

St Mary's C of E VA Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117497
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	339019
Inspection dates	5–6 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Judi Bedawi

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	168
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roger Dean
Headteacher	Jane Guy
Date of previous school inspection	9 March 2007
School address	Dellsome Lane North Mymms Hatfield
Telephone number	01707690500
Fax number	01707690502
Email address	admin@stmarys565.herts.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' books, displays, a range of school documentation and policies, monitoring records and data on pupils' achievement. Inspectors received and analysed 51 parental questionnaires.

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

- the effectiveness of strategies to improve attendance
- raising achievement and attainment in science and reading
- provision for pupils with a travelling background
- the achievement of girls.

Information about the school

St Mary's is smaller than most other primary schools. Pupils come from the local village and beyond, due to fewer available Reception Class places in surrounding schools. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds with a significant number from the travelling community. An increasing number are from minority ethnic groups, a few of whom are at an early stage of learning English. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs and there is an above average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The headteacher was appointed in January 2008, following several years of staffing and leadership instability. The school has recently gained the Healthy Schools award.

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 is a good school. It provides pupils with a good quality education within a positive learning environment. This enables them to bloom, whatever their needs, background or abilities. They arrive happy and eager to learn. Pupils capture the views of most other pupils and parents, by saying; 'Our school is great, it has improved a lot'. The inspection team agrees with them.

Children get off to a flying start on entering the Reception Class. This is due to the good focus on developing basic language, reading and number skills and in building friendships. Children's starting points vary, year on year but are mostly below age related expectations in language, mathematical and emotional development. Some local children attend the onsite pre-school provision but an increasing number arrive from the wider community with no pre-school experience and weaker communication skills.

Attainment across the school and by the end of Year 6 is broadly average. However standards in English, in mathematics for higher attainers, and for girls, reached above average levels in the Year 6 preliminary 2009 test results. There has been ongoing improvement in Key Stage 2 for all other pupil groups in recent years. Pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well due to skilled one-to-one support. However, pupils perform and progress less well in science due to less developed monitoring and assessment of pupils' progress. Reading dipped this year, apart from for higher attaining girls who reached above average levels. Nonetheless, with the strong focus on individual learning, early support, setting and good teaching, pupils make good progress from their below average starting points.

Staff are confident and competent in their assessment and marking of pupils' work, using the information gained effectively to refine learning for individual pupils and groups. Pupil targets are clear and they generally know how well they are doing, but do not regularly assess their own progress. They think that they do their best and usually work hard. They enjoy learning about, for example, mathematics, history, English and music and love trips that enrich their life experiences and additionally promote community cohesion well.

The quality of pastoral care and support is a real strength of the school, because pupils including the most vulnerable, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils with little or no understanding of English, are empowered by focused support that enables them to concentrate fully on learning. Pupils, including those from the travelling community, are able to catch up with any learning they may have missed by being given extra support. Additional support if needed, extends to, and is valued by, families who typically say 'the staff are passionate about their work and the children.'

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Pupils' personal development is good, characterised by an ethos of care for each other. Attendance has improved and is now good, with a significant reduction in term time holidays. Behaviour is good at work and play and older pupils' behaviour is sometimes outstanding, as they provide exemplary role models for younger pupils.

Partnerships with parents and carers are good with easily accessible information and, for example, in the Reception Class, home school books for parents of children with home languages other than English. The governors are strong advocates for the school within the village community, but do not yet question and robustly challenge senior leaders as well as they might. Additionally, their workload and training programme is not organised effectively enough to ensure that they are 'ahead of the game' in carrying out their duties.

The headteacher and senior leaders have successfully addressed previous inspection issues and now have clear priorities to move the school forward and further raise performance. Standards are rising and attendance is improved. Staff teamwork, including that of middle managers, is good with a positive impact on the school's work and pupils' good progress. Governors provide a positive link to the local community. The school's evaluation of its effectiveness is accurate. Consequently, the school's capacity to improve is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and achievement in reading and science by:
 - monitoring and tracking pupils' progress and attainment in science
 - emulating the good practice in mathematics to review classroom practice in science to promptly identify and fill any gaps in learning
 - focusing more in reading to meet pupils' individual needs and interests, and by involving parents and carers in their children's learning.
 - Develop the role of governors by:
 - using clear action planning to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance.
 - developing robust systems to challenge and hold senior leaders to account
 - review and sustain training requirements to ensure governors fulfil their
 - role and responsibilities.

