

St Mark's Church of England Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115712
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	338643
Inspection dates	22–23 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Michael Merchant

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	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Paul Harris
Headteacher	L Bailey
Date of previous school inspection	20 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 15 lessons and observed eight teachers. They held meetings with a governor, staff and groups of pupils. They also talked to some parents and carers who were present at the start and finish of the school day. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at its improvement plan, minutes of governors' meetings, data on pupils' progress, records of the monitoring of the quality of teaching, and a range of school policies. They also analysed questionnaires received from 83 parents and carers and 100 pupils.

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

- pupils' attainment and progress, particularly of girls and higher attaining pupils
- how well the teaching takes account of the needs of these groups of pupils and how well teachers help all pupils to improve their work
- the effectiveness of the curriculum at motivating and inspiring all pupils and providing challenge and interest for all pupils
- the effectiveness of middle leaders and governors in checking attainment, progress and teaching and contributing to the school's improvement.

Information about the school

This school is similar in size to most other primary schools. The very large majority of pupils are of White British heritage and the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is much lower than is typically found. There are below-average numbers of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities, mainly moderate learning difficulties, is similar to that typically found but the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is well below average.

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 are right to be proud of St Mark's and relish all it has to offer. By the time pupils leave in Year 6 they are confident, well-rounded young people, ready to play their full part in the world beyond school. One parent summed up the views of many when saying, 'St Mark's is a brilliant school; it provides a safe, stimulating learning environment for my child.'

Pupils join the school with attainment that is broadly that expected for their age. By the end of Year 6, attainment has risen and is above average. This represents good progress and achievement from pupils' starting points and the vast majority of pupils meet, or exceed, their challenging targets. Above-average numbers of pupils attain the expected standards in English and mathematics, but too few attain the highest levels. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good, and often very good, progress. Pupils have an excellent understanding for their age as to how to stay safe. A very positive atmosphere permeates the school and relationships are exceptionally strong. Consequently, pupils have a high regard for both their classmates and for the adults who work with them. All adults work together extremely well to ensure that all pupils, whatever their difficulties or disabilities, are able to take full advantage of everything the school has to offer. Pupils' joy of school is palpable and is evident in the ever-improving attendance rate, which is very high.

The curriculum ensures that learning is meaningful and fun. It usually matches pupils' needs well. Links between subjects have yet to be fully exploited to provide even more opportunities for pupils to practise skills such as literacy and numeracy as well as those of research and enquiry. Teachers ensure that pupils are well motivated and are eager to contribute to lessons. They use questioning in lessons skilfully to promote learning and to analyse and improve pupils' performance. Teachers mark books carefully and regularly. As a result, the advice teachers give to pupils as to how to improve their work is effective and most pupils are clear as to the next steps in their learning. In a minority of lessons, learning is held back because teachers do not always ensure that pupils 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 room to fine tune the use of assessment information to ensure that the tasks they set in lessons provide maximum challenge for the high-flying pupils.

The driving force behind the school's success is undoubtedly the highly effective and dedicated headteacher. She has led the school for a number of years with unflagging enthusiasm and determination but does not work in isolation. She is very well supported by a talented deputy headteacher and senior team and encourages all staff to be creative in their own way. The governing body supports the school well and plays a key

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role in promoting safeguarding and links with parents. However, governors have yet to evaluate the work of the school fully and systematically or to play an active part in setting school priorities. School self-evaluation is accurate and, most importantly, the school knows exactly what to do further to sustain its journey towards excellence. This, together with the successful action leaders have taken to ensure improvement since the last inspection, means the capacity to improve further is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on existing practice to improve the quality of teaching and learning 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 pupils more responsibility for their own learning by encouraging them to be more active and inquisitive in class.
- Improve the curriculum by strengthening the links between subjects, in particular to enhance further pupils' skills of independent learning through research and enquiry.
- Build on the individual skills and expertise of governors to ensure they play a robust and strong role in shaping the strategic direction of the school.

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

The work seen by inspectors in lessons confirms the overall picture of consistently good progress. Pupils greatly enjoy school, grow in confidence and develop positive attitudes to learning. Boys and girls achieve well because most teachers expect much of their pupils and explain complicated ideas well. In an outstanding literacy lesson in Year 5, pupils were learning at a blistering pace because of the teacher's exceptionally high expectations of what he wanted them to learn and the challenging and fun tasks he set for them. Too few pupils, however, are working at the highest levels in English, mathematics and science. The school is very conscious of the needs of all pupils and so there is very little difference in the progress made by most groups of pupils. For example, the work is made interesting for boys and girls and the school works very effectively to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who enter the school with particularly low levels of attainment. Detailed plans to support these groups, coupled with thoughtful deployment of learning assistants and timely interventions, ensure that they make similar progress to that of their classmates. Some higher attaining pupils, however, are not being stretched as much as they could.

Pupils have a well-developed understanding of right and wrong, reflecting the school's strong Christian ethos, and appreciate and enjoy the wonders of life around them. The behaviour of pupils in lessons and around the school is good and often impeccable, although some can be boisterous at play time and at the end of the day. Pupils readily explain the value of adopting healthy lifestyles, the need for exercise and have an excellent understanding for their age of how to be safe in school and the wider community. They take advantage of the many opportunities to participate in the

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community and are well informed about other peoples' needs. Pupils develop good social and interpersonal skills and relish working collaboratively. This, together with above-average standards in the key skills in English and mathematics, means that they are well prepared for the next stages of their lives.

