

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118754
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	339293
Inspection dates	10–11 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Mike Capper

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	228
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father James Mowbray
Headteacher	Amanda McGarrigle
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2006
School address	St Mary's Road Swanley Kent BR8 7BU
Telephone number	01322 665212
Fax number	01322 662114
Email address	headteacher@st-marys-swanley.kent.sch.uk

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	10–11 November 2009
Inspection number	339293

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

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

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 17 lessons or parts of lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at teachers' planning, the school's assessment information, safeguarding procedures and samples of pupils' work. They analysed questionnaires from staff and pupils, as well as 41 from parents.

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

- how well teaching provides the right level of challenge for all pupils, particularly in writing and for pupils from Gypsy Roma families
- how well the school is improving rates of attendance
- how effectively leaders are working to ensure that progress across the school is even and to identify and improve areas of weakness
- pupils' enjoyment of school and their involvement in the local community.

Information about the school

The majority of pupils come to this urban school from the local community in Swanley. The school serves a very diverse community and nearly half of the pupils coming from Gypsy Roma families who have settled in the area. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. Most, but not all, of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a Nursery and in a Reception class.

The school has recently won a Design Mark for its work in design and technology. It also has a Quality Mark Award from the Basic Skills Agency and Healthy School accreditation.

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

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 that helps pupils to learn quickly. Pupils from many different backgrounds get on together extremely well and there is a calm and harmonious atmosphere in school. Adults provide very high-quality care for the pupils and support their social and emotional needs very effectively. As one parent noted, 'nothing is too much trouble for the teachers'. Pupils greatly enjoy school with comments such as 'the teachers teach us well' and 'the grown-ups and children make you feel at home' typically summing up their views.

Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage where there is an exciting curriculum that takes very good account of how young children learn. Pupils continue to make good progress in the rest of the school and by the end of Year 6 attainment is broadly average in English, mathematics and science. In English attainment is lower in writing than in reading. While progress in writing is satisfactory overall, it is uneven. This is most evident in Year 6 where pupils have positive attitudes towards writing but do not always produce work that reflects their ability. Consequently, recent improvements in writing skills lower down the school are not always progressively being built on well enough. Where progress is slower, it is because teachers do not expect enough of the pupils by ensuring that work builds closely on prior learning, and they do not give them sufficient guidance about how to improve through marking. Pupils do well in other subjects because teaching is good. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour well and make learning interesting by making good use of resources and visits to bring subjects alive. They are hard-working and enthusiastic and are generally successful at providing the right level of challenge for all pupils, although less so in writing than in other areas of the curriculum.

Pupils from Gypsy Roma families are fully integrated into school life and they make good progress. The school is particularly successful at celebrating the traditions and values of its diverse community. For example, stories from the Romany heritage are shared with pupils. Members of the Gypsy-Roma community are fully represented amongst staff and on the governing body and they contribute well to the life of the school.

Pupils are rightly proud of their school. Their behaviour is good and they are polite and courteous. Pupils are keen to learn and they support each other well both in and out of lessons. They make a good contribution to the community by taking part in local events and working very closely with other schools and groups. Links with the local Anglican church are especially strong and these contribute well to pupils' spiritual development. Pupils are keen to take responsibility and do so very conscientiously. The school council gives pupils a good voice; for example, they are currently being consulted about how to improve the trim-trail.

The school is successful because leaders have created an ethos in which members of the school community are valued and respected. Teamwork among staff is good and there is a strong drive for further improvement. There are good systems for evaluating school effectiveness and to identify strengths and weaknesses, including the sharp use of data to identify any pupils who are in danger of falling behind in their work. Such pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are given good-quality support in and out of lessons, helping them to progress well.

Governance is emerging from a period of instability which led to local authority intervention in the last academic year. There are many new governors on the governing body and it is beginning to provide the right sort of support to leaders. Governors have recently undertaken training so that they can strengthen their role in monitoring the work of the school, providing challenge and taking a fuller part in strategic planning. They understand the importance of working with the school to ensure that recent improvements in relationships between governors and senior leaders are maintained and built on.

