

Ashford, St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118738
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291232
Inspection date	23 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Don Mason

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	422
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alison Thompson
Headteacher	Sue Parkin
Date of previous school inspection	11 June 2001
School address	Western Avenue Ashford TN23 1ND
Telephone number	01233 625531
Fax number	01233 634004

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Pupils enter this larger-than-average primary school with below-average levels of attainment. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is average but varies considerably from year to year. The proportion of pupils whose first language is not English has recently increased and is above average. Many of these pupils are at an early stage of learning English.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with outstanding features. In this happy and inclusive environment, pupils are self-confident and appreciative of the many opportunities the school provides. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. A typical comment was, 'This school has a very positive effect on the children. It values them all equally, regardless of their academic ability'. It is this feeling of self-worth which helps to promote the pupils' good personal development. Good provision, characterised by lively teaching and interesting activities, ensures that children in the Foundation Stage make good progress. Most reach the levels expected for their age in all areas of learning by the start of Year 1. Good teaching ensures that this positive start is successfully built on in other year groups. As a result, pupils continue to make good progress in English and mathematics to reach above-average standards at the end of Year 6. Standards in science are in line with the national average.

The school has taken effective steps to remedy the drop in results in 2006. Additional mid-year checks on pupil progress are now carried out and monitored by senior staff. This ensures that pupils in danger of falling behind are given good support. Consequently, the school predicts the test results in 2007 will show a significant improvement on the previous year and better reflect the progress made in lessons. The school is rightly investigating ways of checking pupils' achievement in science more rigorously to improve progress and ensure that standards in science are commensurate with those in other subjects. The curriculum is good and pupils' enjoyment is promoted by a very wide range of sporting activities, visits and visitors, and theme days such as the 'Roman Day' at Dover museum. Curriculum enrichment is outstanding.

The outstanding care, support and guidance provided for pupils is reflected in the excellent relationships which exist between staff and pupils. Individuals feel safe, adopt safe practices and know that someone will help them if there is a problem. The academic guidance provided for pupils is good and appropriate steps are being taken to improve the consistency of advice offered to pupils in marking. It is not sufficiently relevant to their individual targets so pupils are not always given clear guidance about how well they are progressing towards their targets. Pupils with learning difficulties and those who are at an early stage of learning English, make as much progress as other pupils because of the carefully planned support provided for them by well-trained, enthusiastic teaching assistants. Pupils have numerous opportunities to make an outstanding contribution to the community through activities such as the school council, church events and responsibilities in school. These culminate in the Year 6 opera, which is composed, written and organised by the pupils.

