

St Mary's Infants' School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117384
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	338997
Inspection dates	24–25 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Paul Canham

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	169
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Judy Adams
Headteacher	Val Morris
Date of previous school inspection	28 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 11 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, parents and a group of pupils, and talked with pupils in lessons. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including assessment and attendance information, lesson plans, safeguarding arrangements, school development planning, governing body minutes and pupils' work. Inspectors also scrutinised the 52 questionnaires received from parents, as well as those from staff and a sample of pupils.

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

- the extent to which the school is accelerating achievement, particularly for boys and the most able pupils
- how successfully the school promotes pupils' experience and appreciation of cultures and faiths other than their own, in this country and beyond
- how effectively the leadership team and the governing body are influencing the school's direction and ensuring sustained improvement.

Information about the school

Almost all the pupils at this smaller than average sized infants' school are from families of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement, is above average and increasing. It is significant in some year groups where proportions are between 27 and 42 per cent.

The school has achieved National Healthy Schools status, Activemark and the silver Eco award.

A children's centre was recently opened on the school site, but this is not managed by the governors and was not inspected.

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

This is a good school. There are signs that substantial improvements have been made since the last inspection. The school has several outstanding features, which include the exceptionally good start children get in Reception and the school's very supportive environment. This places a high priority on enhancing pupils' self-esteem and in developing their confidence. Consequently, pupils have outstanding attitudes to school and work exceptionally well in pairs and independently. They have an excellent awareness of how to keep safe and understanding of healthy lifestyles. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. One parent's comment sums up the views of others: 'We feel that the school offers a very caring environment, where all children are valued and encouraged to do their best.'

Together with close support from well-informed governors, the headteacher has developed a school that is committed to gaining the best provision and outcomes for all pupils and their families. Highly committed staff contribute to the school's strong collective leadership. The school has an accurate understanding of where it is now and of the improvements needed. These strengths provide a solid platform for learning and show that it is well placed to move forward successfully. However, the school is aware of the need to make better use of the information it collects on pupils' progress to inform governors and guide development.

Children start school with a narrow range of skills, with particular weaknesses in communication. Improvements are such that standards for the majority of pupils have been lifted to average levels by the end of Year 2. The school has now established systems that pay particular attention to pupils' needs much earlier. Consequently, attainment levels rose sharply last year and pupils, currently in Year 2, are on course to reach similar levels. Boys and girls achieve equally well. Subjects are frequently linked in innovative ways and detailed assessment procedures support successful teaching; this motivates and challenges pupils with interesting activities. Good, and sometimes outstanding, teaching and the pupils' eagerness to become involved, result in good progress. Pupils benefit from well-paced lessons where they enjoy using their own ideas and working together. Typically, activities are well matched to pupils' prior attainment. Intervention work, including focused support for individual pupils, is successfully making up for lost ground in learning for those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Clubs and performance activities are popular and provide pupils with good opportunities to develop their confidence, and their creative and performance skills. While the school has exceptionally good links with outside agencies, local schools and the community, it recognises the need to provide pupils with more opportunities to appreciate and value

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people's backgrounds and communities in other parts of the country and globally.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make better use of the information it collects on pupils' progress to gain a clearer overview of the school's work and guide its strategic development.
 - Extend the school's strategy for community cohesion by creating more opportunities for pupils to appreciate and value people from a wide variety of backgrounds and communities globally.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

The pupils' sheer enjoyment of learning stands out along with their eagerness to become involved in different projects and activities, for example in English and science. Pupils' positive attitudes in lessons are indicators of the good progress they make. In English lessons, pupils are confident when predicting the outcomes of a story and demonstrate a good use of vocabulary and punctuation when writing for different purposes. When working in pairs or small groups, pupils are very supportive of each other and show a great deal of independence. Pupils also demonstrate much pride in getting the tasks right and explaining the reasons behind their answers, for example, in science and during topic work. In assembly, pupils sing enthusiastically, tunefully and with considerable self assurance.

Children start school in Reception with a narrow range of skills and lower than expected levels of knowledge and understanding in several key aspects, especially in communication. From this point, pupils make good, and sometimes very good, progress. In 2009, attainment levels rose sharply and pupils currently in Year 2 are on course to reach similar levels with significant proportions on track to gain levels above those expected of pupils of the same age. The school exceeded its challenging but realistic targets in reading, writing and mathematics in 2009 and this picture is likely to be repeated this year for pupils reaching the higher levels. There are no significant differences between the achievement of different groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Pupils say they thoroughly enjoy coming to school and do well in the nurturing environment. Respect and consideration for each other are at the foundation of the school's work. These strengths underpin the outstanding behaviour of pupils who get on extremely well with each other. Pupils willingly take on responsibility, including acting as monitors and members of the school council. These qualities contribute to the highly supportive school community where: 'Every child matters at this school no matter what their ability,' as one parent reported. The council provides very good opportunities for pupils to represent the views of others, contribute to the smooth running of the school, and help develop leadership qualities. Supported by the school's initiatives to encourage enterprise, including raising money by selling cakes to help fund trips, pupils' personal skills are developing into important attributes for future life. Pupils show exceptionally good levels of understanding about living healthily and personal safety in and out of

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school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
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	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Consistently good, and sometimes outstanding, teaching leads to accelerated learning as pupils move through the school. Key strengths in teaching include planning that is well matched to pupils' learning; a lively pace and precise questioning that probes pupils' understanding. Timely reminders during lessons highlight misunderstandings and quickly guide pupils back on track. However, on occasion, pupils are given a little too long to work by themselves and become restless. Teaching assistants give well informed and close support to individuals including those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The wide range of attractive and informative displays gives an insight into the diversity and richness of the curriculum. It provides a careful balance between basic skills in literacy and numeracy and the development of pupils' performance and creative skills in subjects such as physical education, music, and design and technology. Pupils are given very good opportunities to reinforce their learning and develop skills through topics that

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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successfully link different subjects. The curriculum is under continual review. Strategies, which include giving greater attention to the sounds of letters and writing for different purposes, are having a positive impact on the rate of progress made by pupils earlier in the Key Stage. The curriculum is underpinned by a well planned programme for personal, social and health education. Pupils' learning experiences are further enriched by the use of subject specialists, a wide range of popular clubs, including breakfast club, and trips.

