



St Mark's CofE School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109328
Local Authority Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number 288356
Inspection dates 15–16 November 2006
Reporting inspector Chris Constantine HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Baytree Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Bath
Age range of pupils	11–16		BA1 6ND
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01225 312661
Number on roll (school)	313	Fax number	01225 429063
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Roger Coombes
		Headteacher	Cherril A Pope
Date of previous school inspection	18 November 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	15–16 November 2006	288356

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is the only secondary Church of England VA school and the smallest secondary school in the local authority. It achieved a specialist status for Business and Enterprise in 2003. The school is undersubscribed, with an imbalance of boys and girls in some years, particularly in Years 7 and 11 where there are more boys. There is higher than average mobility in Years 10 and 11. Pupils are mainly from White heritage groups and a small number speak English as an additional language. The school has a relatively high proportion of children with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school is satisfactory with a number of good features. It has improved on many fronts since the last inspection in 2002, particularly in pupils' achievements in Years 7 to 9, in developing its Christian ethos and in the behaviour of most pupils. Parents and pupils have been well involved in contributing their opinions and are more satisfied by the clear sense of purpose now in the school. They feel that the school has squarely faced up to its problems and has taken the right steps to deal with them. The school has good capacity to improve.

The clear vision and concerted promotion of improvement by the headteacher, governors and deputy headteacher are main strengths. They have instilled a highly principled moral sense of purpose in the school. The emphasis on ethics in business as part of the Business and Enterprise developments and the commitment to supporting people throughout the world are exemplary. The newly extended leadership team is making a real difference, sharing the responsibility and renewing the drive for improvement.

There is still much to do. The fall in GCSE results in 2005 shook the school and starkly underlined a longer-term gap between boys' and girls' achievement. Girls do less well in the years where they are in a distinct minority and in some subjects. The trend has been for Key Stage 3 results to go up sharply but for GCSE results to fluctuate. GCSE results in 2006 were better and whilst standards are still below average, this represents satisfactory achievement for a group whose standards were affected by very high mobility. The school now carefully monitors and evaluates all pupils' progress and a very effective full review of pupils' progress in the current Year 11 shows that they are being actively challenged and supported to do well.

Raising the quality of teaching is a key to further improvement, so that it makes pupils want to learn to their limits. At present, too many classrooms, particularly in Years 10 and 11, lack lively activity and interest. As one parent put it, 'Innovation and creativity motivate children and inspire them to learn. I want to see my child get a buzz out of school.' There is too little emphasis on creativity, innovation and independent learning in lessons.

There are substantial strengths in what the school provides, some of them just developing. Care and support for pupils' well-being and health are good. Pupils' opinions now count much more and the school council is much stronger and more influential. The new rewards and celebration assemblies, linked to a reinvigorated house system led by the enthusiastic staff who suggested it, mark a significant move from imposing sanctions to celebrating success.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement in Key Stage 4, particularly for girls, to match the levels now seen in Key Stage 3.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it engages all pupils' interest and encourages them to learn more actively and independently.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Analysis of results and standards seen by inspectors show that pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Their attainment when they enter the school is below average. Results of national tests in Year 9 have risen rapidly since 2002. Standards at the end of Year 9 are average and pupils' progress in Key Stage 3 is very good. Results are below average at the end of Key Stage 4 and overall progress is broadly satisfactory. Looked after children and pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress in their time in the school. GCSE results in 2005 fell sharply and in 2006 rose again. There is some underperformance for girls, particularly the more able and in Years 10 and 11. The teaching that has had such good effect in the earlier years has not promoted active or independent learning well enough for them. Girls have missed challenging targets in the last two years. There is a negative effect on girls' achievement of having a 40/60 gender split in some years. The freedom allowed in option choices for GCSE has resulted in poorer results overall in some foundation subjects. Results in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are better.

The very high mobility, particularly into Years 10 and 11, explains some of the low standards. Pupils who entered the school in Years 10 and 11 did less well in 2006 than those who started in earlier years. The school uses a very good range of analyses and has started to intervene when individual pupils and groups are not on track to achieve their potential. Setting and better assessment have had a very positive effect on achievement in Years 7 to 9.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Personal development and well-being are satisfactory with good features. Most pupils enjoy school and want to learn. Attendance is satisfactory and improving. Behaviour around the school is good, and satisfactory in lessons, where there are occasional disruptions and lack of attention by a small minority of pupils.

Exclusions have fallen recently with the school's shift of emphasis from sanctions to rewards for good behaviour, and pupils now say bullying is uncommon and quickly dealt with if it does occur. They feel the school is a safe and enjoyable environment. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with particular strengths in spiritual and moral development. Pupils appreciate the school's encouragement for them to adopt healthy lifestyles and many take up the sporting opportunities, after school clubs and healthy food choices. Many make a good contribution to the school through accepting responsibilities and to the wider community through support for charities and entertaining senior citizens at a Christmas party.