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

Pupils say that they love school and find learning exciting and fun. They appreciate the way that teachers take the time to explain to them when they sometimes get 'stuck'. Pupils relish challenge, as seen in a particularly demanding 'starter' in a mathematics lesson which they tackled enthusiastically, basking in praise when they succeeded. Pupils make good progress from their below average and, for a few, low starting points

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in the work seen in books and lessons, although there is some fluctuation between cohorts. As they enter Year 1, most pupils have broadly average levels of attainment, but a few continue to develop their basic skills through the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. In Years 3 to 6 and particularly for the oldest pupils, progress accelerates in English and mathematics, leading to above average attainment for increasing numbers of pupils. Those who start school with very limited communication skills or who have entered later into other year groups make good progress from their various starting points. This is due to good and sometimes outstanding teaching. Focused work linked to individual learning needs and Year 5/6 ability grouping in mathematics and English, introduced in September 2009, is already having a positive impact on consolidating skills and raising standards. In 2009, girls' performance significantly improved to be above average in mathematics. Almost all pupils say they enjoy the mathematics quizzes and games. Writing across the school is above average, but reading results dipped for most pupil groups. There is an upward trend over time, with the exception of science where progress and attainment is below average because it has not received the same high level of attention as English and mathematics. The school recognizes science as needing attention.

Pupils work well collaboratively and with good independence, but younger ones have to be reminded to put hands up rather than call out because they are so eager to answer questions. Behaviour is good in lessons and at break times with pupil play leaders organising games for younger ones. There is strong empathy and tolerance between pupils from different backgrounds. They are very supportive of those who are working hard to learn English, who have different cultural backgrounds, including Traveller pupils, or those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Gifted and talented and higher attaining pupils are clearly identified and provided for so that work provides increased challenges that extend their learning and interest. As a result, they make good progress.

Pupils' personal development is good. Their attendance is also good because parents now realise how important it is not to disrupt their children's learning by taking term time holidays. They say they feel very safe, easily able to ask for help to resolve occasional minor differences, if need be. They have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles, diet and exercise and enjoy physical education and sport. They make good contributions to school life and their local community, for example, the school council designed the new wild life area and the school entrance and pupils support local and wider community charities. Acquisition of skills to foster future economic well-being is good, with Year 4 and 5 pupils learning to touch-type. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and reflected in the positive relationships and work ethic. Pupils are enthusiastic about the weekly celebration assembly, valuing their own achievements and those of others. They are rightly proud of their school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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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 are skilled at drawing the best from their pupils, aided by good use of information about their skills to refine and plan learning that usually grasps pupils' imagination and interest. Marking is helpful in enabling pupils to improve their work. Targets are regularly reviewed and shared but pupils do not assess the quality of their own work regularly. Teamwork and relationships are positive, so that pupil outcomes and self-esteem are raised. Subject knowledge is good leading to questioning that makes pupils stop, think and review their responses. Where learning is best, rapid pace, clearly understood objectives, high expectations and challenge predominate. Teaching assistants contribute well, supporting small groups or individuals who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, who are Travellers or who have home languages other than English. In a very few lesson starters, when too much time is spent in 'teacher talk', assistants have little input to maintain interest. This is most evident for younger pupils whose attention wanders.

The curriculum meets individual needs and addresses identified gaps in learning, well. It is increasingly topic based to enhance enjoyment and give less academic pupils opportunity to shine. Group work is used well to meet pupils' individual needs in literacy and numeracy in Years 5 and 6 so that learning is closely matched to ability, and pupils' progress and confidence accelerate. Visits are well established. Many clubs including gardening, choir and professional football and rugby coaching develop pupils' skills and their personal development. Music is enriched by djembe drumming in Year 5. French is recently introduced and much enjoyed.

Pastoral care is clearly a strength. Staff know their pupils and their families very well.

