

St Mark's CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114545
Local Authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	338396
Inspection dates	18–19 March 2010
Reporting inspector	George Logan

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	197
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr Brian Twohig
Headteacher	Dr Sharon-Marie Coombes
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2007
School address	Manor Road Brighton BN2 5EA
Telephone number	01273 605588
Fax number	01273 623410
Email address	head@stmarks.brighton-hove.sch.uk

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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

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors spent just under half their time looking at pupils' learning, visiting 13 lessons taught by seven different staff. They held meetings with the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and another governor, staff and pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' books, records of their progress, lesson planning, playtime activities and the school's self-evaluation documents, including records of teaching and the main improvement plan. Inspection questionnaires were received from pupils, staff and from 32 parents and carers.

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

- how consistently pupils make progress through the school, particularly in Early Years Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2
- how consistent and effective the teaching is and how well staff use assessment to plan work for pupils at the right level
- the effectiveness of school leaders, including middle managers and governors, in raising achievement
- how successful the school has been in promoting better attendance among pupils.

Information about the school

This is a slightly smaller than average primary school. It serves a socially and economically diverse residential area in the eastern suburbs of Brighton. Most children join the Early Years Foundation Stage unit in the Nursery class. There are relatively few pupils from minority ethnic groups. Very few pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is much higher than that found in most schools. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, more than two thirds of those on roll, is extremely high. The great majority of these have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties or speech and language difficulties. Of the others, most have moderate learning difficulties. The school's philosophy centres on addressing pupils' emotional needs to ensure that they maintain their engagement with education and facilitating effective learning. To that end, the school makes substantial provision to ensure pupils' inclusion, through the use of learning mentors, counsellors and support staff. The school recently gained the Inclusion Quality Mark.

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

The school provides well for its pupils and community, sometimes in very challenging circumstances. Parents and carers recognise the school's considerable commitment to pupils' well-being and personal development. Consequently, most pupils enjoy school, attend often and feel very safe. Pupils build good social skills, show positive attitudes to learning and behave well. Their good understanding of healthy lifestyles is only occasionally reflected in their chosen diet. A core of persistent non-attenders has a negative impact on attendance figures. However, this does not affect the progress of the great majority of pupils who attend regularly. The school employs many strategies to address the high level of social and emotional needs among the pupils. For many, this means a planned, relatively slow start in school with learning accelerating rapidly as they get older. From very low standards on entry, children make steady progress through Nursery and Reception. Although attainment remains below the expected level for most children by the end of Reception, the reorganised Early Years Foundation Stage unit has emerging strengths, particularly in the good teaching and in the positive relationships being fostered. Though inconsistent in Years 1 and 2, progress accelerates as pupils move through the school, so that, by the end of Year 6, attainment is broadly average. This represents good progress for most pupils and a significant improvement on the low attainment of past years. The good curriculum secures increasingly sound basic skills in literacy and numeracy, encourages pupils to build independent learning skills and provides well for those with additional learning needs through the deployment of skilled learning mentors. Extra-curricular provision is good, while other aspects contribute strongly to pupils' good personal development. There is embedded good practice in most aspects of marking and assessment. Teachers use assessment well to check learning and to plan lessons. However, the marking of written work varies in rigour. Individual targets for improvement exist, but are not used consistently between classes and so have a variable impact on the rates of pupils' progress. Senior leaders provide a clear direction for the school. While there has been some instability in the governing body, statutory duties are fulfilled. The engagement with partner institutions within the local cluster, with secondary schools and support agencies is good. Pupils have satisfactory opportunities to learn about the diversity of life in the United Kingdom. Rising attainment at Year 6, the appointment and retention of able and experienced staff, extensive systems to support pupils' personal development and a clear awareness of what it needs to do next, all indicate that the school has good capacity for improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Seek, in continued cooperation with the local authority, to resolve the issues around the low attendance of a small group of pupils with high levels of absence.
- Ensure that younger pupils make consistently good progress by:
 - extending existing good practice in the marking of pupils' written work, so that pupils are clear as to what they need to do next
 - using pupils' individual learning targets more effectively to bring about accelerated and consistent progress.