The development of workplace skills is satisfactory through careers guidance and development of basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Where teaching is good, pupils are actively involved and speak readily, but there are relatively few lessons that really inspire. Whilst competent, teaching often lacks the colour that is necessary to excite pupils to enjoy learning and to excel. This affects learning in Years 10 and 11 in particular, where pupils want to get good results at GCSE but often do not receive the extra stimulus to build on what they have achieved in Years 7 to 9.

There is evidence that the overall quality of teaching is improving. Regular monitoring of teaching by senior staff is leading to greater consistency, with the 'Good Lesson Guide' being the focus of lesson observations and evaluation. Thorough planning of lessons usually gives adequate attention to the needs of different groups of learners in the class, including those with learning difficulties. However this common planning framework is often too rigidly applied, stifling creativity, innovation and challenge. Therefore pupils, especially older ones, sometimes find lessons dull, particularly if examination preparation dominates rather than guides the teaching. Teachers are increasingly making good use of performance information to set challenging targets for pupils. But lessons are often dominated too much by the teacher, so that pupils are not fully engaged or active enough in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. In Years 7 to 9 additional support for those whose basic skills are weak helps them to cope. In Years 10 and 11 the school's move from a more prescriptive curriculum to greater choice has not been successful because some pupils' choices were not guided sufficiently well. As a result some followed less appropriate courses and achieved less well. The school has recognised this problem, and present pupils in Year 10 have better programmes with logical pathways for their futures. There is good provision of practically based courses for those whose basic skills remain weak. Despite some collaborative provision with local colleges the range of vocational courses is relatively limited.

The impact of Business and Enterprise status has taken time to permeate throughout the curriculum, but is becoming an increasing strength. It has brought effective new technology to many classrooms. The involvement of all pupils in special activities, such as the Year 7 Enterprise Day, is very good. The promotion of a global perspective in the curriculum is linked vigorously to the principle of ethical enterprise and the school's Christian ethos.

Pupils have good opportunities to take part in a wide range of other activities including sport, music and homework clubs. This is very well organised as the 'After School Academy' with good levels of participation.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are well cared for and support for learning is improving. The role of form tutors has been extended recently and they know more about their pupils' academic and personal achievements. Attendance is regularly monitored. Pupils are confident that they have an adult to turn to if they need advice on personal or academic matters. They spoke positively about the guidance they receive at important times such as choosing options. The Sanctuary, a valuable space for quiet reflection, and courses run by the chaplain actively promote pupils' self-worth, particularly the confidence of girls.

The school has good links with local agencies, schools and colleges, which support particularly those who are vulnerable or at risk. Safeguarding provisions are very thorough.

Assessment systems and the tracking of pupils' progress are thorough and enable effective intervention to improve standards and achievement. Pupils know their targets and how to improve; parents are regularly informed of their children's progress. The Footprint lessons that bring together all the provision for literacy support in small groups are successful in raising self-esteem and achievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory with several good features. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and governors know very clearly what needs to be done to raise standards and achievement. They have successfully reorganised the way the school is run. These new structures and careful appointments to leadership posts give the school its good capacity to improve. These developments have shown themselves in Key Stage 3 results if not yet GCSE results, and a common sense of purpose amongst senior and other leaders is palpable. Staff feel optimistic and well supported. This growing confidence is well illustrated in the recent Year 11 review, which is a valuable tool to help individuals and groups to achieve better. Overall, self-evaluation is accurate and has provided effective whole-school and subject development plans, but the monitoring of teaching has not led to the necessary consistency in learning and to high standards in Years 10 and 11.

The school uses its generous funding wisely. Business and Enterprise status has helped to cultivate good links with business and the community. The Business Support Group is a particularly valuable link. The headteacher has led the successful development of the specialist status with a deep commitment to promoting high principles in business and global responsibility. These values are a notable strength of the school and a testimony to her good leadership. She and the deputy headteacher are a powerful team giving a clear vision and sense of direction to the school's work.

Governors support the school well. From a former position of not always challenging weaknesses with sufficient rigour, they now have given their full backing to the

restructuring of the senior team and have new, robust systems to monitor the school's work.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

We enjoyed inspecting your school this week, visiting your lessons and the Year 7 Enterprise Day and talking to many of you. We would like to thank you for contributing so well to the inspection and for the way you responded to us so positively and politely.

Your school is satisfactory with some good features, and has improved in many ways since it was last inspected in 2002, especially in the better test results in Years 7 to 9, developing its Christian message and improving behaviour through rewards.

Your headteacher, the governors and the staff have shown us how much they want you to do well and that they are doing the right things to make that happen.

We think the school's main strengths are:

- how the head, governors and the senior staff run the school
- the way you give your opinions about what is good and needs changing in the school and how well your views have been acted on
- the school council
- the Business and Enterprise days and the new technology in your classrooms
- your commitment to supporting people throughout the world
- the way the school cares for you and supports your well-being and health
- the rewards and celebration assemblies, linked to the new house system.

We think you can help the school to be even better by working on these two things with your teachers:

- achieving better GCSE results, particularly for girls
- more lessons where you learn actively and independently.

All three of us wish you and the school great success in the future.