

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124766
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	340650
Inspection dates	9–10 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Rob McKeown HMI

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	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	286
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Finnis
Headteacher	Wendy Garrard
Date of previous school inspection	19 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. The inspection team observed all teachers teaching a total of 15 lessons, across all the classes. They also observed a small number intervention sessions taught by teaching assistants. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, parents and carers, staff and governors. Inspectors observed the school's work, looked at pupils' books and teachers' planning, and scrutinised several key documents including those related to safeguarding, raising attainment, development planning, progress tracking and analysis, leadership team monitoring and governing body meetings. They also scrutinised questionnaires completed by 119 parents and carers, and those completed by pupils in Years 3 and 4 and by staff.

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

- how successful the school has been in raising attainment and improving rates of progress this year, particularly for boys, in writing and in mathematics
- whether teaching is sufficiently differentiated to ensure that all groups and individuals are challenged and supported well and make suitable progress
- whether teachers' assessments and pupils' learning targets are used effectively to inform planning and help pupils improve their work
- how robust the school's systems for improving attendance are
- how effective the leadership and management of provision for pupils with special educational needs is
- how effective leaders and managers are in tackling weaknesses and overcoming barriers to improvement.

Information about the school

St Mary's is a larger-than-average-sized primary school. It serves the community of Mildenhall and some of the surrounding villages. As a Church of England Voluntary Aided school, it has a strong Christian ethos. Most pupils come from White British families and a few come from American families attached to the local USAF base. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than average. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is a little above average. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The school holds the Healthy Schools award and has very recently gained the Arts Mark Silver award. In line with local authority reorganisation proposals, St Mary's will become a 5-11 age primary school from September 2012.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**2****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

Main findings

This is a good school which provides its pupils with outstanding care and pastoral support. It has improved well since its last inspection and noticeably so in its approach to tackling underachievement and ensuring pupils make good progress. Almost all parents and carers are happy with what the school provides for their children and several endorsed their views by writing positive testimonials on their returned questionnaires. One parent/carer wrote, 'this is a well run, friendly school that helps children to do their best and gives guidance on how parents can help at home'.

Pupils achieve well at St Mary's. They make good progress in the key subjects of English and mathematics, although progress is stronger in reading and mathematics than it is in writing. This year, progress has been particularly good in Years 2 and 4 and pupils are on track to reach their challenging targets; their attainment is broadly average. The school recognises that the progress made by boys requires careful monitoring to ensure that they achieve as well as the girls. A sharper focus on tracking pupils' attainment has enabled staff to make regular checks on how individuals are doing and provide targeted support to meet the individual's needs and accelerate their progress. Consequently, pupils who have slipped back or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good and sometimes outstanding progress.

All aspects of pupils' personal development are good and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Assemblies contribute particularly well to this; they are memorable occasions in which pupils' achievements are valued and celebrated. Pupils say they feel safe in school and believe they are supported well by their teachers and other adults. They have a good understanding of how to adopt healthy lifestyles and make positive contributions through their school and 'eco council' involvement. Behaviour is good and sometimes outstanding in lessons, which contributes to effective learning. Attendance is average. It has improved this year because of an increased emphasis on reducing persistent absence but still falls short of the target set with the local authority.

Teaching is good and pupils say they learn a lot and enjoy their lessons. There are many strengths in teaching throughout the school and senior leaders have worked well with staff to establish a consistent approach to planning and delivering lessons and to assessing pupils' learning. Teaching assistants routinely provide pupils with good support and their contributions in lessons and in managing group work are often excellent. Pupils achieve well in a number of subjects because teachers plan a curriculum that meets the needs and interests of everyone. Subject expertise is used well to enable pupils to receive high-quality experiences, for example in art and music. Both indoor and outdoor learning environments are well maintained and resourced and

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are designed to promote pupils' all-round development through positive learning experiences. The quality of care, guidance and support is excellent, and especially so for pupils needing additional support. Staff go the 'extra mile' to ensure that individual pupils receive the support they need. The contribution made by the school's child and family support key worker is an important factor in the success of this aspect of the school's work.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and leadership team work very well together, providing strong direction and a resolute commitment to improvement, which is shared by staff and governors. The work of the director of learning, in leading the school's rigorous approach to tracking attainment and progress, is particularly effective. Strong contributions are made by other key leaders, notably the teachers who lead developments in English and mathematics. This strength in depth in leadership and management gives the school good capacity for further improvement. However, the school acknowledges that some temporary leadership roles require formalising, for example in the Early Years Foundation Stage, to help staff to strengthen provision further in the Reception classes. Overall, the school provides good value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment to above average levels in Year 2 and Year 4 by:
 - sustaining and building on the good improvements made in teaching, learning and progress
 - narrowing the gap between boys' and girls' attainment, particularly in writing.
- Build on the good progress made with raising levels of attendance to meet the target set with the local authority by focussing on the attendance of different groups of pupils, especially those at risk of persistent absence.
- Improve outcomes and progress for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - helping staff to plan effectively and assess learning activities that are purposeful, suitably challenging and develop children's independent-learning skills
 - securing effective day-to-day leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage team.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Evidence from observing lessons, from teachers' assessments and from looking at pupils' books indicates that pupils are making good progress from starting points mostly below average. Attainment at the end of Year 4 is broadly average, although the school's assessment data shows that, in Year 4 this year, pupils are moving beyond average standards in reading and mathematics. Attainment in Year 2 has been broadly average for a number of years but this is also improving and outcomes are expected by the school to be better than in 2009 when boys' attainment was much lower than girls.

