

Ashford, St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118738
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	339285
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Margaret Coussins

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	416
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alison Thompson
Headteacher	Susan Parkin
Date of previous school inspection	23 May 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 24 lessons and 15 teachers. They held meetings with pupils, governors, the headteacher and other staff with leadership responsibilities. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation including the school improvement plan, monitoring records, pupils' progress records and safeguarding procedures. Responses to questionnaires received from 197 parents and carers were analysed.

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

- the achievement of all groups of pupils, in order to establish whether teaching takes sufficient account of their different needs
- how successfully the curriculum is being developed and its impact on pupils' learning, enjoyment and achievement
- how effectively the school is working to narrow the gap between boys' and girls' attainment in English
- the effectiveness of the school's monitoring and self-evaluation with reference to the school's capacity for sustained improvement.

Information about the school

Ashford St Mary's is a larger than average primary school. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to that found nationally. These pupils have moderate learning difficulties and/or dyslexia. The school makes provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage in two Reception classes. There is a nursery school on the school site that is managed by a private provider and not included in this inspection. The school has gained the Healthy School and Activemark awards.

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. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school life in this happy, harmonious community, and their very positive attitudes to learning are reflected in their above average attendance levels. The school's very positive and inclusive ethos promotes and encourages pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Behaviour is exemplary. Pupils have an excellent awareness of how to stay fit and healthy, reflecting the work the school has done to achieve national awards. Pupils enjoy their learning because they are taught well. Outstanding care, guidance and support help them become increasingly confident and well-rounded young people, ready and well prepared for the next stage of their education. Parents and carers agree with their children's view that the school keeps them very safe. Inspectors endorse this as they found that the school has outstanding safeguarding procedures.

Pupils' achievement is good. They get off to a flying start in the Early Years Foundation Stage from starting points that are below expectations. Throughout the school, pupils' work and the school's tracking data show that all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are currently making good progress and achieve well, but that there is room for further improvement. The school has correctly identified that in the past, attainment has varied year on year and that some pupils have not made the progress they should. Leaders have sharpened up the procedures for tracking progress and this is informing priorities for whole-school improvement. Whilst generally effective, performance data is not analysed sharply enough to ensure that all groups of pupils make progress at the rate of which they are capable. For example, assessment data is not used consistently by teachers to plan work precisely for the more able and less able groups in some classes.

The headteacher and senior leaders work closely to evaluate the strengths and areas for development in the school. They do this accurately and maintain an ambitious drive for improvement. For example, the focus on improving boys' writing skills has successfully narrowed the gap between boys' and girls' attainment. Monitoring, self-evaluation and tracking pupils' progress is rigorous and leads to a clear identification of whole-school priorities for improvement. The school has a good capacity to improve further. The school engages outstandingly well with parents and carers and this contributes significantly to the school's success.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate progress by:
 - making sharper use of data to ensure pupils achieve their full potential and

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checking that intervention programmes are working effectively for individuals and groups of pupils

- setting work which is more precisely matched to pupils' different abilities and provides consistent levels of challenge for more able pupils and the right level of support for less able pupils.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Attainment by the end of Year 6 is broadly average. In 2009, attainment improved significantly to above average levels from the considerable dip seen in 2008 when attainment was below average. The large majority of the current Year 6 pupils are on track to attain expected levels in English, mathematics and science and a similar proportion to that found nationally are on track to reach the higher levels. Pupils' excellent behaviour and enthusiasm in lessons underpin their good learning and progress. On occasion, in all year groups, work is not well matched to pupils' abilities and this sometimes slows the progress of more able pupils and those who find learning more difficult. Working collaboratively, investigating and problem solving inspires pupils and also contributes to their good progress. One pupil, summing up the animal focus week taking place during the inspection, said, 'It's great because it's been more fun and we've learnt a lot because we wanted to do it not just because we had to do it.' Throughout the school, pupils were enthused by their lessons in this special week and agreed they were learning lots of new things. In a Year 5 lesson, the use of drama after watching a film clip helped all pupils, but particularly boys, to empathise with characters to inform their writing. One boy said, 'It's fun, it helps us get lots of ideas in our head.' Pupils take their responsibilities in class and around the school very seriously. They are very aware of their role in the school community and that their ideas and opinions are valued and respected. They make a good contribution to the local community through their involvement in a range of activities, including visiting people in residential and sheltered housing and through their links with the church.

