

St Mary's CofE VA Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124311
Local Authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	340539
Inspection dates	4–5 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Judith Tolley

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	309
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr K Hymus
Headteacher	Mrs G James
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 17 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and local authority representatives. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of evidence including the school's analysis of pupils' progress, school improvement and curriculum planning documents, 29 questionnaires from parents and carers and 99 questionnaires from pupils.

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

- the progress pupils make, especially in mathematics
- the effectiveness of the use of assessment information in lesson planning and in informing pupils about how to improve their work
- the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels in raising standards and eliminating underachievement.

Information about the school

St Mary's C of E Primary School is larger than average. A higher proportion of pupils than average come from minority ethnic backgrounds. Almost a third of pupils speak English as an additional language, and for a very small minority this is in the very early stages of development. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than average, as is the proportion entitled to free school meals. The school has gone through a lengthy period of instability in staffing in the last three years.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

St Mary's is a satisfactory school which is improving rapidly. It has some good features, such as the good quality of teaching and the care, guidance and support it provides for its pupils. Leadership and management are good and driving improvement. Despite a prolonged period of instability in staffing over the last three years, there has been significant improvement in the progress and personal development of pupils since the last inspection. The headteacher provides very clear direction so that there is a shared vision for continuous improvement in the school. Collaborative work among staff is proving effective in ensuring a good degree of consistency of purpose and planning across the school.

The 2009 unvalidated national test results for Year 6 pupils in English, mathematics and science are below national averages but demonstrate a significant improvement on previous years. The vast majority of pupils reached their targets, although very few achieved the higher levels in any subject. Progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1 is good as a result of good teaching and learning. In Key Stage 2, despite good teaching and learning pupils' progress is slower. This is because the improved progress lower down the school is more recent so older pupils are catching up. Although questioning is used effectively to challenge those pupils who find learning easier than most, tasks set for them are not always challenging enough. Opportunities for pupils to explore ideas for themselves are limited and, as a result, pupils are sometimes too dependent on the teacher. The school recognises the need to raise standards further and increase rates of progress in English and mathematics, particularly for those pupils who are capable of reaching above average standards.

Good care, guidance and support is greatly supporting improvements in pupils' personal development and creating an environment where pupils value and celebrate their achievements. Safeguarding procedures are robust. Behaviour is good, pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning and enjoy coming to school. This is evident in the improvement over the last year in attendance rates, which are now broadly average. However, despite the best efforts of the school, a few pupils continue to take extended holidays abroad during term time and this slows their progress. Pupils speak about their school and their achievements with pride and say that learning is fun. They take their responsibilities seriously, for example in the school council, the eco group and as playground leaders. The development of a more creative curriculum is at a very early stage and opportunities for pupils to practise their writing in different contexts are limited. Curriculum planning is not always linked closely enough to the progress individuals are making. This means that some lesson plans are too vague and do not always identify how the needs of all pupils, especially the more able, are to be met.

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Self-evaluation is accurate and the school has a clear understanding about what needs to be done to raise standards further. It tracks pupils' progress closely.

Underachievement is rapidly identified and appropriate support provided so that the large majority of pupils are now meeting or exceeding their targets. Governors are well informed, supportive and are developing their role as critical friends. The clear vision of the headteacher and middle leaders, the robust procedures for tracking pupils' progress and the improvements demonstrated so far in raising standards and achievement indicate that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in English and mathematics by:
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to practise these skills, particularly writing, across other subjects in the curriculum
 - improving attendance.
- Ensure that the level of challenge is appropriate for all pupils in lessons, particularly for those capable of reaching higher levels, by:
 - using assessment information more effectively in day-to-day planning
 - linking curriculum planning more closely to information about pupils' progress.
- Encourage the development of independent learning skills by:
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to explore ideas for themselves
 - providing more activities during which they can work independently of the teacher.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

In lessons a growing number of pupils now make good progress due to good teaching and effective support. This means they are making up for previous gaps in their learning and their achievement overall is satisfactory. Behaviour is good. Pupils are eager to participate in class discussions, listen carefully to adults and to each other and are able to express themselves clearly. However, they are not always as confident with independent work and rely too much on help and guidance from their teachers to complete tasks.