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	2
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	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	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The carefully structured curriculum contributes strongly to pupils' learning because the interests of most pupils are well met. The curriculum supports pupils' personal development well through very effective personal, social and health education, and there is an excellent focus on using visits to widen pupils' life experiences. In particular, the arts and music are very well promoted. However, the school recognises that links between subjects are not fully developed. Therefore, pupils have fewer opportunities to become even more independent by applying their knowledge and skills across a range of subjects. Parents agree that children are looked after exceptionally well. Child protection procedures are rigorous and the care for vulnerable pupils is outstanding. Excellent links with specialists help pupils with their learning, social skills and emotional development.

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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Support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is especially strong and helps them to make good, and sometimes excellent, progress.

The quality of teaching and engagement with pupils and their learning are good. Typically, lessons are fast paced and fun. Adults ask perceptive questions and these help pupils to think and use more varied vocabulary in their answers. Effective use of talking partners, drama and role play help pupils make good progress in their speaking and writing. In the most effective lessons, teaching is lively, tasks and concepts are clearly explained, and activities provide very effective challenge so that all pupils learn at a swift pace. The school has set up thorough systems to check on pupils' progress and these are used well to ensure that none is in danger of falling behind and to enable teachers to consistently set the next steps for each pupil's learning. Pupils have a good understanding of the quality of their work and what they need to do next in order to move forward. However, not all teachers are explicit in sharing their expectations for high-level attainment in lessons until group work begins and this is a missed opportunity to promote better progress in the earlier part of lessons for this group of learners. Teachers sometimes talk too much which limits the time pupils are actively and independently learning, resulting in slower progress and less time for pupils to articulate and build upon what they have learnt by the end of the lesson.

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?

Clear-sighted leaders and managers are at the heart of the school's success. The headteacher works tenaciously to improve pupils' educational opportunities. She has set a precise path for improvement based on accurate self-evaluation and embedding initiatives which have made a positive difference to pupils' achievements. Leaders communicate high expectations persuasively to staff so that all have a shared sense of direction and feel part of a successful team. The senior team checks the school's performance rigorously, offers constructive advice and training and uses its highly effective teachers well to extend and share good practice. In this way, the quality of teaching and learning is steadily improving. A climate has been created where everyone is trying hard to make the school even better. Consequently, teamwork is strong, staff morale is high and pupils' progress is accelerating. Members of the senior leadership team and the subject leaders fulfil their responsibilities well. There is no hint of complacency and there is a determination from staff at all levels to sustain and build

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upon the gains of recent years. In this way, the school promotes equality for all pupils. 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 the inspection. They are very supportive of the school but are insufficiently involved in prioritising improvement. Their contribution to the school's improvement plan is light, and their approach to evaluating the effectiveness of some policies and procedures is insufficiently rigorous.

In this inclusive school, every child matters and individual needs are considered very specifically. The school works in outstanding partnership with external agencies to secure extra support for those pupils who need it. Community cohesion is good. Leaders have worked tirelessly to ensure that pupils are developing into caring citizens who respect and value the views of others and that a set of common, shared values is embedded in every child. There is strong involvement with the local community and other schools abroad. There is a clear recognition that because the school is situated in a predominantly White British community, it needs to develop more effective ways of widening pupils' first-hand experiences of the range of cultures present in the United Kingdom today.

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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
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	2

Views of parents and carers

The school and its headteacher clearly enjoy the confidence and support of those parents who returned the questionnaire. A number of individual comments reflected the high-quality care, support and guidance given to pupils, particularly to those with special

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educational needs and/or disabilities, and the good progress made by pupils. The inspectors agree with these views. The parental criticisms were few and these were followed up as inspection trails during the visit. For instance, a small minority of parents and carers raised concerns regarding instances of inappropriate behaviour. Inspectors found behaviour in class and around the school to be good. A higher proportion of parents felt that the school could keep them better informed about their child's progress and to involve them more in decisions that are taken at school. Inspectors agree with these views and the school recognises that it can do more to communicate more effectively with parents. The views of the parents interviewed informally in the playground confirm the positive responses in the questionnaires.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mark's Church of England Junior 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 83 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 234 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	31	37	49	59	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	40	48	42	51	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	21	25	49	59	11	13	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	22	27	51	61	7	8	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	26	31	50	60	3	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	18	22	54	65	10	12	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	18	22	56	67	7	8	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)	29	35	43	52	3	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	23	28	48	58	7	8	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	27	45	54	7	8	3	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	24	51	61	6	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	35	42	37	45	7	8	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	36	43	37	45	6	7	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

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

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

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

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



24 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's Church of England Junior School, Cheltenham GL51 6NU

Thank you for the warm welcome and help you gave us when we visited your school recently. We really enjoyed meeting you and talking to so many of you. We were really impressed with how polite and well behaved you are and how much you told us you enjoy school. 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.

- Your personal development is good. You behave well around the school and in your classes and you look after each other so well. You relish working in groups and helping each other to learn and you readily help your classmates when they find things difficult.
- You make good progress as you move through the school and your achievement is getting better all the time. By the time you leave at the end of Year 6, you reach standards that are higher than those in most other schools. This is because your teachers teach you well and you also work hard.
- Your teachers and other adults take excellent care of you. They make sure that everyone feels very safe and secure. They also give you a lot of advice about how you can improve your work.
- Your headteacher and all your other teachers know exactly how to make sure that your school continues to improve.

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

- Ensure that more of you reach the higher levels in the national tests that you take at the end of Year 6, by planning work for you that is not too easy or too hard, but just right for you and really makes you think.
- Make sure that you are able to learn more things on your own.
- We want governors to be in a good position to check the policies are working well and help the school plan for the future.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Merchant

Lead inspector

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