

Aston St Mary's Church of England Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117421
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	339004
Inspection dates	18–19 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Raminder Arora

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 of pupils on the school roll	120
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jill Price
Headteacher	Philip Gray
Date of previous school inspection	6 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors, one of whom visited the school for half a day specifically to evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures. The inspectors visited nine lessons during which six teachers were observed. Meetings were held with pupils, staff and the chair of governors. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at its monitoring and assessment records, safeguarding documents and those relating to health, safety and strategic planning. In addition, 83 questionnaire returns by parents and carers were considered, together with those returned by pupils in Key Stage 2 and by staff.

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

- the extent to which the attainment and progress of current pupils are continuing the improvements seen in 2009
- the consistency and impact of teaching and how well assessments are used to plan work for pupils at the right level
- the effectiveness of leaders including senior leaders, middle managers and governors in securing higher standards and improved progress by pupils.

Information about the school

Pupils at this small village school are mainly of White British heritage with a few from minority ethnic backgrounds. There are no pupils at an early stage of learning English. More pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities than found in schools of the same size and none have a statement of special educational needs. The number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The outward mobility is high, with an above average proportion of pupils leaving the school partway through their primary education. The school has earned a number of awards including Activemark, Healthy Schools, ECO bronze award and Investors in People accreditation.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. Under the strong leadership of the headteacher, the school's improvement since its last inspection, continues at pace. High-quality provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage, a considerable strength of the school, ensures that children get off to a flying start. Pupils in Years 1 to 6 achieve well and enjoy school because they are provided with good teaching and an interesting and enjoyable curriculum. By the end of Year 6, levels of attainment are above average. Most parents are very supportive of the school, one commenting, 'We really love this school and are overjoyed with our child's progress,' and another, 'I am so pleased with the school, a lovely community; I would not want my child to go anywhere else.'

Improved results in the 2009 assessments in Year 6 showed that pupils made good progress to reach above-average levels of attainment with English and mathematics being the strongest subjects. Science is a relatively weak subject with fewer pupils securing higher levels. Through its systems for tracking progress and analysing data, the school has rightly identified the need for consistent challenge and better use of pupils' learning targets to help more of them to gain higher levels in science. Nevertheless, the work in pupils' books, lessons and the school's assessment records confirm that pupils make good progress overall, and those in Year 6 are on track to sustain the improvement seen in 2009. The gifted and talented pupils are given opportunities to excel, especially through problem solving in mathematics. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. Sensitive and timely support, in and out of lessons, helps them to gain in confidence and independence, and they play a full part in the life of the school.

Pupils make good progress in their all-round development. They learn effectively because lessons are well organised, supportive and productive. Most teachers carefully assess and plan to meet pupils' differing needs. They have high expectations of pupils' learning in most lessons, but their marking of pupils' work does not consistently refer to the targets set or inform pupils about what they need to do next. Teachers provide good on-going feedback to all pupils in lessons, but sometimes miss opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own learning. The good quality of the curriculum and excellent care, guidance and support ensures that pupils develop the skills and positive attitudes required for the next stage of learning. Pupils behave sensibly, work hard and enjoy very positive relationships.

The headteacher, well supported by staff and governors, keeps a close check on the school's performance. They have an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses, and areas for development are tackled robustly. Governors, some of whom are new, are working towards strengthening their role and realise that they need to be more

