

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 115155 |
| Local Authority | Essex |
| Inspection number | 338520 |
| Inspection dates | 14–15 December 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Selwyn Ward |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 4–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 123 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Susie Diggons |
| Headteacher | Surge Dhanda |
| Date of previous school inspection | 5 May 2007 |
| School address | Castle Street Saffron Walden Essex |
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector in the school for two days and a second additional inspector at the school for half a day. Inspectors visited parts of 10 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They looked at samples of pupils' work, analysis of the tracking of pupils' progress, school policies and procedures, school leaders' and local authority monitoring, school improvement plans, risk assessments and the questionnaires received from pupils, staff and 71 parents and carers.

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

- how well boys and girls of different abilities have progressed during their time at the school
- how staff support pupils who need extra help with their learning, including those with special educational needs and behavioural difficulties, and those learning English as an additional language
- the impact of leaders' and governors' monitoring and the measures they have taken to drive school improvement.

Information about the school

In this small school, the great majority of pupils are White British but a growing number of pupils have joined the school from other European countries. The proportion of pupils learning English as an additional language is now a little above average. Although the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average, an above average proportion have a statement of special educational need. Since the last inspection, the school has been through a number of temporary changes of leadership until the appointment of the current headteacher in April 2008. Other members of the leadership team have joined the school in the past year. St Mary's has an Eco-Schools award and it has been part of the Improving Schools Programme (ISP) - a government initiative aimed at raising standards in English and mathematics.

A pre-school and before- and after-school care clubs share the school site. These are independently managed and have been separately inspected.

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

'The school has come on in leaps and bounds.' This comment from a parent sums up the views of the many who wrote to describe all the improvements they have seen at St Mary's over the past 18 months. Gaps in and several changes of temporary leadership had taken their toll, but the headteacher and new leadership team have drawn well on local authority support to tackle these weaknesses. They have succeeded in creating a positive climate for learning where pupils grow in confidence and increasingly work hard and do their best. Attainment is in line with the national average, and this represents satisfactory achievement in relation to pupils' starting points on entry to the school.

Careful monitoring has enabled leaders to give teachers helpful feedback on their teaching which is satisfactory, and has contributed to its improvement. However, leaders have an overly positive view of the effectiveness of some lessons. For example, some are judged to be good when pupils' progress is only satisfactory. Pupils are encouraged to share their ideas with others but in some lessons opportunities to practise their speaking and listening skills are missed because teachers are overly directive or answer their own questions. The school's push on marking means that pupils know the next steps they need to concentrate on to improve their work, but teachers do not always give them the opportunity to reflect on what teachers write in their books or respond to these comments. Teachers do not always expect sufficient quality or quantity of work from their most-able pupils particularly when the whole class is given similar work to do. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities generally make good progress because they benefit from carefully targeted support that helps them to move their learning on. Those pupils who join the school part-way through their primary education, including those new to learning English are helped to make broadly similar progress to their peers. A parent of a child new to Key Stage 2 told inspectors, 'My child has settled in at St Mary's very quickly and already feels like she belongs. I put this down to the safe, caring atmosphere that this school provides.'

Teachers are especially effective in motivating their pupils. They describe how teachers 'help you if you get stuck' and appreciate the clear and consistent systems of rewards and sanctions that have resulted in a dramatic turnaround in behaviour. A 'zero tolerance' policy led to a period of high exclusion rates, but the success of the policy is evident in both the good behaviour seen in lessons and around the school and the lack of exclusions this year. Staff all share in the school's ambitious aim to 'aspire for excellence in a Christian learning environment'. Some of the school's self-evaluation grades are generally accurate; the success of leaders' actions in driving forward change for the better demonstrate the school's capacity for good continued improvement. As a parent explained, 'The school is improving but it takes time. There is still a way to go

but the school is definitely moving in the right direction.'