Many aspects of care, guidance and support are outstanding and have a clear impact on improving outcomes for pupils. The exceptional pastoral care for pupils' personal development is recognised and valued by parents and carers: 'St Mary's provides a wonderfully nurturing and supportive environment; my son is thriving....because of this,' one parent reported. The close attention to pupils' health and well-being is reflected in the many opportunities for physical activity and the provision of healthy school meals. Individualised programmes of support are successfully planned for pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable, covering a number of personal and learning needs. These programmes are reinforced by close tracking of each pupil's progress. Well focused individual attention enables those with the greatest needs to gain the confidence and self-esteem to become successful learners.

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's strong leadership and management have been the driving force behind the school's improvement with both good and outstanding outcomes for individuals and groups of learners. These include substantial gains in teaching, the effectiveness of care, support and guidance, and attainment levels that were above average in 2009 and are on course to be repeated this year. With close support from governors and committed staff, the headteacher has established a school that successfully enhances every pupil's self-esteem and develops their confidence. Members of the leadership team and key staff successfully contribute to the school's effectiveness. The school promotes equality and tackles any form of discrimination well. Monitoring procedures are highly effective in identifying the needs of pupils and, as a result, all groups of pupils make good, and sometimes very good, progress. Staff and governors have a clear and accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. However, the school knows that it must make better use of the information it collects on

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pupils' progress to gain a clearer overview of its work, guide planning and ensure sustained improvement.

The governors' strategic involvement ensures that policies are systematically reviewed and resources are closely targeted at individual educational needs. Attention to pupils' safety is integral to the school's work and safeguarding procedures are firmly established. Detailed and well organised procedures ensure that safeguarding arrangements are carefully followed. The school uses well embedded and reliable quality assurance and risk assessment systems. Local services and agencies are used exceptionally well to enhance the well-being of pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Community cohesion is promoted strongly within the school and in the community. Links and partnerships with the church, schools nearby and outside agencies are extensive and show a deep understanding of local needs and challenges. However, the school knows that it must do more to help pupils understand about people's backgrounds and communities in other parts of the United Kingdom and beyond. Parents and carers are very supportive of the school and readily play an active part in events such as the school fete and curriculum evenings. They benefit from regular newsletters and access to the school's website, which is being developed.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Early Years Foundation Stage

Working closely with parents, children's needs are identified early. Outstanding leadership and management makes certain that detailed planning takes very good

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account of their starting points. Children benefit from a highly stimulating and nurturing learning environment where well-planned topics ensure all areas of learning are covered with a particular focus on reading, speaking, listening, writing, and number skills. Adults respond skilfully and sensitively, and exceptionally good support is given to children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Children listen attentively, play together very well, and thoroughly enjoy participating in a wide range of stimulating activities. Children are very keen to explore activities and find things out for themselves while chattering to each other. New experiences, both indoors and outdoors, captivate and fully engage children so they make exceptionally good progress in all areas of learning. Staff give closely targeted support to both teacher-initiated activities and those which children choose for themselves. Children are nurtured from the very start. As a result, they settle quickly, are eager to learn and are very well prepared for entry to Year 1.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

The response rate was similar to that found in most schools and almost all questionnaires were positive. Most of the written comments expressed considerable satisfaction with the school. These included positive remarks about the caring and supportive environment, the quality of the staff, the effectiveness of the school's leadership, and recent improvements to the learning environment.

A very small minority of parents and carers recorded reservations over a very small number of issues, including the way the school deals with unacceptable behaviour. These reservations were not reflected in the very large majority of comments and the inspection found evidence to indicate that the school deals with any unacceptable behaviour in a very effective way that pupils understand and value.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's Infants' 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 52 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 169 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	32	62	17	33	1	2	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	36	69	14	27	2	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	30	58	21	40	1	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	33	63	16	31	1	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	39	75	12	23	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	34	65	16	31	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	37	71	15	29	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)	27	52	23	44	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	30	58	20	38	2	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	25	48	19	37	6	12	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	48	19	37	5	10	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	37	71	9	17	2	4	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	36	69	12	23	3	6	1	2

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.



28 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Infants' School, Hertfordshire, SG7 6HY

We very much enjoyed our visit to your school and thank you for making us feel so welcome. This letter is to tell you about some of the things we found while we were with you. Yours is a good school and you are exceptionally good at helping to make it run smoothly. You told us it is also a place where you want to be, make lots of friends, and enjoy taking part in the many interesting and exciting clubs and activities.

Here are some more important things about your school:

- you make good, and sometimes very good, progress in lessons and you enjoy your work
- your work is often a good standard and it frequently shows creativity and imagination
- you are very considerate towards each other
- staff take exceptionally good care of you, and make sure that you know exactly what to do to keep safe
- you have an excellent understanding of what makes for a healthy lifestyle and healthy eating.

To make things even better for you, your school has been asked to:

- make better use of the information about your progress to help with the school's future work
- help you to understand more about people's backgrounds and communities around the world.

You can help by continuing to work hard at the activities you are given. We wish each one of you every success in your future education and hope that you continue to enjoy learning as much as you do now.

Yours sincerely

Paul Canham

Lead inspector

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