Pupils start school with skills that are below average for their age. Overall, they make satisfactory progress so that by the end of Year 6 standards remain below average. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 has been below average in the past but this is rapidly improving. However, whilst progress is satisfactory overall, too few pupils, especially boys, reach the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics. In test results at the end of Year 6 in 2007 and 2008, attainment declined

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in English, mathematics and science. School data indicate that standards improved significantly in 2009 in both key stages. Work seen during the inspection also indicates that this trend of improvement continues and that the large majority of pupils now achieve as they should. Progress in Key Stage 2 is slower than that in Key Stage 1 because pupils have fallen behind in the past and have to recover lost ground. This is being achieved by well-focused support for individual pupils and the imaginative use of resources such as individualised computer programs. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language make the same satisfactory progress as their classmates as a result of the focused support they receive.

Pupils say they feel safe and know who they can go to with problems. They are confident that issues such as rare cases of bullying are addressed promptly and effectively. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Extra-curricular activities, including physical exercise, are very well supported. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the school and wider community by helping younger pupils and by fundraising. They display respect for one another and their teachers, take time to reflect on their own actions and have a good sense of right and wrong. They have a satisfactory understanding of their own culture and the multicultural diversity of society. Pupils' basic skills and their ability to work with others are developing satisfactorily. As a result, they are adequately prepared for their secondary education.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3

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

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	
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	3

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching and learning is good and its consistency improving. As a result, pupils are making up lost ground and achieving satisfactorily. Teachers present new ideas clearly and they and teaching assistants use questioning to good effect to support and challenge pupils both in whole-class discussions and during class work. When pupils are given the opportunity to discuss ideas with a partner their confidence increases and they are then keen to share their ideas with a wider audience. Activities are well sequenced so that pupils build effectively on previous learning but opportunities are missed to enable pupils to explore ideas for themselves or to work independently. Teachers have high expectations of behaviour, pupils respond well and relationships are good. In a minority of lessons the pace slows and pupils become restless when teacher-led activities are too lengthy or when they are required to remain too long on one task. Assessment information is used effectively to meet the needs of the majority of pupils and teaching assistants are skilful in supporting individuals and small groups in lessons. However, too much reliance is placed upon setting and it is unclear how the needs of groups of differing ability in lessons are to be addressed. Planning is not always detailed enough to ensure that more able pupils are sufficiently challenged to reach their potential. Marking is of good quality and gives pupils good guidance about how to improve. Pupils know their targets and are beginning to evaluate their own progress, although this is still at the very early stages of development.

The curriculum adequately meets pupils' needs and interests. The school's emphasis on the development of core skills in literacy and numeracy is raising standards across the school. The school is working towards a creative curriculum to provide better opportunities for pupils to practise their skills across a range of subjects and to engage their interest more effectively. Although this is at a very early stage of development, for example through the project on 'The Hobbit', it is already proving successful in enthusing pupils as well as in improving attendance.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is satisfactory and for those who speak English as an additional language it is good. Resources for information and communication technology (ICT) are limited. The school recognises the need to increase the use of ICT across the school and has plans in place to do so but, in the interim, has concentrated its resources in Years 5 and 6 in order to help these pupils to recover lost ground in English and mathematics.

The school is a calm, welcoming and exciting place to learn. Displays are interesting and foster pupils' learning. Support for vulnerable pupils is becoming an established part of the school's work. Good links with partner institutions ensure that pupils make a smooth

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transition to high schools and well thought out induction procedures ensure that they settle quickly when they begin school. The school works very effectively with a range of external agencies as well as parents and carers to remove barriers to learning. Clearly targeted support for groups of potentially vulnerable pupils has resulted in significant improvement in pupils' attitudes, behaviour, achievement and relationships.