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They are willing to seek the right sort of support to ensure that vulnerable and/or more needy pupils have every opportunity to do well, personally and academically, by ensuring that any learning barriers are minimised. This is reflected in the performance of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities who have considerable success in test results. This support enables pupils with special educational needs and/or difficulties enables to make good progress relative to their lower entry points. Pupils' welfare is monitored closely. There is innovative practice in work that celebrates the Traveller heritage and culture, enabling pupils from other backgrounds to understand and value alternative lifestyles.

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?

The headteacher is sharply focused on improving outcomes for every pupil so that self-esteem and the aspirations of pupils and staff are raised. The school is moving on at a good pace. Staff are increasingly involved in ongoing development and school decision making. Teamwork at all levels is good and has a positive impact on learning.

Senior leaders now have a very clear view of the actions needed to ensure that pupils' attainment and progress continues to rise, by building on from current achievements.

The school's good knowledge of itself is firmly based on precise data analysis and monitoring to identify priorities. The governing body is greatly valued by the school community but has now to develop its overview of the school's work. Safeguarding procedures and practice are satisfactory and meet current government requirements.

Partnerships with local schools, support agencies and Traveller education support are good. Community cohesion is aptly focused on practical outcomes. Links to the Travelling community are noteworthy. Pupils learn positively about their lifestyles and work through mutually enjoyed discussions and visits. This is breaking barriers and raising the profile of Travellers in the village and wider community and brings about better understanding. Equality of opportunity is good; pupils from different minority ethnic groups mix happily and are interested in each others different lifestyles, cultures and backgrounds. Most parents feel that the quality of information has improved and the school's level of engagement with parents is good.

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	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

All children, including those with little or no knowledge of English, settle happily into well known routines. They cope well with regular new arrivals and quickly make friends. Promotion of basic skills and social development has a high priority. Learning is carefully planned and assessed to ensure continued good progress. Children's language and basic skills are mostly below age related expectations when they arrive. Good play and learning experiences are provided based on developing basic communication and number skills. Outdoor provision, although small, is well organised and stimulates curiosity, seen when children searched for number pictures. Teaching is good with lots of additional information and shared good humour. There is a good balance between child led and teacher directed learning and play. The attention given to children's welfare helps them to feel nurtured and well cared for. Behaviour is good, reinforced well by staff, and this helps children to remember the rules. All children show real understanding of others no matter what their needs or abilities. Children make good progress from their starting points and needs. Attainment for most is broadly average as they move into Year 1.

Provision is good and enriches children's learning and social development. Relationships with parents are developed well through use of home school books and accessible information. Safeguarding practice and procedures meet current government requirements. Good leadership and management ensure a positive start to formal education.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

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

The very large majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire are happy with their children's education. All feel that their children are safe and well cared for. They think children have good understanding of staying healthy. Most parents think that teaching and the progress that children make are good and the inspectors agree with them. A few parents felt that behaviour could be better, but inspectors found no evidence of bad behaviour. Inspectors judged leadership to be good. Evidence to support partnership with parents is good. Inspection findings are mostly in agreement with parents' views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's C of E V A 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 51 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 168 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	21	41	29	57	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	31	61	20	39	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	23	45	25	49	2	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	16	30	33	61	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	19	35	29	54	5	9	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	16	30	33	61	4	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	19	35	33	61	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)	19	35	27	50	3	6	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	15	28	34	63	4	7	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	14	26	30	56	6	11	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	31	27	50	7	13	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	18	33	31	57	2	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	24	44	25	46	4	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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

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



7 November 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's C of E VA Primary School, North Mymms AL9 7NF

We all want to say thank you for making us so welcome and being so polite and friendly when we visited your welcoming school recently. You told us a lot about what you like doing, particularly mathematics, sport, music and history. It is obvious that you enjoy school and think that your teachers make learning fun.

You make good progress in learning from your various starting points because teaching is good. Your school does a good job in helping you to learn. Your behaviour is good. Your attainment is good, as is your attendance. The school knows it needs to improve your learning and progress in science and reading. You can help by continuing to work hard in lessons and by reading lots of books to your families or carers. The governors have some work to do to improve their knowledge of how well you learn and to be even more organised and better trained.

We are sure that you will enjoy working with your teachers to achieve these goals.

Yours sincerely

Judi Bedawi

Lead Inspector

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