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strategically involved in the work of the school. The school's success in raising pupils' attainment, accelerating their progress and improving systems to assess and support pupils shows they are well placed to sustain further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that pupils' learning targets are set and used effectively to help more of them to gain the higher levels, particularly in science at the end of Year 6, through:
 - making sure that all teachers have consistently high expectations of all pupils, especially the more able
 - ensuring that marking always refers to pupils' learning targets and informs them of the next step in learning
 - giving pupils regular opportunities to develop the skills of self-assessment and evaluate their own work in lessons.
- Develop the role of governors so they are fully and systematically involved in school self-evaluation and planning to bring about improvements.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' achievement is generally good throughout the school. Assessment results in Year 2 rose in 2009 to above average, matching the improvement found in Year 6. The outward mobility of some pupils leaving in Year 4 to join a local middle school, sometimes affects attainment levels in Year 6. The school works well to tackle this problem through its effective individual support for all pupils. As a result, the current results of 2009 have been above average overall. In lessons seen, nearly all pupils made good progress. Many pupils are articulate, and discussed the key ideas with insight and enthusiasm. For example, when solving Sudoku puzzles, pupils responded well to questioning by giving well thought out responses. However higher attaining pupils do not always make as much progress, in English and science. This is because expectations for learning are not always high enough and the use of targets to extend their learning is inconsistent. The few pupils whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable also make good progress because of good support provided for their learning and personal development.

Pupils' good spiritual, moral and social development is well nurtured. They respond positively to opportunities to reflect quietly in assemblies. Pupils make a good contribution to the school and the wider community. Year 5 and 6 pupils help to run the family group sessions every week. The school council is influential in making improvements, for example in equipment for the playground. From helping with coffee mornings for the local community to supporting charities and forming links in Zimbabwe, pupils are developing a good understanding of their place in the global community. The diversity of cultures and faiths represented across the school is warmly celebrated and promoted. Pupils readily take responsibility for staying healthy and their adoption of a healthy lifestyle is reflected in the national awards gained. They relish the opportunity to

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take part in a range of sporting activities and understand why the school emphasises the need to eat healthily. Pupils' good behaviour contributes to their positive attitudes to learning and is reflected in their ability to stay safe throughout the school. Pupils say there is no bullying and none was seen during the inspection. Pupils' good personal and academic skills and good levels of attendance prepare them well for future life.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Good relationships between staff and pupils motivate pupils to learn and do their best. In most lessons, teachers use their good subject knowledge and accurate assessment information to plan activities that build well on pupils' previous learning. Pupils are made aware of the purpose of lessons and this keeps them interested and excited about learning, especially when lessons proceed at a brisk pace and include interesting activities as seen for example, in a well planned science lesson with 'hands on' opportunities to develop pupils' investigative skills.

Most lessons present pupils with a good level of challenge, helping them to extend and develop their ideas through skilful questioning and creative teaching. For example, in a

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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mathematics lesson pupils explained the use of their particular methods to solve a given problem. However more able pupils are not always challenged sufficiently in some lessons, and this sometimes limits their progress.

The practice of setting pupils' learning targets is inconsistent. Teachers' marking does not always refer to pupils' learning targets to support their understanding of how well they are doing and what to do next. Most teachers involve pupils in evaluating their own learning, but this practice is inconsistent. The well-planned curriculum provides a wealth of exciting experiences through a rolling programme of 'enrichment days', for example in science, music and art. These have been successful in encouraging pupils to produce quality work. There is a wide range of after-school clubs on offer, the most popular being the sports clubs.

The quality of pupils' pastoral care is excellent. The school, in effective partnership with different support agencies, parent groups, the local church and the Small Schools Network, successfully promotes a caring and supportive ethos. The visits and visitors to school, such as the Fire Brigade, greatly enhance pupils' understanding of personal safety. Transition arrangements are carefully planned and are appreciated by parents. Robust systems have led to improved attendance and behaviour, and these are fully embedded.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, ably supported by the assistant head has been successful in creating an inclusive, harmonious community where all pupils have the same opportunities to participate in all the school has to offer and any discrimination is effectively tackled. Senior leaders are passionate about wanting the school to be successful and work effectively as a unified team to promote equality of opportunity still further. For example, they have identified the need to improve consistency of practice among teachers in the implementation of a programme to support the higher attaining pupils, particularly in science. All staff are involved and have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school development plan is an effective document that has correctly identified the priorities which help to drive the school forward. Monitoring of teaching and learning is thorough and regularly supported through professional development opportunities. Some of these are gained through Investors in People accreditation and partnerships with other schools and training institutions. Governors

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fulfil their statutory duties and have a good range of expertise between them. They are, however, inclined to readily accept the school's view of itself, especially in matters of attainment and progress, rather than evaluating the outcomes for themselves.

