

St Mary's VA C of E Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109617
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	288449
Inspection dates	15–16 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Marianne Harris

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	126
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Phil Chapman
Headteacher	Mrs Christine Spurgeon
Date of previous school inspection	26 February 2002
School address	High Street Clophill Bedford MK45 4BE
Telephone number	01525860206
Fax number	01525862587

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small lower school where the majority of pupils are from a White British background with a few pupils from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. There are no pupils who are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The school is in a socially advantaged area where few pupils are entitled to free school meals. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities is below that normally seen.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school where pupils make excellent progress whatever their ability. The care guidance and support that pupils receive is excellent. The school's own evaluation of its work is modest because they continually strive to improve. One parent summed the school up succinctly when she wrote, 'St Mary's Lower School is a wonderful place for children to start their school life.'

From an average starting point children make very good progress in the Foundation Stage because provision is excellent. This very good progress continues throughout the school and, by the end of Year 2, standards in national assessments, and in work seen, are well above average. By the end of Year 4 the school's own data shows that standards remain very high and that pupils' achievement is excellent.

These very high standards can be attributed to outstanding leadership and management. All staff work very well together under the excellent leadership of the headteacher. They share a collective responsibility to ensure that all pupils make as much progress as possible. There is excellent emphasis on educating the whole child and, consequently, their personal development is outstanding. Pupils know they have a voice in the school and that their views are listened to. They are very aware of ecological issues and have a very good understanding of keeping healthy and being safe. The progress that they make is tracked very effectively so that any child who is falling behind can soon catch up. Pupils know what their targets for improvement are and speak confidently about how teachers help them to get better by discussing their work and encouraging them.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. All teachers share the purpose of each lesson so that pupils know what it is they are going to learn. Teaching assistants are very skilled at providing very good support to any pupils who may need it. Resources are used very well so that learning is interesting and relevant to all pupils. The outstanding curriculum is enriched by many activities that take place outside the classroom and pupils really appreciate the opportunities offered to them. The school grounds are excellent and many areas have been developed so that meaningful learning can take place beyond the classroom. The school has rightly identified the scope for further development so that even better use can be made of this special resource.

There has been excellent improvement since the last inspection. Standards have steadily risen and the issues identified have been very effectively tackled. The governors are very knowledgeable about the school and are frequent visitors. They fully understand the challenges the school faces and support the staff very well. The school provides excellent value for money and demonstrates an outstanding capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement current plans to develop more of the outside area so that maximum use can be made of this outstanding resource.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils' achievement is excellent. When they start school the ability of each cohort varies, but is broadly average. Some children are more able and a small number have specific special educational needs. By the end of the Foundation Stage, children have made very good progress

and reach standards that are above those expected for their age. Standards at the end of Year 2 are well above average and this has been the case in national assessments for the past five years. Standards continue to rise as the school aspires to reach challenging targets that ensure all pupils make outstanding progress overall, whatever their ability or level of need. By the end of Year 4 standards remain very high and well above those expected. Current work in the school reflects these very high standards. One parent concluded, and many others agreed, that, 'My daughter has come a long way in what feels like a short time.'

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development, including all aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, is excellent. In discussions with pupils they are very keen to talk about the work they have carried out on recycling and replacing old light bulbs for those that are energy efficient. They have a very good understanding about how to keep healthy and discussions over lunch demonstrated that they put this knowledge into practice. Pupils really enjoy coming to school. Their attendance rate is well above average and lateness is rare. They are excited by learning and behave extremely well, caring for one another and celebrating successes. Pupils especially enjoy finding out about other cultures and clearly explained how they learnt to carry a baby on their back during a study on African culture. Older pupils are particularly proud of their singing and are excited by all of the opportunities they have to sing in the local and wider community. The pupils have raised much money for local, national and international charities and are very keen to help whenever they can. Parents rightly think that pupils are very kind and caring, extremely polite and friendly because the school has a 'warm and caring atmosphere'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Most remarkable is the consistency achieved throughout the school. All teachers explain clearly the purpose of each lesson, work is planned to meet the needs of all pupils in the class and activities are interesting. Pupils remark that they really like lessons, 'because they are fun'. Pupils also remark that teachers really help them to get better by setting them targets that they can review for themselves and by discussing their work so that they know what to do to improve. All staff have very high expectations of all pupils wanting them to achieve as well as they can. Teaching assistants are very skilled at supporting pupils who need extra help so that they can achieve very well. Extra activities are very well planned for pupils who are more able so that they make very good progress in all subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding curriculum that is very well planned to develop the whole child, personally as well as academically. There are many opportunities for pupils to learn beyond the classroom and pupils in Year 4 are particularly excited about their residential trip to France. Many pupils learn other languages, including French and Italian, and some even speak a smattering of Japanese after the work they carried out looking at what life is like in Japan. The school has a beautiful outside area, most of which has been developed to promote learning outside the classroom. However this development work is yet to be completed. The programme

to promote pupils' personal development is excellent. Much use is made of external agencies, such as the police and road safety officers, to ensure that pupils know how to keep safe. Other visitors help pupils gain understanding of a very wide range of other cultures and visits to places of interest really help pupils learn about the world beyond their immediate locality.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils are cared for, guided and supported extremely well. Child protection systems are robust and all staff have been trained to a good level in first aid. The very good relationships that exist within the school make this a safe and inviting place to be in. The school's own tracking system that monitors how much progress each child is making as they move through the school is excellent. Teachers make regular assessments on each child to make sure that none are falling behind. Personalised learning plans are drawn up so that pupils soon catch up. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are quickly identified and very effective support is put in place so that they can make very good progress. Pupils know how well they are doing and are so well supported in all they do that they are very keen to do even better.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management throughout the school is excellent. All staff work very well together and all are fully involved in making sure that all pupils make excellent progress. The headteacher has been most successful in ensuring that all pupils have an excellent education. It is particularly noteworthy that standards have continued to rise and there are such high expectations for all pupils to achieve as well as they can, whatever their starting point. Governors are particularly supportive of the school and make frequent visits to work with the pupils and staff. They are excellent and are frequent visitors to the school, monitoring its work and supporting where appropriate. They are fully aware of the challenges that the school faces, particularly in maintaining the very high standards.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

18 May 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of St Mary's VA CofE Lower School, Clophill, MK45 4BE

Thank you so much for welcoming me into your school when I visited and for being so helpful in telling me all about your work. I really enjoyed having lunch with the school council, who were particularly helpful in explaining about your school. I am now writing to let you know what I found out.

You told me that you really enjoyed coming to school and that your lessons were fun. I think that your school is excellent. You all make excellent progress in your work because your teachers work very hard and make sure that you all achieve very well. I was particularly impressed by your understanding of how to keep healthy and how much work you have done in looking after the environment.

You told me about all of the extra activities you have. I wish that I was going with Year 4 to France so that I can see all the lovely places you will see. You must feel very grown up leaving your families at home. You know so much about other countries and really understand about respecting other people.

I think that the area around your school is absolutely beautiful. I talked to your headteacher who wants to improve some areas in the school grounds, and it would be a fantastic idea if you could help by giving her lots of ideas of what you would like to see.

Once again thank you so much for being so friendly, polite and well behaved. I wish you all well in the future.

Marianne Harris

Lead Inspector