The quality of the artwork displayed around the school is impressive and the high priority given to the arts underpins pupils' outstanding cultural and spiritual development. One pupil was engrossed with a display of pupils' watercolour paintings created after working with a visiting artist and said, 'They're beautiful and I'm so proud of what I could do ? I didn't think I could ever do something that looks so beautiful.'

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
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	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
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	1

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have excellent relationships with their pupils based on trust and mutual respect. Lessons are carefully planned and teachers work successfully to make learning interesting and exciting for pupils. The good well-balanced curriculum is carefully planned to provide activities that are relevant and meaningful to pupils. Senior leaders are resolute in their work to shape a curriculum that best meets the needs of all the pupils. Of particular note is the involvement in the national London Get Set 2012 programme that is making a strong contribution to developing pupils' personal attributes of, for example, respect, courage and friendship. Themed and creative approaches to learning are enhanced by an excellent range of enrichment opportunities, including visitors to school and trips. Pupils and parents and carers appreciate the wide range of school clubs.

There is a good pace to learning in most lessons and teachers imaginatively bring subjects alive. In these lessons, good progress is made because learning is memorable and challenging and work is well matched to the abilities of pupils. The same level of learning and progress is not consistent in all lessons. Occasionally, lessons do not challenge more able pupils sufficiently or do not provide the right level of support for pupils who find learning more difficult. As a consequence, some pupils do not always make the progress they should. Pupils are clearly aware of their individual targets for learning, because good marking and feedback give pupils clear guidance about the next steps they need to take. Adults work successfully to include pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable. These pupils are able to fully participate in learning and the life of the school and make similar progress to others. Pupils and parents and carers agree

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that the school looks after them exceptionally well. One parent commented that in meeting her child's specific needs, 'The St Mary's staff have been fantastic in dealing with this issue both in the way they have treated my child and in the support they have given me.'

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 inclusive ethos of the school ensures that all pupils have equal opportunities to learn and develop as well-rounded individuals without fear of discrimination. It ensures that all pupils have every chance to take part in all of its activities. As a result, all groups achieve well, although the school recognises that improvements can still be made. The school has extremely positive relationships with its parents and carers, who are exceptionally well informed about their children's learning and progress. Excellent use is made of a purpose-built parents' room and parents and carers said they value the adult learning and social opportunities provided by the school. The school ensures parents and carers are fully involved in school development; for example, over 100 parents and carers attended a recent conference with pupils, staff and governors to discuss the development of the school over the next five years. Leaders have developed the school as a very cohesive community in which pupils show tolerance and respect towards others. The school has strong links with the local community, including the church, and has effectively reached out to community groups, for example ensuring that its Nepalese community is represented on the governing body. International links are very well developed through working with partner schools in Spain, Italy and Cameroon, which give pupils an insight into other cultures. The school has identified that the next stage of its work is to develop national links. Safeguarding procedures are very well developed, known by staff and applied across all aspects of the school's work. Systems for keeping pupils safe are continuously reviewed and updated in response to the views of parents and carers and pupils; for example, additional security was installed at the request of parents and carers.