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher provides strong leadership and is well supported by an enthusiastic, hard-working staff team. The school has taken timely action to deal with issues arising from the most recent national test results. The very good assessment arrangements now in place for English and mathematics and the improving progress made by pupils in these subjects provide evidence of the school's good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the assessment arrangements for science in order to raise pupils' achievement to match that in English and mathematics.
- Improve the quality of marking so that pupils are given clear guidance about how they are progressing towards their targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children start school with below-expected levels of attainment because a significant number have weaknesses in literacy, numeracy and physical development. These are the areas in which children make particularly good progress in the Reception classes. Most are at expected levels when they enter Year 1. Pupils continue to make good progress as they move through Years 1 to 6 and attain above-average standards at the end of Year 6. The dip in standards in the latest Year 6 tests was partly due to the high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties. In addition, a number of 'borderline' pupils did not quite achieve as well as expected. The school has introduced additional, rigorous assessment procedures that are helping to ensure that the school has a clear view of the progress that all pupils are making and that expected levels of attainment are well founded. A programme of intensive support designed to boost pupils' progress in reading, writing and spelling was introduced last term. This is already making a positive impact on pupil achievement. Good progress in mathematics has been restored partly by the new emphasis on problem- solving work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The pupils' good personal development is reflected in their friendly, out-going manner and their positive attitudes towards their work. The Christian ethos of the school helps to promote the pupils' good social, moral, spiritual and cultural development and is supported by the school's work with projects in Madagascar and Croatia. Attendance is good and pupils enjoy their education. Visits from the school nurse, links with local supermarkets and a wealth of sporting activities help to promote the pupils' good understanding of healthy lifestyles. Pupil's behaviour is good. However, the perception of some pupils is that behaviour is not always as good as it should be. The development of skills which pupils will require in their future lives is good. They make good progress in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). Activities such as the Year 3 topic on pocket money and the school council's input to the appointment of new staff help the pupils to develop skills that will serve them well in the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The good quality of teaching ensures that pupils' progress is good in all year groups. Lessons are well planned and teachers usually provide activities that are well matched to the needs of pupils of different abilities. Pupil and adult relationships are excellent and pupils show good levels of concentration in lessons. There is good pace in most lessons. The work of teaching assistants is a strength of the school. They are well used to improve pupils' achievement, particularly in ICT and in supporting pupils in danger of falling behind. Teaching in the Reception classes takes good account of the needs of young children and ensures a good balance of teacher-directed and independent activities. Aspects of teaching are sometimes outstanding and teachers generally have high expectations of their pupils. The school recognises that the marking of work is not always as helpful as it could be in informing pupils what they need to do to achieve their personal learning targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum helps to ensure that pupils, of all abilities, in all year groups, make good progress in the basic skills and ICT. This is partly due to the positive impact of the new intervention programme for literacy, which is proving effective in helping a significant number of pupils to consolidate and improve their basic skills. Those pupils at an early stage of learning English are well catered for and their progress is carefully monitored. Pupils enjoy their lessons in physical, health and social education, which promote their good understanding of how to keep themselves fit, healthy and safe. A wide range of clubs, sporting and musical events and lessons from specialist teachers contributes to the school's outstanding curriculum enrichment. Links with secondary schools are strong and pupils enjoy projects such as 'Superheroes' which ease the transition to the next stage of their education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve well and make good progress in their personal development because of the outstanding pastoral care and good academic guidance they receive. The work of the learning mentors in supporting pupils who are experiencing difficulties and the 'social skills' groups for pupils with special educational needs are examples of the high level of care provided for the pupils. Policies to ensure pupils' safety are securely in place and regularly reviewed. The academic guidance provided is strongest in writing, where pupils have clear information about how to reach the next level. The school accepts that the quality of marking is variable and does not relate to the pupils' individual targets often enough.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has high expectations of pupils and of the adults in school, who are united in their wish to raise standards whilst providing pupils with a rich and enjoyable education. Staff are appreciative of the many opportunities provided for professional training and support. Following a period of satisfactory progress for pupils in Years 3 to 6 and last year's disappointing Year 6 test results, the school took decisive action. Very good assessment arrangements are now in place and subject leaders make good use of the information to identify possible areas of weakness. Class teachers and senior staff meet regularly to discuss pupils' progress and arrange extra support if it is required. The school has a clear plan of action to bring about further improvements. The improvement of achievement in science is a priority and effective action is being taken. The school is anticipating that the impact of these measures will be seen in improved results in this year's national tests.

The school works well with parents and outside agencies, especially other schools, including special schools, to promote pupils' development. Governors are proud of the school and provide strong support. They are focused on raising achievement. Through the use of assessment information and close links with school staff, they are well placed to help the school move forward.

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Annex A

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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

24 May 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of St Mary's C of E Primary School, Ashford, Kent TN23 1ND

I really enjoyed my visit to your school. Thank you for being so helpful and friendly. I particularly enjoyed visiting your classrooms, seeing the work you were doing and talking to you about your school. I found that your school provides you with a good education, with some outstanding features.

What you do well

- You make good progress in your work and standards at the end of Year 6 are above average.
- Your attendance is good. You behave well in school. Generally you enjoy your lessons and get on very well with your teachers.
- The teachers are checking your progress regularly and making sure that you get extra help if you need it.
- You are proud of the outstanding range of after-school clubs and special events which the school provides for you.
- You get on well with your teachers and they take very good care of you, especially if you are having any difficulties.
- The headteacher and adults in school work well together as a team and are making changes that are bringing about improvements.

What we have asked your school to do now

- Help you to make as much progress in science as you do in English and mathematics.
- Make the advice that teachers give you when they mark your work even better than it is now and tell you how well you are progressing towards your personal targets.

I wish you very well for the future.

Mr D Mason Lead Inspector