

St Mary's CE (VA) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110848
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	337588
Inspection dates	16–17 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Mike Thompson

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	160
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ann Williams
Headteacher	Mary Barnard
Date of previous school inspection	5 July 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons or parts of lessons and held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body, some senior members of staff, and both formally and informally, with groups of pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at data showing the progress made by pupils, documents, policies and the school's planning for future development. In addition, questionnaires returned by 88 pupils, 49 parents and 27 members of staff were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the effectiveness of the school in meeting the needs of pupils, particularly the lower attainers, through:
- teaching, and the impact of teachers' use of assessment, including the marking of pupils' work and the targets set for pupils
- the systems for tracking pupils' progress and identifying potential underachievement
- the development of children's language skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- how effective the school is in promoting regular attendance.

Information about the school

St Mary's is a small school. Most of its pupils are of White British heritage and are from the local estate. The next largest group are Gypsy Roma representing about 8% of the total number on roll. About a third of all pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This proportion is well above the national average. The majority of these pupils have general learning difficulties, often combined with speech and language and/or social and emotional difficulties. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is high in comparison with the national norm. There is also a significant group of lower-attaining pupils, a few of whom are only at the school for a short period of time while awaiting resettlement. Together with the pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, these pupils account for about half of the number on roll.

The St Mary's Care Club, managed by the governors, provides pre-school and after-school care for pupils during term-time.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

St Mary's provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. It has a number of strengths, mostly relating to the good quality of the care, guidance and support provided for pupils and their personal development and well-being. Particularly noteworthy is the safe environment, greatly appreciated by parents and pupils.

The school is good at ensuring that all pupils are warmly welcomed and equally valued. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory, but rapidly improving. From very low starting points, and with extremely limited knowledge and understanding of the world around them when they join the Nursery class, pupils make satisfactory progress in their academic development. Even so, significant barriers to learning mean that standards remain low by the time they leave at the end of Year 6.

On entry, children's social skills are generally very poor. The school invests a great deal of time and resources in successfully helping pupils to develop socially, thus providing a climate within which learning can take place. Behaviour is good, and most pupils work well with their classmates. Consequently, lessons run smoothly and without undue disturbance. Despite the school's successful efforts in improving pupils' attitudes towards learning, some barriers to accelerated progress remain. While pupils invariably follow teachers' directions well, they are far less effective in working independently and are sometimes over-reliant on adults for guidance. This 'learned helplessness' stems from lack of confidence and perseverance. In addition, pupils' lack of vocabulary and fluency in English adversely affect their comprehension, which in turn affects the progress they are able to make in all other subjects. This is most evident in problem-solving in mathematics and investigative work in science. Teachers report that when faced with unfamiliar language or phraseology in test situations, pupils often panic and perform less well than they should. The school is acutely aware that better attainment in oracy and literacy is the key to raising standards overall, and has been successful in improving standards in English since the last inspection. However, opportunities to develop pupils' language skills are frequently missed because adults, keen to involve pupils in discussions, readily accept pupils' responses while overlooking poor speech patterns and incorrect grammar or sentence structure.

In all classes, inspectors observed many good features of teaching. However, the learning that results from teaching is sometimes only satisfactory. This is because teachers do not always use assessment well enough to provide clear, specific and measurable targets for pupils to achieve. In particular, these targets are not linked closely enough to pupils' next steps in learning, as defined in the National Curriculum. This view is confirmed by pupils, few of whom have a clear idea of precisely what they

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need to do to improve their work. In addition, systems for marking pupils' work vary from class to class, and marking used as a tool for improving pupils' work has little impact. The curriculum satisfactorily meets the needs of pupils. Its strengths lie in the activities provided to enrich pupils' experiences and promote their enjoyment in learning. Work is underway to integrate the teaching of different subjects in a thematic way, but this approach is better developed in some classes than others.

