

Mary Howard CofE (VC) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124249
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314860
Inspection date	21 February 2008
Reporting inspector	David Driscoll

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	39
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Layland
Headteacher	Julie Bullous
Date of previous school inspection	3 November 2008
School address	School Lane Edingale Tamworth B79 9JJ
Telephone number	01827 383245
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This very small primary school serves a rural area of Staffordshire. An average proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals. All pupils are White British and speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has fallen since the previous inspection and is now very low. Many more pupils leave or join the school partway through their education than is the case nationally.

In January 2007 a new headteacher was appointed and the school became the first in Staffordshire to become federated with another school. This means that the headteacher manages both schools, although they both have their own governing body. Full-time teachers now teach both classes, whereas prior to September 2007 they were taught by more than one teacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Mary Howard is a good school where pupils achieve well, and standards are now above average. Pupils make good progress in their literacy and numeracy skills in all years, including the Foundation Stage. Progress is equally good in science, but standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are not high enough because, until recently, there have not been sufficient computers at the school. Pupils are now catching up because they receive specialist teaching in the subject, but not enough use is made of computers in other lessons.

Pupils' personal development is also good. Pupils look forward to school, where they have many friends. They rightly identify the good teaching as one of the main reasons for their enjoyment. They love the challenging tasks they are given, and work hard to do their best. Pupils appreciate the good care, guidance and support they receive. They know they have someone to turn to with their problems, and that they will be listened to and taken seriously. They also find their academic targets very helpful in 'telling me what to do to make my work better'. Pupils' understanding of how to live a healthy lifestyle is outstanding, because the good curriculum provides plenty of opportunities not only to learn how to be healthy, but also to put their knowledge into practice. Pupils' good attitudes shine through in the very high rates of participation in the many extra clubs and activities offered.

One area of relative weakness is in pupils' limited understanding of other faiths and cultures. The school's managers know that the curriculum does not provide enough opportunities in this area and are soon to launch a major project to rectify the situation. This example is typical of the good leadership and management shown by the headteacher and governors. Checks on what the school provides clearly show where improvements are needed, and the school takes swift, and successful, action to put things right. The federation has been very successful in allowing the school to provide a better education at a much-reduced cost. Pupils are making greater progress because of improved assessment and teaching, so standards are rising. Attendance is good and improving rapidly as pupils' enjoyment of coming to school grows. Parents are very happy with the education the school provides and the number of pupils on roll is now increasing. The headteacher and governors clearly have all the skills needed to take the school even further along its road towards excellence.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good teaching, together with a good, interesting curriculum, ensures that children do well in the Foundation Stage. Children join with skills that are below the levels expected for their age, but by the start of Year 1 their standards are improved to an average level in all areas of learning. Being taught alongside pupils in Years 1 and 2 has great benefits. The children want to have a go at the harder work being given to the older pupils, and are often successful, particularly in their number work. Sometimes, though, they can find the work a little too difficult and don't always get the support that would help them take that extra step towards reaching even higher standards. A good balance is maintained between these more formal sessions and ones where children choose activities for themselves, so they learn to play, as well as work, together. Federation has strengthened management considerably. The manager now works alongside the manager from the partner school to share ideas and ensure greater accuracy in assessment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in ICT by providing more opportunities for pupils to use computers in all subjects.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to learn about other faiths and cultures.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

There are no clear patterns to the standards reached by pupils, as the performance of just one pupil heavily influences results when numbers are so low. Standards in Year 6 are currently above average, but they were much lower last year. However, the current tracking of pupils' performance shows that they are making good progress in all years, and are achieving well regardless of their starting points. Challenging targets are set for their performance and are used well to drive up standards. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make particularly good progress, and many pupils have been removed from the register of special educational needs as they no longer require extra support.

Progress in English and mathematics is good in all years. However, pupils have fallen behind in ICT, both in terms of their skills and their understanding, owing to a previous lack of computers and teaching expertise. In contrast, pupils have made good progress in science, where standards are well above average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' enjoyment of school is clear from the very start of the day. They hurry to school to take part in 'wake up, shake up', alongside their teachers, parents and one or two even younger children. Improving pupils' enjoyment has led to increased attendance. The decline in attendance in recent years has been reversed, so it is now above average and improving each term. One reason for improved enjoyment is that pupils feel safe at the school. They trust their teachers and look out for one another in the playground. One older pupil stopped a runaway hoop at playtime because the younger pupil chasing it would have run into the car park and 'that would not be safe'. Most outstanding of all is just how fit and healthy the pupils are. Even the very youngest know what to eat to remain healthy, while the oldest try to influence their parents by pointing out what is 'good for you'.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They respond well to the periods of quiet reflection offered in assemblies. They have a good understanding of 'western' culture and current affairs, but their knowledge of other faiths and cultures is weak. None of those spoken to, for example, could name a religion other than Christianity and some of their ideas about what life is like in a city are underdeveloped. Pupils play a good part in the community, with all having some responsibility for an aspect of life in school, from giving out books to serving on the school council. Behaviour is good throughout the school, and pupils get on well with each other, although they find it difficult to share computers. In lessons, pupils work hard and make good progress in the basic skills they will need for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