There have been many good improvements since the last inspection and this has ensured that progress is more even across the school than it was in the past. There is a good understanding of what still needs to be done and leaders are doing the right things to tackle remaining weaknesses. There is no complacency and the school is well placed to realise its aspirations for the future.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all pupils do well enough in writing, especially in Year 6 by:
 - using marking and target-setting more sharply to help pupils understand how to improve their work
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve to ensure that they always work to their full potential
 - providing enough challenge in lessons so that work builds more closely on prior learning. (by February 2010)
- Strengthen governance so that governors can be fully involved in strategic planning by:
 - ensuring that recent improvements in relationships between senior school leaders and governors are maintained
 - ensuring that recent training on roles and responsibilities is reflected in governors' full involvement in systematically reviewing the work of the school and providing the right levels of challenge. (by July 2010)

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' achievement is good. Most pupils develop a love of learning and greatly enjoy school. Pupils make good progress in most lessons. In a Year 5 literacy lesson pupils

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

learnt well because the activity that involved acting out scenes from A Christmas Carol was good fun and was sharply focused on developing a stronger understanding of the story. In a good Year 2 lesson good questioning engaged pupils well and work helped them to improve their spelling. Where progress in lessons is satisfactory, it is because work is not pitched at the right level for all and there is not enough guidance about how to improve. In lessons where pupils learn letter sounds, an exciting range of activities that include actions and singing ensure good progress is being made; in the last year this has led to the gap in attainment between reading and writing being reduced in national assessments at the end of Year 2.

The average attainment seen in national assessments at the end of Year 6 is also evident in most of the pupils' current work. There are no significant differences between the progress of different groups, with all doing equally well over time from their varying starting points. However, in writing pupils in Year 6 do not always produce their best work because teaching does not always demand enough of them.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils behave sensibly most of the time and show good concern for the needs of others. They develop a good understanding of how to stay healthy, generally making sensible choices about what they are going to eat and participating enthusiastically in physical activity. They have a good awareness of how to deal with the dangers they may face both in and out of school. Pupils are very confident that any worries or concerns will be dealt with quickly by staff and this means that they feel safe at school.

The school has been very successful at improving attendance. Consequently, rates of attendance are now broadly average. The school continues to work rigorously to ensure that all parents understand how important it is that their children do not miss school.

Pupils are soundly prepared for the next stage of their education and for later life. They develop good confidence and self-esteem and make good progress in developing basic numeracy skills. However, the writing skills of pupils currently in Year 6 are a potential barrier to future learning.

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

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

The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The school provides outstanding care and support to pupils. Pupils who are finding life difficult at home or at school are supported extremely well. Adults regularly go the extra mile for their pupils, devoting much time to making school a happy and safe place to be. Pupils are extremely appreciative of this, talking very positively of trips such as a recent one to look at the life of Charles Dickens. Pupils especially look forward to the end of Year 6 'Prom Night' which they feel brings an exciting end to their time at St Mary's.

Good teaching means that there is a very happy working atmosphere in lessons. Teachers respond very well to pupils' interests and aptitudes when planning work, for example making good use of video clips to stimulate an interest in writing. Teachers are becoming increasingly sharp at using assessment information on pupils' learning to plan what to teach next. This is less strong in writing where there is not always sufficient challenge, and expectations, especially in Year 6, are not always high enough. There is some good practice in target-setting, although this is not yet consistent across the school. Where it is best, for example in Years 1 and 2, pupils know how to improve. On occasions marking is not used well enough to guide pupils in the next stage of their learning, especially in writing.

The good curriculum is developing well and leaders know that to make it even stronger, they need to ensure that planning always takes enough account of pupils' different starting points. Links between subjects have improved since the last inspection and pupils now get good opportunities to write across the curriculum. There is a good range of clubs, which are greatly enjoyed by pupils. Learning is enhanced further by opportunities to learn French and Spanish.

Well-managed provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities ensures that they have their needs met well, with activities such as small group 'reading recovery' work having a good effect on learning.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
	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 and other staff are passionate about providing high-quality care and support for children and their families and this is reflected in all aspects of their work. The school's ambitions and the strong drive for improvement are firmly embedded. There is a good understanding of remaining priorities. The headteacher monitors teaching thoroughly and is aware of what needs to be done to iron out remaining inconsistencies. Responsibilities are shared well and subject leaders are becoming increasingly proactive at moving things on for themselves. Governors ensure that statutory requirements are met and, after a period of difficulty, they are now beginning to do the right things to both support and challenge the school.