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

Attainment has risen steadily over the last three years and, although slightly higher in English and science than in mathematics, is broadly average by the end of Year 6. In spite of very low standards on entry, pupils make generally good progress through the school. That said, progress is faster in Years 3 to 6 than in Years 1 and 2. This reflects the school's perception that pupils learn rapidly once the social and emotional barriers to learning have been identified and overcome. Pupils with additional learning needs, a high proportion of the total, make good progress because of the effective support they receive. The rich oral curriculum and specialist interventions in Years 1 and 2 provide well for the needs of the many pupils who enter Year 1 with speech and language deficits. As a result, these pupils are much better placed to tackle the formal curriculum in Year 2. Thorough tracking, specific small group teaching and a nurturing environment combine to promote good progress. The school supports pupils whose learning is affected through persistent absence and regularly evaluates the impact of additional support to ensure that it is effective. In lessons, activities are generally well matched to pupils' needs. Pupils respond particularly well when the pace is brisk and expectations are high. Lower attaining pupils are well supported by adults, while more able pupils are expected to work independently and for sustained periods. This was evident in a Year 2 literacy lesson where several pupils wrote independently for a substantial period of time. Teachers challenge pupils effectively through asking open-ended questions which invite an extended response. This was a strong feature of a successful Year 6 literacy lesson, where pupils were asked to generate back stories for crime scenarios which would form the basis for some extended journalistic writing. The school's calm, positive ethos promotes a strong sense of inclusiveness and responsibility for one another. It works with increasing success to develop links with the community beyond the school. Pupils really like their school and there have been few exclusions recently. The school council plays an active part in school life, providing a good forum for pupils' views to which the school responds. Older pupils demonstrate good social skills, eagerly accept responsibility around the school and act as playground 'buddies'. It is to the school's credit that, despite the low attendance of a few pupils that depresses the overall figures, learning and progress are good overall and standards in Year 6 continue to rise.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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	3
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	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Staff show considerable cohesion as a team. Effective management of pupils' behaviour supports a very positive environment for learning. Teachers have a very constructive outlook and this engages pupils' enthusiasm successfully. Relationships are a strength and this is reflected in pupils' very good behaviour and their mature attitudes to learning. Teachers promote some opportunities for pupils to work independently, so that they develop skills in organising and recording their work. This is evident, for example, in science and topic work. Teaching assistants are very well deployed to support learners, both those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who learn quickly. While the marking of work is thorough in some classes, practice across the school is inconsistent. In addition, while individual learning targets exist, these are implemented differently from class to class, which causes their impact upon pupils' progress to be uneven and generally not as good as it should be. The school has many curricular accreditations, recognising the quality of provision in, for example, basic skills and the creative arts. While the curriculum primarily aims to develop key skills in literacy and numeracy, it supports pupils' personal development with equal commitment. Though still satisfactory, the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum successfully promotes children's social skills and their knowledge of phonics. Alongside discrete subject teaching, a range of cross-curricular creative themes contributes to the development of thinking and research skills. Small group interventions are precisely

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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targeted on pupils’ specific needs in personal development, speech and language or in basic literacy and numeracy skills. Good personal, social, health and citizenship education, together with many visits and visitors which enhance the curriculum, strongly promotes pupils’ personal development. There is a wide range of well-supported extra-curricular clubs. Staff have an exceptionally close knowledge of the needs of pupils and their families and support those in difficulties extremely well. The school works well with a wide range of agencies and in-house provision, such as the learning mentor team. This effectively supports the health, social or behavioural needs of pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable. In a diverse community, often facing significant external pressures, the school works very hard to raise attendance. Most parents and carers ensure that their children attend frequently. However, the response by a very small number of families where attendance remains low does not reflect the extent of the school’s efforts.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
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?