Pupils attendance is satisfactory. They appreciate the opportunities they have to learn about different cultures and ways of life, including among the many now represented within the school community. They confirm how well staff look after them. As a result, they feel very safe and they, in turn look out for and after one another in this caring community. Older pupils from Years 4 to 6 especially enjoy the opportunities they have to help children in Reception and Years 1 and 2. Parents express particular appreciation of this, and they also attest to the rapid progress their children are making this year in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By the end of the summer term 2010, accelerate pupils' progress in Key Stages 1 and 2 by:
 - in all lessons, matching work to pupils' different capabilities
 - setting more-able pupils clear expectations of the quality and quantity of their work
 - ensuring that teachers' explanations do not inhibit opportunities for pupils to practise their speaking and listening skills
 - making time available for pupils to read, reflect on and respond to the advice and instructions that teachers give them in their marking.
- By the end of the spring term 2010, focus leaders' monitoring of lessons on the progress that all pupils make.
- 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

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Boys and girls make at least satisfactory progress in lessons. In a small minority of lessons observed by inspectors, the rate of progress was good. Progress is especially good for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those who need extra help in managing their behaviour. Those who join the school part-way through their primary education, including those who come with very little English, are helped to make similar progress to their peers. Rates of progress are improving across the school as a result of better teaching. Parents appreciate this, but some are understandably ambitious for able children to be pushed to do better. One wrote to express the view that, 'The quality and quantity of work that my child generates is not as good as it could be. On several occasions, I have been told my child is "where they should be" but I don't feel that is good enough.'

A notable strength of St Mary's is its success in developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is evident in the good relationships between pupils from a range of different cultural backgrounds in the school. Parents described how, 'Our

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

children feel a part of the school community and have many friends across the age ranges.' Another wrote to praise the way, 'My son has grown in confidence since joining the school.' The palpable improvement in pupils' attitudes and behaviour is illustrated well by the parent who wrote, 'It is very noticeable that the pupils take a great pride in their school and, whenever they represent the school, it is often remarked upon how well behaved they are.'

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

Behaviour management is consistently good across the school. This ensures that pupils feel safe and secure, and are confident that any problems will be swiftly dealt with. Pupils are enthusiastic about the many opportunities they have for physical education and sports, and to use information and communication technology. Imaginative links between subjects enliven the curriculum, so that pupils practise and apply their literacy and other basic skills through the work they do in subjects such as history. In some subjects, including religious education an overdependence on sometimes unchallenging worksheets limits opportunities for more extended writing.

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

Teachers are increasingly involving pupils in evaluating their own learning. At the start of lessons, they routinely set out for pupils their 'learning objectives', although, on occasion, these only show the task for the lesson rather than what the pupils should be learning. Building on elements from the Improving Schools Programme (ISP), staff have concentrated much effort on their use of assessment. This is now used well to keep a careful track of how well each pupil is doing and to direct support where the pupil is identified as at risk of falling behind. For example, tests earlier in the term showed that some girls in Year 6 were not doing as well as they should be in mathematics and action was quickly taken to move their learning on. Teachers' marking is also helping pupils to improve their work, although not all teachers follow up this by ensuring that their pupils take the time to read and respond to their comments. Analysis last year, including that from the last local authority review of the school's progress, showed that spelling had been a weakness, and so teachers have increased the rigour with which they correct pupils' spelling errors.

Although teachers have a detailed picture of how well each pupil is doing, they do not always make full use of this information in planning lessons. This means that activities are not all matched carefully to pupils' different capabilities. Pupils who need extra help with their learning, because of their special educational needs or because they are new to learning English, benefit from well-targeted support from teaching assistants. However, on occasions, work is too easy for more-able pupils. In all classes, teachers make use of 'talk partners' so pupils can share their ideas with others and develop their speaking and listening skills. However, this is less effective when teachers only expect pupils to report back on what they have said themselves, not what their partner has told them.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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| The quality of teaching | 3 |
| 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?

Parents, pupils, staff and governors all readily acknowledge how far the school has come in a relatively short time. As a parent explained, 'Our headteacher has worked very hard to steer the school in the right direction.' Priorities have been well chosen, with leaders drawing well on the support of the local authority. They have worked in close partnership with the local authority without allowing themselves to become dependent on them. Leaders' own monitoring has been key in making improvements to teaching and tackling underachievement, but they acknowledge that their monitoring of lessons

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

does not adequately focus upon the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and the progress they make.

The school's successful promotion of both community cohesion and equality of opportunity is evident in the way it functions as a harmonious and inclusive community where pupils value the fact that, as a Key Stage 1 pupil explained in assembly, 'We are all the same and we are also individuals.' Pupils' horizons have been widened by the school's support for a range of national and international aid charities, and through links that have been developed with a school in Malawi. Thoughtful displays throughout the school help to prolong the impact of initiatives such as International Week, and pupils who have joined the school from overseas are encouraged to share their experiences, which others listen to with keen interest.