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Ambitious targets have been set for the progress pupils are expected to make in each year group and regular checks are made through each term to ensure that pupils are on track to meet them. Several pupils take part in one-to-one and group intervention sessions that are successfully helping those who may have slipped behind in their learning to catch up. Pupils are developing a broad range of key skills, including in information and communication technology skills, to prepare them for their future.

Pupils get on well together and are polite and helpful. Lessons in personal, social and health education help pupils to develop a good understanding of their feelings and emotions. Pupils are confident about speaking up for themselves and feel comfortable about raising any concerns they may have. They take part in a broad range of physical activities in lessons, at break-times and in sports clubs, which all help to promote healthy lifestyles. There is an excellent range of outdoor play equipment and pupils are good at sharing this and using it safely. Staff give pupils the chance to contribute their ideas towards the planning of the thematic learning topics and pupils have a prominent voice in determining other school improvements. Pupils also take part in local community events and raise funds for a number of charities through the year. There are good opportunities for enterprise with older pupils running a school shop and savings bank. Transition arrangements, into and out of the school, are also good. Pupils enjoy receiving awards in assemblies for their positive contributions in lessons and around the school, including for higher levels of attendance.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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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The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teachers plan and organise interesting learning activities that are planned precisely and matched well to pupils' needs. High expectations and positive relationships ensure that learning in lessons is purposeful. Interactive whiteboards are used effectively to help to illustrate teaching points and focus pupils' attention. Suitable resources are selected to help pupils learn successfully, including practical apparatus to help support pupils' understanding in mathematics. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together and this ensures that pupils of all abilities are able to make pertinent contributions in lesson discussions. Where the teaching is particularly effective, teachers ask probing questions which challenge pupils' thinking and test their understanding. In these successful lessons, pupils have many opportunities to discuss and reflect upon their learning. The school has adopted an assessment system in which pupils evaluate the success of their learning in all subjects, including in English and mathematics. This works particularly well in the older classes and complements the helpful marking that teachers complete. Although the substantial majority of teaching is good or better, there remain a small number of lessons in which learning and progress are satisfactory. This is because the pace of learning is slower and, occasionally, the checks teachers make on pupils' learning when they are working independently are not always sharp enough to identify when pupils lack understanding.

The curriculum provides pupils with a range of good quality learning experiences that contribute significantly to their wider personal development and well-being. Attractive displays around the school reflect the breadth and quality of the curriculum on offer. There is a strong focus on pupils gaining the key skills they need in English and mathematics. A thematic approach to curriculum planning is organised through a number of inspirational topics, such as the Year 4 topic 'survivor', to which pupils contribute their ideas. Visits to places of interest are used well to add relevance to learning and to stimulate pupils' interests. A good range of after-school clubs, run by both staff and outside groups, extends pupils' enjoyment of learning beyond the school day. Excellent attention is given to all aspects of care, guidance and support. Safeguarding procedures are good. Positive links are maintained with a range of support agencies and induction and transition programmes help pupils to settle well in school and to move on with confidence. The excellent work of a child and family support key worker ensures that the school caters well for any pupils needing additional support. Systems to support attendance are robust and have resulted in a reduction in absence this year.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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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 senior leadership team have an accurate view of the school's strengths and the aspects that require improvement. The drive to improve pupils' attainment and accelerate their progress is firmly embedded and teachers meet regularly with leaders to evaluate pupils' achievements. Leaders are strongly committed to tackling discrimination and to ensuring that all pupils have an equal opportunity to benefit from what the school provides. Teamwork is very good and responsibilities for leading and managing aspects of the school's work are shared widely and successfully among staff. There are good systems in place to monitor the quality of teaching and to make checks on teachers' planning and pupils' work. Key, subject leaders have played a full part in evaluating the quality of provision and written and submitted reports to the governing body. Communication with parents and carers is very good and the school encourages them to play a full part in supporting their children's learning. There are also productive links with other schools and local services, including the local pyramid of schools. The work of the part-time special educational needs coordinator is particularly effective. The positive leadership of the school's approach to promoting community cohesion is reflected in a good range of events organised this year to strengthen provision.

