

St Margaret's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115071
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	311814
Inspection dates	12–13 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Derek Watts

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	59
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Neil Pyman
Headteacher	Mrs Naomi Snowdon
Date of previous school inspection	13 January 2004
School address	Church Lane Toppesfield Halstead Essex CO9 4DS
Telephone number	01787 237354
Fax number	01787 237534

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Margaret's CE is a much smaller than average primary school. Most pupils are from a White British background and there are currently no pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is above average. However, these pupils are not evenly distributed. In some year groups, over half of the pupils have learning difficulties while other year groups have none. The current headteacher was appointed in September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of St Margaret's CE Primary is satisfactory. There are good aspects to its work and it is demonstrating a good capacity to improve. Good care, guidance and support and a positive school atmosphere lead to good pupils' personal development. Pupils achieve satisfactorily from their various starting points. Pupils make good progress in years 5 and 6 because of better teaching for these year groups. Parents hold positive views about the school and most are pleased with the care and education provided for their children.

The headteacher has a clear vision and provides good direction for the school. With her staff, she has created a positive school atmosphere for pupils to learn and staff to work in. She knows the school's current strengths and weaknesses and has been able to identify what action is needed to bring about further improvements. The leadership of English is effective but other leadership roles are at a developmental stage. Hence, overall, leadership and management are satisfactory.

Standards vary by the end of Year 2 and Year 6 because numbers in each year group are small. In addition, in some year groups, a significant number of pupils join or leave at different times. Progress in writing has improved because of action taken by the school. In the current Year 6, standards are broadly average in English and science but below average in mathematics. The school is putting in place a programme of action to raise achievement in mathematics.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Across the school, teachers have established good relationships with pupils. Teachers' instructions and explanations are clear and informative, making the purposes of lessons clear. Teaching and learning are stronger in years 5 and 6 because here activities are well matched to pupils' needs. Challenge and pace are not always high enough for pupils to be able to learn as well as they should. In a few lessons, tasks are not sufficiently well matched to pupils' needs. Pupils have clear individual learning targets so they know what they need to do to improve, particularly in writing. The curriculum is good and is enriched by a good range of additional activities. The accommodation and grounds have been improved well since the last inspection.

The school has effective systems to safeguard pupils and to track their attainment and progress. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and this is reflected in their keen participation in activities. They are friendly, polite and they relate very well to others. Behaviour is outstanding in lessons and around the school. Attendance is satisfactory. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles and keep themselves safe. They thrive on additional responsibilities and make good contributions to the school and wider community.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children's overall attainment on entry to Reception varies from year to year. The current Reception children have entered with below expected attainment. Children quickly settle into routines and make good gains in their personal and social development. They enjoy their learning and relate well to adults and other children. The quality of teaching and the curriculum are satisfactory and children make sound gains in other areas of learning. The areas of learning are taught adequately. However, these are not always incorporated into interesting topics, which add enough relevance and meaning to children's learning. The outside learning activities are not always sufficiently linked to main themes or topics. The planning and organisation of