A major reason for pupils' enjoyment is that they like the challenging, and fun, activities they are given. The accuracy of assessment has improved and is now good. This allows teachers to plan lessons that are generally well matched to the pupils' abilities. Marking picks up well on errors, so the next lesson will concentrate on ensuring that all pupils are secure in their learning. Individual whiteboards are used well in lessons to check that pupils are keeping up. Sometimes, though, this shows that some pupils in a group are finding the work easier than others, and teachers are not always quick enough to adjust the tasks or the support accordingly to ensure that all can make the best possible progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets most of the pupils' needs well. Pupils are healthy because they all receive two hours physical education each week, and the great majority stay on for extra sport, often led by a qualified coach. Enjoyment has improved as the range of extra clubs and activities has grown, helped by links forged through the federation. The schools combine for special projects or sports days, for example, so that pupils can work with a greater number of children of their own age. The federation has also led to more specialist teaching, and improved progress, as teachers swap schools for some sessions. This is proving particularly valuable in helping pupils to catch up in ICT, but pupils do not get enough opportunities to practise their newly learned skills in other subjects. Similarly, pupils are not taught enough about other faiths or cultures to appreciate the diversity in Britain today. Pupils who are particularly gifted or talented are catered for well through links with the local secondary school, where pupils attend extra lessons in subjects where they show particular promise.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Parents and pupils all say that the school is very quick to act on any concerns that may arise. Parents are confident that their children are safe in school. There have been some shortcomings in procedures to keep the school site secure, but in most respects, a consistently robust approach is taken to keeping pupils safe, especially with regard to child protection matters.

Academic support and guidance are equally good. All pupils know, and value, their targets. Their parents know them too, so they are better able to help children with their studies. Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are quickly identified. The school uses a wide range of different ways to support the pupils, so extra help can be closely matched to their needs. The success of this intervention has led to a significant fall in the proportion of pupils requiring extra support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school has made good progress since it was last inspected, and the rate of progress has accelerated since federation. Leadership is particularly good. The headteacher is described as 'strong, clear and highly respected' by parents. She is well supported by a good governing body that made the brave decision to federate. Governors use their individual skills well. Governors with financial experience, for example, have taken control of the budget and turned a large deficit into a projected surplus since the school was federated. The headteacher quickly and accurately assessed the areas most in need of improvement. Detailed plans for improvement are in place and most actions have proved successful. Even the two main weaknesses highlighted in this report are already being tackled, but there has not been sufficient time for actions to have had an impact. However, the roles of subject coordinators are underdeveloped, particularly in terms of monitoring and further developing the quality of provision.

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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
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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	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?	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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
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	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

Dear Children

Inspection of Mary Howard Church of England (VC) Primary School, Edingale, Staffordshire B79 9JJ

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school, and for telling me just how much you like coming to school. The first thing that I noticed was how fit and healthy you all are. I almost wished I could have joined in with 'wake up, shake up' in the morning because you and your teachers seemed to be enjoying it so much. You told me that you like the teachers, the cook and all the other grown-ups in school, all of whom take good care of you and keep you safe. You also said that you have many friends and that you get lots of fun things to do. I agree with you. Yours is a good school. You quickly learn new things because the teachers give you tasks that are difficult enough for you to be successful, but only if you work hard and behave well. And you do! You are doing well in your English, science and mathematics. You are not as good with computers as I would expect, because the school has not had enough of them in the past. You really need to catch up a bit in ICT, so I have asked the teachers to let you use computers in as many lessons as possible. You have to help, too, by sharing them well. I have also asked the teachers to tell you more about the lives of people in other parts of Britain and the world, particularly if they are from a religion that you have not heard of.

Your school is getting better and better all the time because the people who run it are good at finding out what can be improved and then doing something about it. Your school now works very closely with another local school and this has been a great help in providing you with a better education. You now have many more clubs to go to, and your mums and dads are very happy that you want to go to school each day.

With all best wishes for your futures

David Driscoll Lead inspector



23 February 2007

Dear Children

**Inspection of Mary Howard Church of England (VC) Primary School,
Edingale, Staffordshire B79 9JJ**

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Lead inspector