The effectiveness of governance has stepped forward since the last inspection. Useful training has sharpened the governing body's approach to challenging the school for improvement. Relationships with staff and the school community are positive and key governors have a good knowledge of the school's work and help to shape its strategic direction. There is a strong focus on safeguarding and ensuring pupils and staff work in a safe and secure environment. Nominated governors are linked to key staff and school development priorities, and a more formal system has been introduced for recording the outcomes of governors' visits. A number of new and inexperienced governors have joined the governing body recently and they believe they are receiving good support to enable them to become effective.

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

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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	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

Early Years Foundation Stage

The effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. The skills and aptitudes of children entering the Reception year are below age-related expectations overall. The school's own baseline assessments indicate that many children enter school with levels of development which are below those expected, particularly in some aspects of their personal development and in early literacy and numeracy skills. Children make satisfactory progress overall and good progress in some areas of learning, for example in their mathematical development. Girls make better progress than boys, especially in communication, language and literacy. There are good induction procedures in place to support children and their parents and carers when the children start school. Staff have created a welcoming environment in which children are made safe, feel secure and are well cared for. Children are encouraged to behave well and to develop good habits of personal hygiene and healthy lifestyles.

Staff know the children well and plan indoor and outdoor learning opportunities that cover all the areas of early learning. A structured phonics programme is in place to ensure suitable attention is given to developing children's early reading skills. Activities that are led by adults are planned successfully and matched to children's learning needs. Children gain less from the activities that are provided for them to access independently, as these require a greater focus on intended learning outcomes. Assessments of children's attainment and progress are moderated to develop a consistency among the adults completing them. A closer check is required on the way in which adults assess children's engagement and learning when they are working independently.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and currently rest with members of the senior leadership team. They have recognised the need to support newly appointed staff by securing the involvement of an advanced skills teacher to work alongside the Reception teachers and to guide developments in teaching and learning. Leaders acknowledge the need to appoint a member of staff to manage the day-to-day provision and overall developments of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Just under half of the parents and carers returned the inspection questionnaire. Several parents and carers wrote comments about how pleased they were with what the school provides and how well their children were doing. Parents and carers believe that their children enjoy school and that they are taught well. They feel that their children are safe in school and are making good progress. There were very few negative responses about any aspect of the school's work, although a small number of questionnaires were less positive about the management of behaviour and the way the school takes notice of parents' and carers' views. A few questionnaires had comments written by parents and carers about their view of the school's effectiveness. These did not reveal any consistent pattern of disagreement and leaders were made aware of the issues that were raised.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided 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 119 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 286 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	72	61	47	39	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	63	53	54	45	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	55	46	63	53	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	56	47	62	52	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	59	50	60	50	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	55	46	62	52	1	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	58	49	59	50	2	2	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)	46	39	61	51	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	52	44	63	53	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	37	31	69	58	5	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	40	34	64	54	6	5	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	42	35	70	59	4	3	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	65	55	52	44	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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	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.



11 June 2010

Dear Children

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Mildenhall, IP28 7LR

Thank you for your help with the inspection and for welcoming the inspectors to your school. We enjoyed the two days we spent with you. Please thank your parents and carers for completing the questionnaires about their views of the school. Thank you also to the children in Years 3 and 4 for completing their questionnaires. They were very helpful and told us that you learn a lot in your lessons, enjoy school, and feel safe when you are there.

The inspectors believe that you attend a good school. All the adults care for you extremely well and want you to be successful. We were pleased to see that you are making good progress, especially in your reading and mathematics. Your teachers organise interesting lessons for you and we like the system you use for judging whether your learning has been successful or not. You receive very good help from all the adults that work with you. We enjoyed talking to different groups of children and hearing about the work of the school and 'eco councils'. We were also impressed with your behaviour and the way you get on together, including outdoors where you have some lovely space and play equipment to enjoy. The achievement assembly was excellent. Well done to the children receiving commendations for being resilient, resourceful and reflective and to the classes for their contributions as well. There are several other good features in your school, for example the clubs, the educational visits you make and the attractive displays of your work.

At the end of the inspection, we asked your headteacher, the staff and governors to keep working on making your school even better. The Reception classes need an overall leader. We would like to see you reaching even higher standards in English and mathematics, especially in writing. We also believe some of you can manage even higher levels of attendance. You can help the adults by being in school every day, trying hard and always doing your best.

You have much to look forward to at St Marys' in the rest of the year. I hope you enjoy it.

Yours sincerely

Rob McKeown

Her Majesty's Inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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