Partnership with parents is outstanding and marked by the active support provided by them. A member of the Parent Council for example, provides excellent support to the school's very popular, 'Walking Bus'. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and were rigorously applied by all at the time of the inspection. Procedures for ensuring the safety and well-being of pupils are regularly reviewed. The school effectively promotes community cohesion at the local, national and international level, exemplified by its effective links with a school in Zimbabwe.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Most children enter Reception with skills and understanding that vary from year to year, but are typically at the levels expected for their age. Currently, as a result of the consistently good and often outstanding teaching, most children make very good progress in achieving all the early learning goals by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Excellent progress is made in personal, social and emotional development, and their language and communication skills. A very effective programme for teaching letters and sounds supports the development of communication, and reading and writing skills. Children develop their speaking and personal skills extremely well.

Children settle very happily due to the warm welcome and the strong induction

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procedures. The promotion of children's welfare and safety is excellent. All routines are very well established and this increases children's feeling of security. Staff form excellent relationships and encourage children to enjoy learning. Plenty of practical play and stimulating focused activities, for example learning about travel to different countries, excite children about learning. There is a very good balance of focused, adult-led sessions as well as purposeful, child-selected play activities. Learning opportunities are rich for both indoor and outdoor learning. Role-play areas are linked well to topics to provide excellent opportunities for children to develop their creativity, independence and enquiry skills. The exciting resources motivate children to use their initiative and imagination in play, for example the very stimulating and inviting 'Jungle Corner' where they could also hear sounds that different animals make.

Leadership and management are outstanding and ensure that all learning and welfare requirements are fully met. A very good assessment system has been developed and staff are working closely together to promote consistent practice. Children quickly become confident speakers and gain rapidly in their self-esteem which helps them learn extremely well. These aspects combine in outstanding provision that meets the children's needs very effectively.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

The majority of parents have positive views of the school. They are particularly pleased with the caring, friendly and welcoming ethos. Evidence from the inspection supports parents' views that children enjoy school and that care for children's health and safety is good. Many parents acknowledged that there has been a noticeable improvement in the school. A small minority of concerns centred around behaviour at playtimes, but behaviour during the inspection was found to be good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Aston St Mary's Church of England Aided 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 83 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 120 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	54	65	27	33	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	65	78	17	20	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	47	57	33	40	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	48	58	30	36	2	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	58	70	25	30	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	43	52	39	47	1	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	47	57	34	47	1	1	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)	50	60	29	35	2	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	48	58	31	37	2	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	40	48	33	40	6	7	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	36	43	41	49	2	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	57	69	26	31	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	58	70	24	29	1	1	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



20 May 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Aston St Mary's Church of England Aided Primary School, Stevenage, SG2 7HA

Thank you very much for your very friendly welcome and for helping us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you and were really pleased to hear how excited and proud you are about your school. Your school is a good school. These are the best things about your school:

You behave well and we know you enjoy being at school very much because you and your parents told us this.

You have a good understanding of how to keep yourselves safe.

You are keen to learn and get on well with each other.

Most of you achieve well, and the youngest children in your school do particularly well.

You support the school and local community well.

You have a good understanding of people who live in different communities.

You enjoy the exciting activities your teachers plan for you.

All the staff and governors are working together with your headteacher to make the school as good as possible.

To make you all perform even better, we have asked the school to make sure that more of you score higher levels, particularly in science, by the time you leave school at the end of Year 6. We have asked your teachers to make better use of your learning targets in marking your work and to help you get more involved in assessing how well you are doing, so you know what to do next to improve. We have also asked the governors to be more actively involved in the work of the school to make it even better. You can help by continuing to work hard

Finally, we would like to thank you once again for your help and wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Raminder Arora

Lead Inspector

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