



# Aston St Mary's CE Voluntary Aided Primary School

## Inspection Report

---

**Unique Reference Number** 117421  
**Local Authority** HERTFORDSHIRE  
**Inspection number** 290831  
**Inspection dates** 6–7 November 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Georgina Beasley

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

---

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary	<b>School address</b>	School Lane
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided		Aston, Stevenage
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11		Hertfordshire SG2 7HA
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01438 880212
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	102	<b>Fax number</b>	01438 880212
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mr J Meadows
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr P Gray
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	5 February 2001		

---

<b>Age group</b> 4–11	<b>Inspection dates</b> 6–7 November 2006	<b>Inspection number</b> 290831
--------------------------	--	------------------------------------

---

---

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

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

## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

## **Description of the school**

Nearly all children who attend this small village school come from White British backgrounds. A smaller than average proportion of children is entitled to free school meals. More children have learning difficulties or disabilities than found in schools of the same size. An average proportion has a statement of special educational need.

## **Key for inspection grades**

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Aston Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary is a satisfactory school that is improving rapidly. It successfully nurtures children's excellent behaviour and attitudes to learning. Children are encouraged to think for themselves and consider how their actions affect others, and so get along extremely well. They have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and keep healthy and fit, and know what it means to behave responsibly.

The newly appointed headteacher provides good leadership. His appointment is justifiably popular with parents. As one said, 'He is a huge asset to the school. The children think he's great'. Following a period of considerable unrest, the school is emerging into a close knit and happy family where children, staff, governors, parents and the people from the village come together to embrace Christian values and celebrate increasing successes. There is renewed energy and enthusiasm for learning. Classrooms are welcoming and children's achievements are celebrated openly. Until May of this year, improvement since the previous inspection had been unsatisfactory. The new leadership team has built a good team spirit and a commitment to make the school the best it can be. This has ensured good improvement to the quality of teaching and learning, the curriculum and the support and guidance for children's personal development and learning. Teaching and children's achievements in Nursery and Reception are satisfactory.

Recent improvements are not yet fully reflected in what is already satisfactory achievement and average standards at the end of Years 2 and 6. Children in Years 5 and 6 make excellent progress because of outstanding teaching in this class. Underachievement in previous years has now been tackled successfully and all children make at least satisfactory progress. Children with learning difficulties make good progress throughout the school and many reach the levels expected for their age at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. More able children reached higher standards this year as a result of excellent teaching in Years 2 and 6. Well planned learning tasks help able children reach challenging targets in mathematics but tasks are not always planned so well for them in reading and writing.

The headteacher and assistant headteacher's close checks on children's progress in English and mathematics have led to improving standards and progress in all classes this year. However, these checks do not pinpoint precisely which knowledge and skills are stronger and weaker to accelerate progress further. The school's evaluation of how well it is doing and what it now needs to do to sustain improvement is accurate and mostly reflects the inspection outcome. Subject leadership is not fully effective because staff have only recently been given the chance to get on with the job. The school has a good capacity and the necessary skills to continue to improve.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Embed systems for checking children's progress to pinpoint more precisely where strengths and weaknesses are in achievement within subjects.

- Improve teachers' planning so that tasks help more able children reach their challenging targets in reading and writing.
- Enable subject leaders to monitor achievement in their subjects and to work with all staff to make any improvements that are needed.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Small numbers of children in each year group mean that attainment on entry and standards at the end of Years 2 and 6 can vary considerably each year. Generally, children start school with average skills and attainment in all areas of learning. Progress is satisfactory in the Foundation Stage and most children reach the levels they should for their age by the end of the Reception year. Standards at the end of Year 2 are average in reading, writing and mathematics. Progress is satisfactory. For the first time in three years, more able children in Year 2 are reaching above average levels because challenging targets are identified in teachers' planning, and tasks support learning effectively.