provision is not fully effective in meeting the needs of individuals of Reception, Year 1 and 2 in the same class. The most recent assessments show that current standards in Reception are lower than those expected for children of this age.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement and standards, particularly in mathematics, by ensuring that all lessons are consistently challenging.
- Improve the overall quality of teaching, ensuring that all lessons maintain a brisk pace and that tasks are matched to pupils' needs.
- Strengthen planning and provision in the Foundation Stage provision so that children in Reception make good progress in all areas of learning.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils achieve satisfactorily as they move through the school, building on their sound progress in the Foundation Stage. In 2007, assessments indicated that standards by the end of Year 2 were well above average in reading, writing and mathematics. However, standards in Year 2 have fluctuated from below average to well above average since the last inspection. National test results for Year 6 in 2007 were above average in English, average in science and below average in mathematics. Effective action has been taken to raise achievement in writing across the school and this has led to the improvement in English. Steps are being taken to improve standards in mathematics. Pupils with specific learning needs make sound progress and receive appropriate and helpful adult support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are enthusiastic about school and show positive attitudes to learning. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Clear expectations by staff and positive relationships lead to outstanding behaviour. Pupils relate well with one another. In assembly, they reflect on important issues such as prejudice. They collaborate well in a range of activities. The school works hard to promote good attendance but a few families have children with poor attendance and this lowers the overall attendance figures. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles and possess a good understanding of the importance of healthy diets and taking regular exercise. They thrive on additional responsibility. The school council has contributed to improvements to outdoor equipment. Across the school, pupils are involved in projects to enhance the environment such as creating a new pond. The raising of funds for a variety of charities such as 'Operation Christmas Child' and 'Children in Need' contributes well to the wider community. Pupils are prepared adequately for the next stage of their education because by the time they leave, they have well-developed personal and social skills and satisfactory literacy and numeracy skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory with consistently good practice in the Year 5 and 6 classes. Teachers share learning intentions with the class effectively so pupils know what they are expected to learn. Positive relationships between teachers and their pupils are a strength of the teaching. Teachers' clear instructions and explanations promote learning well. In years 5 and 6, assessment information is used effectively to match tasks to pupils' abilities and needs. As a result, pupils are challenged well and make good progress. This matching of work to needs is not as consistent in the other classes. The marking of pupils' work is constructive and helpful. Good work is praised and helpful comments to guide improvement are provided.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum contributes well to pupils' enjoyment and personal development. The planning of the curriculum has improved. Writing opportunities have been increased and this is having a positive impact on pupils' progress. Improving mathematics is also a key priority. Mental work has been strengthened and a wider range of mathematical activities are planned and provided. A good range of visits and visitors enriches pupils' learning. Popular clubs include football, gardening, netball and rounders. Successful residential visits for years 5 and 6 provide interesting outdoor activities and build pupils' team skills. Health and safety education are promoted well across the curriculum. Significant improvements to the school's accommodation and grounds since the last inspection have provided a new hall, enhancing facilities for assemblies, drama and physical education. In addition, the natural environment is improving with the development of pupil gardens and a pond for scientific study.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care and support are effective and contribute well to pupils' personal development. The headteacher and staff know the pupils well and work closely with their parents. Procedures to ensure pupils' protection and safety are effective. Systems for assessing pupils' attainment and setting individual learning targets are good in English and have contributed to pupils' improved progress in writing. This good practice is being spread to mathematics and science.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are successfully promoting good care, guidance and support. This is leading to effective personal development for pupils. The impact of leadership and management on teaching and on pupils' achievement is satisfactory.

Recent improvements in self-evaluation means that the school knows what it does well and identifies what is needed to bring about necessary improvements. There have been good improvements to assessment and to pupils' progress in writing as a result of effective evaluation. Good use has been made of local authority advisers and consultants to improve pupils' writing.

The headteacher and leader of English provide effective leadership. Other leaders are developing and strengthening their roles so that they can become more effective in monitoring performance and planning for improvement. Governors are supportive and have a clear understanding of the school's performance and of the local community it serves. However, they are not always sufficiently challenging about the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.

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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	2
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.

Annex A

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	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

14 May 2008

Dear Pupils

St Margaret's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Toppesfield, CO9 4DS.

Thank you so much for welcoming me into your school and showing me your work. I enjoyed my visit and would like to tell you what I thought of your school. St Margaret's CE is a satisfactory school which has a number of good features.

These are the strengths of the school.

- You all thoroughly enjoy school.
- The school is a friendly, caring and very pleasant place to be.
- Behaviour is outstanding in lessons and around the school.
- Teaching is good in the Year 5 and 6 classes.
- There is a good range of clubs and visits, which enrich your learning and interests.
- You show a clear understanding of healthy lifestyles and keeping safe.
- You willingly take on additional responsibilities to help the school and the wider community.
- Staff take good care of you and give you good support.

There are three areas that your teachers should work on to make it even better.

- Some of you need to make more progress in mathematics and your teachers are working to make this happen.
- Your teachers should ensure that work is not too easy or too difficult for you and they should make sure that lessons move along at a good pace.
- The activities for children in Reception could be improved in order to help them to learn better.

Finally, thank you once again for all your help. I wish you all the very best for the future.

With kind regards

Derek Watts

Lead inspector