The systems for checking on the progress made by pupils are thorough and provide a wealth of useful data for managers. The school's procedures for evaluating its effectiveness are sound and provide the basis for a clear plan of action. These features and the actions taken to secure improvement mean that the school, ably led by the headteacher, has a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' vocabulary, comprehension and understanding of the rules of grammar and sentence structure by ensuring that all adults consistently model correct usage of English, particularly in day-to-day discussions with pupils.
 - Ensure that when planning and delivering lessons, teachers place a sharp focus, closely linked to the National Curriculum attainment targets, on precisely what pupils need to do to improve their work.
 - Build on existing good practice to promote pupils' social development by focusing closely on developing pupils' skills as independent learners.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

The inspectors took a particular interest in the achievement of the lower-attaining pupils because national data for 2009 indicated that they did significantly less well than their peers nationally. However, lesson observations showed that these pupils do just as well as their classmates. In many instances the learning of some of these pupils is significantly enhanced through the skilled work of teaching assistants. For example, in a Year 6 English lesson in which pupils had to edit and present a poem, a teaching assistant's contributions made a great difference to the quality of learning for those with identified special needs enabling them to take a full part in the lesson by successfully answering challenging questions posed by the teacher. It is greatly to the school's credit that a proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities attain expected levels in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 2. Each year, about 15% of these pupils progress rapidly enough to be removed from the special needs register. This occurs because they benefit from extra help which is well matched to their needs. Pupils of Gypsy Roma heritage make satisfactory progress. They are well integrated into the school community, and they too play a full part in all activities provided.

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All of the parents who completed the inspection questionnaires felt that the school keeps their children safe. The outcomes of the school's 'Big Conversation', in which all pupils were consulted about feeling safe, confirm this. The politeness and consideration shown by pupils reflect the well established and consistently applied procedures for promoting good behaviour. Pupils acknowledge that there is some bad behaviour that is generally limited to inappropriate language used in the playground. During the past year, there have been no exclusions. Pupils' consideration for others is also an important element in their good understanding of how to keep safe. Pupils' enthusiasm for sporting activities demonstrates their clear understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. As well as contributing to the day-to-day life of the school, groups such as the gardening club and Eco-council help promote pupils' sense of community. Pupils' good contribution to the wider community is demonstrated through, for example, a range of fundraising for various charities and visits by the choir to entertain senior citizens. Pupils are satisfactorily prepared for life as future citizens. A clear moral code permeates the daily life of the school and pupils' social development is good. Pupils' spiritual awareness, as seen in their understanding of their own development and appreciation of that of others, is satisfactory, as is their cultural awareness.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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How effective is the provision?

Inspectors found many good features of teaching in all classes. For example, teachers have good skills in managing their pupils; they make effective use of the time available and ensure that lessons proceed at a good pace. They are skilled in providing clear explanations about new concepts because their knowledge of the subjects they teach is secure. In all lessons, teaching assistants work well in partnership with the teachers, although they are sometimes less effective in helping to develop pupils' spoken language. While all teachers display many good technical skills, the impact of teaching on pupils' learning is not always as good as it should be. This is because the targets set for pupils to achieve in lessons are not clear enough. For example, a lively and well organised lesson for pupils in Key Stage 2 did not result in the good learning that the teacher's clear explanations warranted. This was because the teacher's planning did not set out clearly enough precisely what pupils were to learn. In particular, the intended learning was not linked closely enough to the National Curriculum attainment targets even though these were clearly displayed in the classroom. In other respects, teachers use assessment well to identify those pupils who need extra help to tackle specific difficulties in their learning, thus rapidly accelerating the progress made by these pupils. For example, a group of eight pupils in Year 6 benefited from the clear teaching provided for them about fractions and percentages.

The quality of guidance provided for pupils through teachers' marking of their work is not always effective in securing learning. A scrutiny of pupils' books showed that systems for marking are different from class to class and the comments made by teachers do not often result in improvements being made where they are needed.

Pupils' interest in and enjoyment of learning are enhanced through a wide range of activities including visits to places such as the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge and the aviation museum at Duxford. The school is in the early stages of developing its curriculum to enable pupils to work in a thematic way. This approach has the advantage of enabling pupils to appreciate the relevance of their learning as they apply skills gained in one subject when working in another. However, this initiative is far more advanced in some classes than in others, consequently provision is uneven. The approach adopted in Year 5 in which the pupils are working as the 'Green Team Publishing Company' to create a new eco-magazine for children is a good example of well integrated provision. This work involves many aspects of literacy, together with science, art and mathematics, and provides good opportunities for pupils to practise their skills in the use of information and communication technology.

