playground facilities and dressed up as super-heroes to help others. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. They enjoy fruit and vegetables at playtime and love taking part in physical activity such as the adventure trail. Pupils feel extremely safe at school. They know that they will be helped by the teachers if they have a worry and that they can also use the worry boxes to put forward any concerns.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	1
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	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teachers know each pupil well and sensitively adapt lessons in response to changing needs. They are successful in providing fun, practical activities that make pupils keen to learn. Positive behaviour management provides pupils with clear guidance on how they can and should 'make the right choices'. Occasionally the pace of learning drops slightly during whole-class work when pupils wait for others to catch up. A new marking scheme is starting to involve pupils more in checking their own work. Pupils enjoy the 'yippy yellow' that shows them they have used good words in their writing.

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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Pupils have good opportunities to use their ICT skills to enhance their learning in all subjects. The curriculum is being developed to include more purposeful writing tasks for more-able pupils in all subjects. Additional activities such as clubs and educational visits contribute very well to the pupils' enjoyment of school and their emotional and social development.

Members of staff provide excellent care, guidance and support for pupils and their parents. All pupils are known individually and given carefully tailored help and support when they have specific difficulties they need to overcome. Pupils who have fallen behind in their learning are quickly identified and specific support programmes have a very positive impact on their learning.

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 headteacher has a clear vision for the school and a realistic view of its strengths and areas for development. These are successfully shared with other members of staff and governors. The school sets and achieves challenging targets leading to the maintenance of high standards over the last few years. Rigorous self-evaluation has given leaders an accurate understanding of the areas that could be improved further. Recent well-focused developments, such as those in the curriculum that are starting to accelerate the progress of more-able pupils in writing, demonstrate that the school has a good capacity to go on improving.

The enthusiastic senior leaders are working together exceptionally well with parents, carers and external agencies to support all pupils and to ensure that there are no forms of discrimination. Work is under way to provide clearer information on the progress of groups of pupils, to help leaders to detect any slight dips in progress.

Governors carry out their responsibilities diligently, although they have not monitored fully the school's administrative arrangements for safeguarding arrangements to ensure that minor omissions are put right. Despite this, at the time of the inspection the school's safeguarding arrangements were found to be good and pupils' safety and well-being were not being compromised. Governors understand what the school does well and have high expectations for the future.

The school promotes community cohesion successfully by ensuring that cultural diversity is celebrated well. The school has good links with other local schools and is right to be seeking ways of making links with schools further afield. The governing body is keen to

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become more representative of all the cultures in the school community.

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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
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

Most children join the school working at the expected levels for this age group. They make good progress and attainment is above average when children start in Year 1. Children make particularly good progress in learning to read because staff provide very good instruction in this area of the curriculum and succeed well in helping children to enjoy reading. For example, in one lesson, children were enthusiastic about joining in reading part of a text they had helped to punctuate. Children behave well, especially when working in small groups or on tasks they have chosen for themselves. Praise is used effectively to provide encouragement and help children to become confident. However, there are occasions when they are expected to sit for too long, so that less mature children start to fidget. There are difficulties in providing children with a wide range of purposeful choices indoors and outside, because the class is shared with Year 1 pupils and is used as a hall at certain times of day. Nevertheless, leaders have good plans to improve the balance between teacher-led and independent tasks to put this right and to increase the progress children can make in developing their social skills.

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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

Most parents and carers are pleased with the work of the school and support their children well at home and by helping at school. They make positive comments such as, 'We couldn't be happier with the teachers' enthusiastic, dedicated and caring attitude' and 'The school has a great community feel. All members of staff are very approachable.' A very few expressed concerns over the way the school deals with special educational needs. Assessment information suggests that pupils with special educational needs make good progress, although the school is aware that more information could be made available to inform parents and carers about the process of assessing and supporting these pupils.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Mary Towerton 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 inspector received 24 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 42 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	17	71	6	25	1	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	22	92	1	4	1	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	16	67	7	29	0	0	1	4
My child is making enough progress at this school	20	83	3	13	0	0	1	4
The teaching is good at this school	21	88	2	8	0	0	1	4
The school helps me to support my child's learning	17	71	6	25	0	0	1	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	21	88	2	8	1	4	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)	14	58	7	29	0	0	1	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	83	2	8	1	4	1	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	15	63	6	25	2	8	1	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	63	7	29	0	0	2	8
The school is led and managed effectively	20	83	2	8	0	0	2	8
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	20	83	2	8	0	0	2	8

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.



6 November 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of The Mary Towerton School, Stokenchurch HP14 3XN

Thank you for being so helpful during my visit. I am pleased that you enjoy coming to this good school.

These are the best things about your school:

- You learn quickly because teachers give you interesting things to do.
- You are right when you told us that your teachers look after you very well and help you to feel safe.
- You behave well and are good at staying healthy. It is good that you help to grow your own vegetables.
- Your headteacher and other leaders know what needs to be done to make the school even better.

These are the things we have asked your school to do next:

- Help you to improve your writing by giving you interesting things to write about in subjects other than literacy and showing you how you can make your writing better.
- Give those of you in Reception more opportunities to decide for yourselves what you are going to do and learn.
- Make sure that information on how well you are all doing is kept together so that leaders can check that everyone is learning quickly.

Thank you again for talking with me about your school and showing me your work. You could help your teachers by making sure you always follow the advice they give you about how to do better work next time.

Yours sincerely

Alison Cartlidge

Lead inspector

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