The consistency of approach of all leaders is an example of the effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement. The highly effective headteacher inspires loyalty and commitment from the whole staff who work very effectively as a team. However, the school has not always made sufficient use of the analysis of its comprehensive data to ensure that outcomes for individuals in

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terms of attainment and progress are as good as they should be. The governing body knows the school well, provides good support and has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

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	2
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	1
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

The individual needs of children are met very well in the Reception classes. One parent/carer wrote, 'We are extremely pleased with the positive experience our daughter has had in her first year at St Mary's. The teacher takes time to encourage and guide all the children as individuals and this means they flourish.' From starting points that are below expectations for their age, children achieve extremely well and exceed the goals for all areas of their learning by the time they move into Year 1. There are very positive, trusting relationships with staff and, as a result, children are happy, behave very well, settle contentedly into the routines of the day and are very well cared for. Children have an excellent understanding of the need to keep themselves safe and healthy. Children were bubbling with excitement when 'Jim the Giant' wrote them a letter asking questions about lions, which gave them purposeful writing opportunities for writing and sharing what they had learned during the animal focus week. Children play well together, develop outstanding personal and social skills and make an excellent contribution to the smooth running of the day by sharing resources amicably and tidying away their activities. The 'VIPs' of the day enjoy their responsibilities, such as taking the register to the office and handing out the fruit at snack time. There are excellent opportunities for children to take responsibility for their learning, as there is a good balance of activities directed by adults and those where children can make their own

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choices. As a result, they quickly develop independence. Children have access to a small, safe and secure outdoor learning area but its size limits the range of activities available. Nevertheless, the school has correctly identified the need to enhance this area particularly to provide more opportunities to promote children's language and literacy development. Staff make good use of the adjacent Key Stage 1 playground to ensure that children get opportunities for more robust physical activity.

There are very good links with parents and carers to ensure a smooth transition into school. Regular assessments enable staff to keep track of children's progress and plan the next steps in their learning. Outstanding leadership and management have had a very positive impact in securing rapid improvement over the past two years, notably in ensuring consistently very good teaching across both classes. Consequently, progress and standards have improved year on year during this period. Policies and practices are now well established, for example the very effective approach to teaching letter sounds.

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	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are almost unanimously delighted with all aspects of the school's work. The overwhelming majority of those who completed the questionnaire agreed that their children enjoy school, are well cared for and kept safe. Very few disagreed with any of the statements. The inspectors fully support parents' and carers' very positive views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ashford St Mary's 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 197 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 416 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	138	70	57	29	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	141	72	56	28	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	103	52	86	44	6	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	110	56	79	40	5	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	128	65	64	32	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	110	56	78	40	2	1	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	115	58	78	40	2	1	1	1
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)	91	46	86	44	2	1	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	111	56	80	41	2	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	90	46	91	41	5	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	89	45	95	48	6	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	142	72	52	26	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	145	74	50	25	0	0	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.



14 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ashford St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Ashford, TN23 1ND

I am writing to thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school and for talking to us about your work. You were very polite and friendly. You are right to enjoy coming to St Mary's because it is a good school.

We agree with you and your parents and carers that your school is an exceptionally caring and safe place to be and this, with your outstanding behaviour and enthusiasm to learn, helps you make good progress. Your headteacher and all the adults work very hard to make your time at school enjoyable and interesting for you. You work hard too, and by the time you go to your next school you are doing as well as pupils in most other schools in your English, mathematics and science work. We were very impressed with how well you know how to stay fit and healthy and all the things you do for the school and the wider community. You make good progress because you are taught well and teachers plan interesting and exciting things for you to do. Your parents and carers are very pleased that you come to this school.

To make sure that all of you do even better by the time you leave St Mary's, we have asked your headteacher and teachers to do the following things:

- make sure that all of your lessons are as good as the very best ones by giving you work that is just right for each one of you so that you continue to make good progress
- make sure that all the information on how well you are doing is looked at in more detail to make sure that teachers always expect you to do the very best you can.

We thought that your artwork displayed around the school was fantastic and we really enjoyed talking to you and watching you learn. You can help your teachers by continuing to work hard and keeping your enthusiasm for learning.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Coussins Lead inspector

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