The needs of individuals are well known, and pupils feel valued members of the school 'family'. The 'care club' that runs before and after school provides a valuable service for parents and is greatly enjoyed by the pupils who attend. The staff are properly trained to the required standards and are good at ensuring the welfare of the pupils. The school's excellent website is also a very useful source of information for those with an interest in the school.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers nurture good relationships with pupils, their parents and professional partners. Almost all of the pupils surveyed through the inspection questionnaire felt that the headteacher and senior staff are doing a good job. This reflects the pupils' appreciation of St Mary's as a very inclusive school which gives them a sense of belonging. In addition, all of the parents who returned their questionnaires felt that the school keeps them well informed about their children's progress. This is achieved through the 'open door' policy and the accessibility of all staff at the beginning and end of the school day. A further strength of the school's leadership and management is the range of effective partnerships with external professional agencies, such as educational psychology and the education welfare service, which help the school to meet pupils' specific needs.

The promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. A clear policy is in place, but its impact is yet to be evaluated. Arrangements to ensure the safeguarding of pupils are good, and pupils' safety and well-being have the highest priority. All of the required checks on adults who have contact with children are securely in place

The direction provided for the school in order to embed ambition and drive improvement stems largely from the headteacher and some of the senior leaders. Governors are supportive, but are yet to develop the skills needed to be able to be truly independent in holding the school to account.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2

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The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

In the Nursery and Reception classes, children make good progress in their social and emotional development, and satisfactory progress in all other areas of learning. By the time they transfer to Year 1, children's personal, social and emotional development is close to what is expected at this age, and provides a secure platform for the good progress made in this aspect of pupils' development in Key Stages 1 and 2. However, in communication, language and literacy, the children fall well short of the goals expected. The children have good access to a range of interesting and enjoyable age-appropriate activities which encourage independence and initiative both indoors and out. For example, children in the Nursery greatly enjoyed their 'bear hunt' and hurried to record each of their discoveries on a chart. Adults are good at bombarding children with language through constant dialogue about the activities being tackled. However, they are less adept at seizing the opportunities to develop children's learning further by modelling grammatically correct responses for the children to repeat. The children's progress is carefully monitored so that provision can be suitably adjusted in response to what is learned. However, the assessments on which some of the monitoring is based are generally too descriptive. They lack any evaluation of precisely how well the children have achieved their tasks, and make no suggestions about the next steps in learning.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly appreciative of the school. Almost one third of the questionnaires returned by parents and carers had comments appended, and the vast majority of these were positive. A common theme among the positive comments was appreciation of the success of the school in promoting children's personal

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development, a view endorsed by the inspection findings. Few of the comments were negative, and the concerns expressed had no particular pattern.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's CE Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 49 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 160 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	36	73	13	27	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	37	76	12	24	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	33	67	16	33	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	32	65	16	33	1	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	34	69	14	29	0	0	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	30	61	17	35	2	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	28	57	20	41	1	2	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	26	54	19	40	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	28	57	20	41	0	0	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	23	47	20	41	4	8	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	51	22	45	1	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	35	71	14	29	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	37	76	11	22	1	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



18 November 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's CE Primary School, St Neots PE19 1NX

On behalf of the inspectors I would like to thank all of you for being so welcoming and helpful to us when we visited your school. We think that your school provides you with a satisfactory education. This means that there are a lot of things that the school is doing right and some things that need to be improved. We know that all the adults who help to run St Mary's want it to be a good school. For this to happen, you need to make better progress in your work.

Here are some of the things we liked best about your school.

We were impressed by your good manners and behaviour.

You feel safe because the staff take good care of you.

You know a lot about how to keep healthy.

You do a lot to help with the day-to-day running of your school.

To help you to make better progress in your work, we have asked your teachers to do three things.

We would like your teachers to concentrate on improving your skills in speaking English. This is really important, because as you become more expert, you will find reading easier and will understand a lot more. We are sure that this will also help you to become better at solving problems in mathematics and tackling investigations in science.

Many of you told us that you do not know exactly what you need to do to improve your work, so we want your teachers to make sure that, when they set work for you to do, they give you very clear targets to aim for.

We would like your teachers to help you to become more independent in your work. This might mean that you will be asked to plan what you are going to do instead of relying on your teachers to tell you. I'm sure that you are ready for this challenge!

I wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Mike Thompson

Lead inspector

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