

St Mary's Voluntary Controlled Church of England Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117409
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	339000
Inspection dates	7–8 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Steven Hill

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	232
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Thomson
Headteacher	Andy Cosslett
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 15 lessons, taught by 12 teachers. Meetings were held with staff, governors and groups of pupils. The inspection team observed the school's work and examined a sample of pupils' books. A range of documentation was scrutinised, particularly that concerning keeping pupils safe, and information about their progress. Questionnaires were analysed from staff, older pupils and from 92 parents and carers.

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

- the extent to which teachers are using assessment information to match work to pupils' different needs
- whether the progress of boys, and that of more able pupils, matches that of their classmates
- whether pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and their contribution to the community, have improved since the previous inspection.

Information about the school

This is an average sized junior school. Most pupils are of White British origin, with a few from a range of different minority ethnic groups. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language and none are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. The school hosts before and after school clubs, which are managed by a private provider, and which are inspected separately.

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

St Mary's provides a good education for pupils, so they all achieve well and attainment is above average. The school is a harmonious community where pupils behave well, have good relationships with each other and with staff, and enjoy learning. Pupils' good personal development is greatly enhanced by the good quality of the care, guidance and support provided by the school. There is a good curriculum, which enhances pupils' learning and enjoyment. Good leadership and strong teamwork from all staff have led to major improvements since the last inspection. The achievement of more able pupils has improved and is now good, and a persistent shortfall in the achievement of boys compared to girls has been eliminated.

Much more consistent teaching, particularly in the use of assessment information to match work to pupils' varying needs, has been the key to better achievement. Teachers now routinely prepare different work for pupils of different abilities, so that their progress is good in lessons. This is underpinned by the school's sophisticated systems to keep track of the progress of both individuals and groups. Pupils all produce work at a good standard in relation to their capabilities, although standards of presentation are sometimes weak. A few members of staff are still getting to grips with a new method of gauging pupils' standards in mathematics, with the result that not all data about this subject is reliable. Senior leaders have rightly identified this as a key priority for improvement. The regular and rigorous monitoring of lessons by senior staff has provided clear feedback to teachers to help them improve the consistency of their practice. This has supported the many strengths in teaching, such as the use of a range of strategies to involve all pupils, good classroom management, and clear targets for pupils to aim for. Marking of pupils' books has improved, but still does not consistently tell pupils how they can improve their work.

The school has worked very effectively to increase pupils' understanding of a range of cultures since the last inspection. As a result, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good in all strands, and complements their strong contribution to the school and local communities. The promotion of community cohesion is consequently very good within the school and locally, and has been extended overseas, through an email link with a school in Chile. However, pupils' opportunities to interact with people from different communities in this country are still limited.

Self-evaluation is good and the school has a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, and clear plans to address the latter. Subject leaders provide good support to other teachers, although they have had few opportunities to share their expertise by working alongside colleagues in the classroom. The many improvements made since the last inspection, leading to positive outcomes for pupils, together with accurate

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self-evaluation, show that the school has a good capacity to improve in the future.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve progress further by
 - consolidating teachers' skills in assessing pupils' progress in mathematics, so that assessments are more reliable, and enable a more accurate match of tasks to pupils' needs
 - improving the presentation of pupils' work
 - giving pupils more consistent and detailed feedback when marking their books to help them improve their future work
- Give pupils a better understanding of the wide range of communities in the United Kingdom, particularly by extending opportunities for them to interact directly with a variety of people from contrasting backgrounds.
- Provide more opportunities for subject leaders to share their expertise with colleagues by working alongside them in the classroom.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Standards are significantly above average because all pupils achieve well from their above average starting points. Higher ability pupils, whose progress was a weakness at the last inspection, now make good progress because they are given challenging tasks to complete. Those pupils in the current Year 6, who attained above average standards when they were in Key Stage 1, have made exceptional progress in the last two years. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have also made good progress since the last inspection. This is because they are given work that is modified to meet their needs, and receive extra help from adults when appropriate.

Pupils' good behaviour and strong collaborative skills support their good achievement. During a mathematics lesson in Year 3, pupils made good progress in their measuring skills because the tasks were modified to suit their different abilities. They had good opportunities to use practical equipment, and they cooperated well in pairs, sharing ideas and equipment well. Pupils contribute thoughtfully to discussions, as was seen in an English lesson with Year 6, when they were fully engaged in trying to identify the feelings and motivations of characters in a story. Pupils' written work, whilst generally good in content, is sometimes let down by inconsistent handwriting, or untidiness.

Pupils feel safe in the school because they are confident that the adults look after them well, and know how their actions contribute to their own and their classmates' safety. They are caring of each other, and older pupils are noticeably considerate and tolerant towards younger pupils. A group of pupils in Year 4 agreed the best things about the school included 'very good teachers and nice children,' and that everyone was 'very kind to each other'. Pupils feel they have a good voice in the life of the school and that their views are valued and acted upon, particularly through the school council. They are involved well in events in the locality, and take a pride in the many responsibilities they

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undertake in school as they get older. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay healthy, and join in lively games and sports with energy and enthusiasm. Their positive attitudes, good basic skills and above-average attendance mean they are well prepared for the future, in school and beyond.