The headteacher and senior leadership team have been highly successful in developing those aspects of provision, such as counselling, which have such a positive impact on pupils’ well-being and personal development. Several influential partnerships have been implemented with other schools and with a range of health and welfare providers, all of which give positive support to pupils’ achievement and well-being. Although standards have risen significantly at Year 6, progress and outcomes are not yet so consistent for the younger pupils. School leaders recognise the need to set more challenging targets for these pupils. Middle managers, some of whom are relatively new, are effective, with a clear view of how further improvements can be achieved. Attracting suitable governors has been a challenge and there have been several recent changes. However, a core team of committed governors visit the school regularly and are closely involved in shaping its future direction. They are less familiar with pupils’ attainment and this constrains the extent of the challenge which they provide. They do, however, ensure that statutory requirements are met, including the good procedures for safeguarding pupils. Roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding are clearly defined. Potential discrimination is tackled resolutely and equality of opportunity is promoted well. The school promotes community cohesion satisfactorily and is closely involved with parents and carers and the local community, as in the SPLASH initiative, which enables parents

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and carers from all backgrounds to spend time in the classroom, helping to build positive relationships. Pupils have fewer planned opportunities to engage with the diverse cultures of the United Kingdom, although there is a well-developed link with a school in China, with others planned.

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	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	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

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter Nursery with skills and knowledge that are very low in relation to the levels expected for their age. A high proportion have weaknesses in personal and social development and in all aspects of communication, particularly speech and language. Good induction arrangements ensure that children feel safe and settle quickly, are well cared for and build excellent relationships with staff. They behave well and play together confidently. Nursery provision supports children's social development well. Children make at least satisfactory progress across the areas of learning, although their attainment is still well below the expected level by the end of the Reception Year, particularly in reading and writing. Occasionally, the teaching does not provide sufficient challenge to engage able pupils and this constrains their progress. Although the dedicated outdoor area is used well to promote learning, children do not always have enough opportunities to make independent choices in the classroom. There is a significant amount of good teaching in both Nursery and Reception. However, the combination of formerly discrete classes into a restructured open-plan Early Years Foundation Stage unit in the current year has necessitated much reorganisation and adjustment and this has affected children's progress. Nevertheless, systematic teaching

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ensures, for example, that children have a growing, and sometimes secure, knowledge of sounds and letters, although this has yet to have a full impact on their emerging reading and writing skills. There are good systems for observing and assessing children’s knowledge and progress. The school recognises the need for increased moderation to ensure that it is not under-valuing children’s skills and attainment as they leave Reception.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Although a relatively small number of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire, virtually all are very happy with the school. One parent said, ‘My child finds school both interesting and exciting. Well done, St Mark’s!’ Parents and carers greatly appreciate the school’s responsiveness to the social needs of their children and the extensive support it provides for their social and academic development. The only minor criticism concerns the school’s readiness to listen to parents’ and carers’ views. This was discussed with the school. School leaders feel that they work hard to engage with parents and carers, but recognise the importance of sustaining regular communication. Overall, parents and carers feel that this is an extremely caring school where pupils’ personal development is strongly supported. Inspection findings largely endorse these positive views.

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 32 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 197 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	24	75	8	25	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	18	56	14	44	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	16	50	14	44	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	15	47	17	53	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	17	53	14	44	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	15	47	16	50	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	12	38	20	63	0	0	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)	12	38	19	59	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	13	41	19	59	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	56	12	38	2	6	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	47	17	53	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	18	56	14	44	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	22	69	10	31	0	0	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.



22 March 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's CofE Primary School, Brighton, BN2 5EA

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you around the school and watching you at work in your lessons. We found that yours is a good school, which looks after you particularly well.

Our main findings are these:

- you behave very well, are committed to learning and work hard
- most of you now reach the standards expected by the end of Year 6
- you feel that teachers make lessons enjoyable and support you well in your learning
- those of you who are older make particularly good progress
- the adults make sure that you are cared for very well
- you feel very safe and have a satisfactory understanding of the importance of eating healthily
- the curriculum is good, you enjoy a good range of visits, and very many of you get involved in clubs and extra activities
- those of you who find learning difficult get a great deal of extra help, so that you generally make good progress
- school leaders work hard to ensure that you are safe and well looked after.

We are asking the school to make the following changes so that you do even better:

- make sure that you all attend school as often as possible
- ensure that teachers give you clear guidance about how you can improve when they mark your work and also help you to make better use of your individual learning targets so that your progress is consistent across the school.

You can help by continuing to work hard and do your best. We hope that you will have every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

George Logan

Lead inspector

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