The school engages well with parents and promotes equality successfully. Leaders have very successfully broken down many of the barriers between home and school and they ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities to participate in school events by making them free to all. Discrimination is tackled very vigorously and this means that pupils quickly learn to respect different beliefs. The school's contribution to community cohesion is good. Leaders are very responsive to local needs and work extremely well in partnership with others to promote learning and well-being. Pupils develop a good understanding of life beyond the local community. Leaders have recently carried out an audit of provision in this area and have rightly identified that to strengthen this area of its work further, it needs to establish more links with schools in other parts of the world. The school has excellent safeguarding procedures. The school is very vigilant in identifying and responding to any potential dangers that pupils may encounter and does all it can to ensure that they are kept safe.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
	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	1
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

When children start school in the Nursery, very few are working at the expected levels for their age, with language and social skills being especially weak. Children make good progress from these low starting points, and attainment improves to below-average levels by the time they start Year 1. There is an upward trend to attainment and it picked up significantly in the last academic year, reflecting good leadership and management and a strong and effective focus on improving provision after a period of instability due to staff absence. Children are keen to take an active part in learning in both the Nursery and the Reception class and there is a happy and purposeful buzz in lessons, with children from different backgrounds working together happily. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well. Members of staff work together closely to plan a wide range of interesting and meaningful experiences around a common theme. For example, in the Nursery, as part of the work on the story of 'The Billy Goat Gruff', children built bridges, acted out the story using toys and built homes for the goats to live in. In the Reception class learning is purposeful; for example, children learn about counting by throwing balls at a target and counting their scores. Throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage children's personal, social and emotional development is promoted especially well and, as a result, children learn how to share and develop good confidence. They are given good opportunities to try out their own ideas, often planning for themselves where they are going to work. This is most effective when adults give clear guidance to ensure that learning is being moved on quickly enough. Children's progress is assessed carefully and there is good parental involvement through the delightful Marvellous Me books which show learning at both school and home. Leaders evaluate provision thoroughly; they have good plans for the further development of the outdoor area so that children's independence is fostered equally well both inside and outside.

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

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

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents are pleased with nearly all aspects of the school. Their views are typically summed up in comments such as 'my child can't wait to come to school each day' and 'I can talk to the teachers and also make suggestions and they take them on board.' A small number felt that there is too much homework. Inspectors found that homework is used effectively in most classes to support learning at home.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's CE (VA) Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 41 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 228 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	24	59	17	41	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	30	73	11	27	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	27	66	14	34	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	29	71	12	29	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	31	76	10	24	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	24	59	11	27	2	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	54	15	37	2	5	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	46	18	44	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	25	61	16	39	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	15	37	24	59	2	5	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	39	21	51	0	0	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	25	61	14	34	0	0	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	31	76	10	24	0	0	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 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.



12 November 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's CE (VA) Primary School, BR8 7BU

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and for showing us your work. You were very polite and friendly and we thoroughly enjoyed talking to you. We agree with you that your school is good and that you learn well.

Some of the things we found out about your school:

- Children in the Nursery and Reception class settle very quickly and quickly learn lots of new things.
- In Years 1 to 6 good teaching helps you to make good progress in most subjects.
- You really enjoy school because adults make learning exciting by planning many fun activities. We are delighted that you all get on so well together and learn so much about each other's beliefs and traditions.
- You behave well and are clear about how to stay healthy. It is great that you have your own allotment so that you can grow your own food.
- Your teachers and other adults are extremely kind and caring and they give you good help when you are struggling with your work.
- The school is well led and managed and all the adults are working very hard to make the school even better.
- Your parents and carers are very pleased that you come to this school.

What we have asked your school to do now:

- help you to do better in writing by making sure that adults always give you good challenge and guide you through marking so that you know how to improve
- ensure that governors maintain their recent focus of working with the headteacher and other senior staff to support them in their work and to provide challenge when needed.

You can help your teachers by making sure that you always do your best when you are writing, especially in Year 6.

We thoroughly enjoyed talking to you about your work and watching you learn, and wish you all well for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Capper

Lead Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.