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

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have good relationships with pupils and use a range of strategies to engage their interest and enthusiasm. They make good use of discussion and practical, hands-on experiences to ensure that all pupils are involved in what is going on. This was seen very clearly in a science lesson when Year 6 made good progress in learning about solutions, through careful observation, and thoughtful discussion with their friends about what they had seen. Occasionally, the pace of learning slows when pupils spend too long watching and listening, without enough opportunity for active involvement themselves. Good use is made of skilled teaching assistants, particularly to help pupils who might otherwise struggle with their work. Adults are skilled at monitoring pupils' ongoing progress and intervening to address misconceptions, or to challenge pupils to

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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refine their work.

The curriculum now provides well for pupils' varying needs and staff make increasingly good use of links between subjects to make learning more relevant. There are good opportunities to use writing in different styles in a range of subjects, when reporting on science experiments for example. There are good opportunities for pupils to learn different languages, and specialist provision for music and sport helps drive good progress. A good range of extra-curricular activities adds to pupils' interest, and they enjoy the visits they make out. Year 6 particularly value their opportunities to undertake residential trips.

Good behaviour and thoughtful attitudes to each other are consistently reinforced in assemblies and in everyday school interactions, as well as in specific lessons on personal, social and health education lessons. Those pupils who have specific needs or whose circumstances make them vulnerable are cared for well, so they are fully involved in school life and continue to make good progress. Good links with outside agencies and the local authority are used well to support these pupils. Transition arrangements are good, both with the infant school next door, and with the main local secondary school.

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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Clear educational direction from the headteacher and good teamwork from all staff have focused on improving teaching and hence pupils' progress. This has been successful so that there is now a greater consistency in outcomes and provision across the school. In particular, the improved progress of boys illustrates the school's effective commitment to ensuring equal opportunities for all its pupils. The future needs of the school are clearly identified and actions are being taken to address them. The governing body has good systems that give a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and this means that governors are well placed to support the school, and to challenge leaders about performance.

Good links with parents are typified by the regular presentations of work that each class makes to their parents on a half-termly basis. Links with other partners support pupils' well-being and enhance the curriculum, through the expertise in different subjects provided by other schools and organisations. Good links with other schools have supported rigorous moderation of assessment results. Safeguarding procedures are good. All required procedures are in place and implemented thoroughly, and the school

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makes good use of the views of parents and pupils to identify possible issues and take action to address them. There are strong systems to support community cohesion locally and abroad, but opportunities for pupils to interact with people from the wide range of communities in the United Kingdom are still relatively few, and this issue is being addressed by senior staff.

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	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	2

Views of parents and carers

Most parents and carers are very positive about what the school does for their children. They particularly appreciate that their children are safe, the quality of teaching, and how well their children are prepared for the future and encouraged to be healthy. A few parents expressed concern about a number of issues, particularly the information they receive and how they are enabled to contribute to progress, the way poor behaviour is dealt with, and the extent to which parents' and carers' views are considered. The inspection evidence showed that the information given to parents, and the extent to which their views are considered compare favourably to the position in most schools. The ways they are helped to support their children's learning are similar to those found in schools generally. The occasional lapses in behaviour observed by inspectors were dealt with firmly and sensitively by adults. Pupils themselves told inspectors that they were happy with how misbehaviour was handled, so that it did not worry them or interrupt their learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's Voluntary Controlled 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 92 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 232 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	28	30	60	65	4	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	36	39	55	60	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	21	23	57	62	12	13	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	25	27	52	57	10	11	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	27	29	57	62	6	7	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	13	14	63	68	13	14	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	24	64	70	3	3	1	1
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)	21	23	64	70	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	15	16	64	70	6	7	2	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	13	64	70	10	11	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	11	60	65	10	11	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	14	15	62	67	6	7	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	20	22	64	70	4	4	1	1

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.



9 July 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Voluntary Controlled Church of England Junior School, Ware, SG12 0RL

Thank you for your help when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you and watching you at work in lessons. We were pleased to see that your behaviour is good and that you all get on well together. You told us that you enjoy school and we could see why.

Your school has improved since the last inspection and gives you a good education. You are making good progress because the teachers are good at helping you to learn. They have got much better at making sure everyone gets work at the right level, because they keep a careful eye on how each one of you is doing. We have asked them to improve how they assess your work in mathematics, so they can do this even better. We have also asked your teachers to make sure they always tell you how to make your work better when they mark it. You are reaching standards better than those we usually find, although some of you need to be much tidier with your work. The adults all take good care of you and make sure you are safe.

You are learning a lot more about people from around the world, and we have asked the staff to give you more chances to meet with and learn about people from all the different communities in this country.

The adults have worked very hard to make the school better since the last inspection. We have suggested that the teachers should have more chances to work together in the classroom, so they can give each other tips about helping you learn even more. We know you will want to help the adults with this. You can help by keeping up your hard work and good behaviour, and by trying hard to make sure your work is always tidy and well organised.

We hope you carry on enjoying your time in school.

Yours sincerely

Steven Hill

Lead inspector

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