



Inspection report

St Mary's CE (VA) Primary School

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 117497
LEA Hertfordshire

Inspection number 273677
Inspection dates 10 and 11 March 2005
Reporting inspector Mrs C Munt HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Type of School	Primary	School address	Dellsome Lane
School category	Voluntary Aided <i>Diocese of St Albans</i>		Welham Green
Age range of pupils	5 to 11 years		North Mymms Hatfield Hertfordshire AL9 7NF
Gender of pupils	mixed	Telephone number	01707 690500
Number on roll	173	Fax number	01707 690502
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr R Dean
Date of previous inspection	September 2003	Headteacher	Mrs A Botarelli

Age group	Published	Reference no.
5 to 11 years	22 April 2005	273677

Introduction

When St Mary's CE (VA) Primary School was inspected in September 2003, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on three occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in March 2005.

Description of the school

St Mary's CE (VA) Primary School serves the village of North Mymms and the surrounding area. The school is smaller than average with 173 pupils on roll. The pupils are mainly from white British backgrounds. No pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of the pupils known to be entitled to free school meals is below the national average. The pupils' attainment on entry is broadly average. However, a high proportion of the pupils in several year groups, a third in Years 4 and 5, joined the school after the age of five: many of these pupils have learning or other difficulties. The proportion of the pupils who have special educational needs is in line with the national figure. Two pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Need.

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Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils.

The appointment of the headteacher in April 2004 brought stability and a renewed sense of purpose to the school's work. As a result of her determined leadership and the hard work of the teachers and support staff, the school now provides the pupils with a good education. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and there is a broad range of additional activities to engage the pupils' interest and to encourage them to be confident and responsible members of the school community. However, some long and medium-term subject plans are less effective than they could be in promoting continuity and progression in learning particularly for the higher-attaining pupils. Standards in all subjects are broadly in line with expectations for the different age groups, apart from in writing in Key Stage 2 where they are below national expectations. Nevertheless, attainment in writing is rising because the teaching is at least satisfactory and frequently good. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good overall.

Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection of September 2003 required the school to address key issues concerned with leadership, management and governance, standards, the quality of teaching, curriculum and assessment and behaviour management. There has been good progress in relation to all of them.

Capacity to improve

The school is well placed to make further improvement. The headteacher's commitment to high standards provides clear direction for the school's work and the teaching and support staff form an effective team. The proportion of good and very good teaching has improved and is promoting more effective progress over time for the pupils. The school is in the early stages of reviewing the current teaching programmes with a view to developing a more appropriate curriculum. The headteacher and the governing body have a shared understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They also recognise the need to be more evaluative when analysing data. The headteacher has worked creatively within the budget. However, unavoidable high staffing expenses constrained spending in the last financial year which slowed the school's progress in some areas. The local education authority (LEA) has provided a transitional grant for this year.

What the school should do to improve further

The school's development plan recognises the areas where improvement is needed. However the key priorities are to:

- continue to improve standards, particularly in writing;
- improve long and medium-term planning to ensure that continuity and progression in learning are achieved and that work for the higher attaining pupils provides a suitable level of challenge;
- evaluate assessment data more effectively.

Achievement and standards

Standards are satisfactory and are rising because of a better focus to the teaching which motivates the pupils and is accelerating their progress. In Key Stages 1 and 2 the rate of the pupils' progress has increased and is generally good. Challenging targets have been set for the pupils in Years 2 and 6. The school's tracking records for individual pupils show that pupils in all classes have made at least sound progress in reading, writing and mathematics and some have made very good progress, occasionally from a low starting level. In a lower Key Stage 2 class gaps in the pupils' prior learning continue to hamper the recording of work. The school is well aware that despite recent improvements, standards in this year group remain too low. However, it is working systematically and effectively to boost the attainment of these pupils.

The pupils' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average, although some have difficulty in expressing themselves clearly. They make a good start in the Foundation Stage, particularly in their personal and social development. Some pupils reach standards that are beyond those expected for five-year-olds; for instance, in their ability to write short, accurate sentences, to record number work correctly and to work independently on the computer. In the Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1, standards in lessons were in line with those typically found in primary schools. In Key Stage 2, standards were close to those expected in mathematics and science and in several foundation subjects but were below expectations in literacy. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are too low but are rising. In several mathematics lessons groups of pupils worked at levels higher than expected for their age groups. However, there was little other work at a higher level.

In the national tests for pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2004, the school's results in English and mathematics were significantly better than in 2003 and were above the national figures. However, a small number of pupils were absent for the science tests, which resulted in a below average points score. In comparison with schools with a similar entitlement to free school meals, results in English and mathematics were well above average. Most pupils made reasonable progress from their results at the end of Key Stage 1. The Key Stage 1 results in 2004 in reading and writing were lower than in

previous years. The results were well below those of similar schools and of schools nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. This decline was due to inconsistent teaching and weaknesses in planning and assessment. These have been rectified and the pupils in the current Year 2 are on track to meet and possibly exceed national expectations by the end of the key stage.

Personal development

When the school became subject to special measures, the poor attitudes and behaviour of some pupils prevented them from making suitable progress in their learning, particularly in Key Stage 2. The pupil's attitudes and behaviour have improved significantly over the last year and generally they have acquired good work habits. This is a result of the teachers' higher demands and the more consistent application of rules and routines. In most of the lessons, the pupils' behaviour was good or very good as was their attitude to work. The few pupils who have difficulties in behaving appropriately are managed effectively and do not disrupt the learning of others.