Standards are average in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6 and reflect a significant improvement over the last three years. Results for more able children were above average in the national tests last year. Progress for this group of children was satisfactory compared with when they were in Year 2. There has been good improvement in science and writing since the previous inspection. Speaking and drama activities enable the children to rehearse what they want to write, and so progress in writing has improved and standards are now average. The more able children now have good scientific enquiry and investigation skills.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Personal development and well-being are good. Children feel safe in school and recognise that 'fallings out hardly ever happen' because everyone is everyone else's friend. The playground is busy with children playing happily together. They are encouraged to talk about their feelings and concerns openly and so have an impressive understanding of their own and others' feelings. Great opportunities exist for them to learn what it means to be good citizens through school council meetings and discussions in classes. They also have good opportunities to do small jobs around the school and take responsibility for their own actions. Good outcomes of the provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development help the children to develop a good awareness of different religions and cultures. Attendance has recently improved and is now satisfactory because fewer parents are taking their children on holidays during term time. Children usually arrive in school on time and settle to work quickly.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers plan lessons aimed to engage learners and help them to develop a love of learning. The computerised whiteboards are used to engage and enliven learning. Opportunities to work together in groups to plan tasks and solve problems help the children to develop skills they will need in later life. Teachers ask a good range of questions which challenge the children to think things through for themselves. Teaching for children with learning difficulties is good. Work is planned that matches their needs and ensures they receive good levels of support in lessons. All children feel good about themselves and so they try harder. Challenging targets are identified for when more able children work in groups and well matched tasks in mathematics are making teachers realise that the children are capable of doing even harder work. The same level of thought is not given to the tasks that will best help the children to reach the targets in reading and writing. In some classes, the more able children are simply expected to do the same work as others but with less support.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and better than the school's evaluation that it is satisfactory. Individual teachers make sure it is relevant and interesting and supports children's personal development well. The children get good opportunities to practise their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills in other subjects. Teachers do not have as clear an overview as they could of what children learn in year groups other than their own because subject leaders have not had the chance to share this with all staff. Links with the local community, especially the church and schools in the area, visits and after-school clubs provide good enrichment to children's learning. Children in Years 5 and 6 are excited by their visits to the local specialist secondary school 'to do science in the lab'. These activities, personal, social and health education lessons and special weeks and days, such as 'Food Week', help children develop their excellent awareness of how to stay safe, and keep fit and healthy.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Checks to ensure the children are safe and secure in school are rigorous and meet government requirements. All staff provide very good role models and children respond accordingly with excellent manners, attitudes and behaviour. Lunchtime staff encourage the children to make healthy food choices and so help them develop a positive attitude to healthy eating. Systems for setting academic targets are new but are already starting to raise standards and achievement in literacy and numeracy. Teachers' comments when marking work give good guidance on what the children have done well and what they need to do to improve.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving. The headteacher and assistant headteacher form a new leadership team that is quickly and very effectively giving the school a renewed lease of life. Communication has improved tremendously. Parents like the parents' council set up last term and feel that their views are listened to and valued, even when the school decides not to act on their suggestions. Children appreciate being consulted through class discussions and the school council. The governing body carries out its role and responsibilities in a satisfactory way. It has a renewed confidence that the school is now moving in the right direction. Governors have more accurate and up to date information, enabling them to be more active in asking the school how well it is doing, whether it is doing well enough and whether what it is doing is in the best interests of the children. Subject leaders are now being given the time and guidance to carry out their roles in monitoring and evaluation. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

**Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).**

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>
---	-----------------------

### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
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

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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	2

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

### The quality of provision

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

<sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
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	3
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

8 November 2006

Dear Children

Aston St Mary's CE (Aided) Primary School, School Lane, Aston, Stevenage, Hertfordshire. SG2 7HA

Thank you all very much for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school recently. Thank you especially to those children who let me join in with their learning and who told me so much about the school.

The school is doing a satisfactory job. There are some special things to report. I was particularly impressed with the way that you all get along so well, helping each other out when playing outside and when you are working together to complete a shared task. You all behave extremely well, are polite and thoughtful and are growing into responsible young people. Well done! Your excellent attitudes in lessons are helping your teachers to do their jobs and so they are able to plan some exciting things for you to do. I know you enjoy your learning because most of you told me so. You especially like the wide range of clubs and visits. I have asked your teachers to make sure that the tasks they plan for you to do in reading and writing will help you reach your targets, especially those of you who are capable of harder work. You can help by knowing what your targets are and by remembering to check your work to see whether you are reaching them. Keep asking questions to make sure you know what you are expected to do.

You have a good headteacher in Mr Gray. He has worked hard with all the adults to make sure that you are looked after well and are doing what you should to achieve even more in your work. I have asked him and all of the teachers responsible for leading certain subjects to look even more closely at what you do well and what you still need to learn so the school can help you to reach even higher standards. I know you will do this because the school is one big family where you all work together to make it a happy place to be.

Please have a very special Christmas and enjoy the rest of your time at the school.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Beasley (Inspector)