Governors are supportive and share leaders' ambition to build on the improvements already in place. They have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are thorough but they have not been rigorous enough in ensuring that all statutory policies, including those for disability access, are reviewed regularly and kept fully up-to-date. They have tended to depend on staff for their information on how well the school is doing, although they have agreed plans to allocate link responsibilities to individual governors so that they have a direct conduit for more first-hand information.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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|--|----------|
| 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 | 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 | 2 |
| The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money | 3 |

Early Years Foundation Stage

'I have been really pleased with how well my daughter has settled in to school, and this is all thanks to the staff and pupils at St Mary's. She loves coming to school every

morning. I have been surprised and pleased at how much her reading and writing have progressed in just a term.' This account from a parent shows how much things have changed in the Early Years Foundation Stage. In the past, children have not made as much progress as they should in the Reception Year, particularly when they have had several mid-year changes of teacher. Children start at the school with skills and capabilities in line with those expected for their ages. Good teaching, based on high expectations of what the children can achieve, means that the children are currently making good progress, with many working at levels that are above those that might be expected for their ages. The work they do on letters and sounds has had a big impact; children already show an awareness of the need when writing to leave finger spaces between words and of when to use capital letters. The children are looked after well in this well run provision. Their social development and confidence is built through opportunities to follow the good model set by pupils in Years 5 and 6. This was particularly commended by a parent who wrote, 'We were very impressed at how the older pupils are involved in looking after the Reception children, and how polite and friendly they are to them and us parents.' Another very satisfied parent told inspectors, 'We are very proud of the person our child is becoming as a product of this school.'

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

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| 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

More than half of the parents responded to the questionnaire and they express positive views about the school and particular appreciation for the many improvements they have witnessed.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided 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 71 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 123 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements | Strongly Agree | | Agree | | Disagree | | Strongly disagree | |
|---|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|---|-------------------|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| My child enjoys school | 47 | 66 | 24 | 34 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school keeps my child safe | 44 | 62 | 25 | 35 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| The school informs me about my child's progress | 36 | 51 | 29 | 41 | 5 | 7 | 0 | 0 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school | 36 | 51 | 29 | 41 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| The teaching is good at this school | 39 | 55 | 28 | 39 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning | 34 | 48 | 35 | 49 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle | 24 | 34 | 44 | 62 | 2 | 3 | 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) | 30 | 42 | 39 | 55 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| The school meets my child's particular needs | 29 | 41 | 38 | 54 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour | 31 | 44 | 30 | 42 | 6 | 8 | 2 | 3 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns | 21 | 30 | 40 | 56 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 8 |
| The school is led and managed effectively | 28 | 39 | 38 | 54 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school | 38 | 54 | 31 | 44 | 1 | 1 | 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

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|----------------------------|--|
| 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.



16 December 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Saffron Walden CB10 1BQ

Thank you for making us welcome when we came to visit your school. We were very pleased to see how well behaved you all are. You enjoy the interesting things you get to do and you feel safe at school because you all get on together so well and because the staff take such good care of you.

Many of you told us how much you think your school has improved, and your parents echoed this view. You are right. The school has certainly picked up after the difficulties it had when there was no permanent headteacher. The children in Reception are now getting off to a really good start. Through the rest of the school, you are all doing reasonably well and reaching the standards you should by the end of Year 6. Those of you who need extra help with your learning do especially well because staff give you just the right amount of support. We have suggested some ways of helping you all to speed up your progress. In particular, we have asked your teachers to be sure to give you all work that stretches you. Sometimes, when everyone in the class does the same work, it is too easy for some of you. Some of you could stretch yourselves more too. We have asked your teachers to encourage you in this by always giving you a clear indication of how much you should be writing or how many sums you should complete in your lessons. We have asked that when your headteacher and other staff visit each other's lessons, they especially look out for how well each of you are learning.

Your teachers know that helping you to develop your speaking and listening skills is one of the keys to further improving your writing, so we have asked them to give you more opportunities for this. Some of you told me how much your teachers' marking was helping you to improve your work. That is certainly true. We have asked the school to make sure, however, that you always have time to respond to your teachers' comments. You can help with this too by reading their comments carefully and doing your best to follow their advice.

Thank you again for being so friendly and helpful on our visit. We hope you have a happy new year.

Yours sincerely

Selwyn Ward

Lead inspector

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