Well-focused support, for example, for pupils who speak English as an additional language allows them to learn effectively alongside their classmates.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's honest and succinct analysis of the school's effectiveness and her very clear direction is driving improvement. Her vision, enthusiasm and determination are shared by middle leaders. As a result, all staff know exactly what has to be done and understand their role in the process. Planning, involving local authority advisers, is based on detailed monitoring and evaluation of the school's work. This has ensured that good practice in teaching is shared and that teachers play a full part in school evaluation and planning for improvement. Issues from the last report have been tackled successfully. All staff share the senior leadership's commitment to promoting equal opportunity and to ensuring that all pupils reach their potential. The school works hard to inform parents and carers and to involve them in their children's learning, for example through the home learning programme. Governors are very supportive and becoming increasingly involved in the work of the school. They are well informed and therefore in a good position to challenge the school effectively. Safeguarding procedures are good. The school integrates issues about safety into the curriculum and pupils have a good understanding about how to stay safe. The school's work with parents and carers, partner institutions and the local community is satisfactorily promoting community cohesion. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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

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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	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
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	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills, knowledge and understanding that are often well below those expected for their age. All children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those for whom English is an additional language, make good progress in most areas of learning. As a result of improvements made, by the end of the Reception Year many children achieve the goals expected for their age, and some exceed them. Adults take every opportunity to engage children in conversation about their work and their play. As a result, language and communication skills, and personal and social development are particularly well developed. The focus on social and emotional development enables children to develop a positive attitude to learning and to work and play happily together. Children are able to make choices from a broad range of activities and to work independently, for instance using the interactive whiteboard themselves and in art and craft activities.

The school is developing a stimulating and well-equipped learning environment. Although good use is made of this, including the outdoor area, opportunities for adult-led and independent activities are restricted because of the limited space currently available. Staff are deployed effectively to support children's learning. Observations and assessments inform day-to-day planning and the next steps in learning. Where activities are adult led this is done with enthusiasm, for instance in the 'Speckled Frogs' number game, which totally engages children's interest. Induction procedures, informal meetings and home visits lead to effective partnerships with parents and carers and ensure that children settle in quickly and feel secure. The recently appointed Early Years Foundation Stage manager leads an enthusiastic team who work together with a common sense of purpose. Good safeguarding procedures ensure that children are protected and well looked after.

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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 majority of parents and carers are very positive about the work of the school and its impact on their children's learning. A small number of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire expressed concern that the school does not help children to have a healthy lifestyle. Inspection evidence indicates that pupils generally choose healthy options at lunchtime and break times and that there is very good participation in extra-curricular and physical activities. Overall, parents' and carers' views reflect the inspection findings.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's CofE 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 29 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 309 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	14	48	13	45	2	7	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	18	62	11	38	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	16	55	13	45	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	9	31	18	62	1	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	18	62	11	38	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	12	41	14	48	3	10	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	7	24	16	55	5	17	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)	13	45	14	48	1	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	9	31	20	69	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	9	31	18	62	2	7	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	8	28	19	66	2	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	12	41	15	52	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	9	31	16	55	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.



6 November 2009

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of St Mary's C of E VA Primary School, Stoke-on-Trent, ST6 5DE

On behalf of all the inspectors, I would like to thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. Yours is a satisfactory school which is improving rapidly. Some things are good. The inspection team really enjoyed reading your comments and talking to you all. They listened very carefully to what you had to say. You told us how much you appreciated the help you get from teachers and we were impressed by the way the school provides extra help for pupils who are having difficulties so that they can do their best. Teachers and adults in your school look after you very well. We were impressed by how good your behaviour was. You told us that you enjoy coming to school and particularly like the range of clubs and other activities on offer. You feel safe at school and know that if you have a problem, there is always an adult to talk to.

Teaching is good and it is helping you to catch up and to achieve as you should. In lessons we noticed that you were confident in solving problems when you had the chance to talk things over with a partner. We have asked the school to make sure you have more opportunities to do this and to explore things for yourselves. We think that those of you who find tasks easy could do even better and so we have asked your teachers to make sure the tasks you are asked to do are challenging so that you can do your best. You told us that you particularly enjoy the project on 'The Hobbit' and that it makes your learning more interesting. We have asked the school to give you more opportunities to practise your skills, especially your writing, through projects like this.

The headteacher and staff are working very hard to make your school better. You can help the school by continuing to work hard and coming to school regularly. Once again, thank you for answering our questions.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Judith Tolley

Lead inspector

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