Although attendance is in line with the national figure, a small but significant number of pupils arrive late at the start of the day. This disrupts the teaching for the rest of the class and causes these pupils to fall behind in their learning. The school is working appropriately with the educational welfare officer to support families whose children are persistently late.

The provision for the pupils' social, moral and spiritual development is good. Provision for cultural development is sound. The pupils feel safe and honesty and reliability are valued highly. Attractive displays celebrate their achievements and record work in progress. Pupils of all ages mix together well and enjoy pleasant relationships with the adults. They are polite to visitors, to adults and to each other. Pupils have suitable opportunities to contribute practically to the school and the local community; for example, as lunch monitors, by manning stalls at the school fete and by working with local amateur dramatic groups. Year 6 pupils planned events for the school's charity day sensibly and maturely. The pupils understand right from wrong, know the school's rules and generally obey them without reminders. They treat the site and buildings well.

The headteacher gives a strong lead in assemblies which promotes a caring, Christian ethos. Assemblies encourage the development of responsible attitudes and give the pupils time to reflect on important issues such as taking responsibility. Lenten displays, which encouraged pupils to consider others less fortunate than themselves and to be charitable in thought and deed, epitomised the spirit now prevalent in the school. The cultural diversity of society is celebrated and promoted appropriately in lessons and in assemblies.

Quality of provision

The quality of provision is good and this is a key factor in the progress that the pupils make. Almost all of the teaching was satisfactory or better. In six lessons the quality of teaching was good and in four it was very good. Four lessons were taught satisfactorily. The

teaching was unsatisfactory in one lesson where there were weaknesses in planning. The permanent teaching staff and the teaching assistants all taught well. The overall profile of teaching is much improved in Key Stage 2 because of the support and challenge of the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and the school's development adviser. Teachers and teaching assistants have developed their skills well and have put into practice effectively the training that they have received.

Good features of the teaching included: a range of effective teaching styles; high-quality expositions and questioning; imaginative use of resources; clear planning; appropriate learning objectives and high expectations for effort and behaviour which were shared with the pupils. There were good examples of informative marking in several classes although it was inconsistent across Key Stage 2. Relationships were positive and the pupils enjoyed their learning. Teaching assistants made important contributions to lessons, particularly when leading groups. In most lessons the careful deployment of other adults meant that the pupils' individual and special educational needs were met well. Some lessons that were satisfactory overall did not take sufficient account of the more-able pupils' prior attainment, and some made less progress than they should have. Where behaviour management strategies were insecurely implemented the pupils' behaviour deteriorated and their learning was adversely affected.

There are systematic arrangements for assessing the pupils' attainment and progress. Assessment information is beginning to be used appropriately to identify those at risk of underachieving, to create suitably challenging end-of-key stage targets and to inform teachers' planning. Test data has been used effectively this year to inform whole school priorities. However, the evaluation of data is at an early stage of development and there is scope to use it more effectively to review the impact of strategies.

There are some anomalies in the curriculum; for example, in several foundation subjects units of work are not planned in a logical sequence and the termly plans in some year groups do not give sufficient guidance for teachers who are new to the school. Consequently, some foundation subject lessons are less successful than they should be because the pupils have not mastered the basic skills required. The increased provision of after school activities, visits to places of interest and work with teachers from the LEA have extended the pupils' learning effectively. Provision for ICT has improved. The potential of ICT to support other subjects is not fully realised. The school is working successfully with a specialist school to develop the subject and high quality training for teaching assistants is helping them to take a more active part in lessons. The sharing of pupils' targets with their parents or carers is creating more consistent home-school links.

The recent appointment of a resources technician is valued by the teaching staff. This innovative post has provided the teachers with high quality support and is an effective use of resources. The teachers and the support staff know the pupils well and provide all of them with a suitable level of care and attention.

Leadership and management

The school experienced some difficulty in filling the posts of headteacher and deputy headteacher, but the situation was resolved with the appointments of the headteacher in April 2004 and the deputy headteacher in July of the same year. The school's leadership team was consolidated with the appointment, in September, of staff to senior management posts.

The headteacher's leadership and management of the school are good; the leadership and management of other key staff are sound with good features. The headteacher's positive attitude has been instrumental in creating an effective team with a strong commitment to improving the standard of the pupils' education. The senior managers have developed sound procedures and practices which provide them with a clear picture of attainment across the school. They are aware that the presentation of this information is insufficiently evaluative. The high level of teamwork and the strong commitment to the school from all of the staff reflect the good leadership of the headteacher.

Governors' roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and there is an appropriate system of committees. An appropriate range of training is in place. Governors have suitable strategies for holding staff to account for the school's performance. Planning is more strategic and is linked appropriately to the school's needs and the available budget.

The LEA has provided the school with a very good level of challenge and support, particularly through the work of the school development adviser. Other members of the LEA have made an effective contribution to improvements in the curriculum.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

St Mary's CE (VA) Primary school was inspected in September 2003 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in March, May and December 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of September 2003.

In March 2005, two HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Fifteen parts of lessons and an assembly were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, the chair of governors, the senior management team, two representatives from the LEA and informal discussions were held with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of September 2004 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

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