

St Mark's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112325
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	325578
Inspection dates	18–19 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Rosemary Rodger

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	165
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Michael Duff
Headteacher	Mr Peter Barfoot
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Oxenholme Lane Natland Kendal Cumbria LA9 7QH

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	18–19 May 2009
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Telephone number
Fax number

01539 560719
01539 561769

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average sized school that is situated on the outskirts of Kendal. The area served by the school is mixed socially and economically. About half of the pupils attend the school from further afield. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. An average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most pupils are White British. A very small number of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, some of whom are learning English as an additional language. The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises a Reception class. The school has achieved several national awards including Healthy School and Activemark. There is a breakfast and after-school club on site. This provision is not managed by the school and was not part of the inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Mark's is a good and improving school as a result of the dynamic and resolute leadership of the headteacher with the effective support of senior leaders and the staff team. Parents appreciate the welcoming and caring environment in which their children thrive and enjoy learning. Comments were made such as, 'It is important for a parent to feel that they can trust an organisation with the care and education of their child and have 100% faith – sums up St Marks.'

Pupils make good progress and achieve well. The results of the 2008 Year 6 national tests were significantly above average in mathematics and science and above average in English, with most pupils achieving the higher Level 5. In the Year 2 tests in 2008, standards were above average, although results were not as strong at the higher levels in writing and mathematics. Current standards in Key Stage 1 show a marked improvement on previous years and progress is good. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the few learning English as an additional language are progressing very well.

Personal development and well-being are good with outstanding features in pupils' enjoyment of learning which is reflected in their above average attendance. Older pupils take on several responsibilities with great pride and serve on the school council or as house captains. Behaviour throughout the school is good overall. Nevertheless, there are occasional incidents of low-level misbehaviour in some classes. The school does not implement a sufficiently consistent behaviour management policy. Pupils say they feel safe, and understand and practise the importance of eating healthily and keeping fit. They are well prepared for later learning. This is evident in pupils' close links with the local secondary school, the priority they give to recycling, and their links with a local business to develop awareness of the world of work.

The quality of teaching is good, with some outstanding teaching of older pupils. Teaching assistants provide invaluable support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those pupils learning English as an additional language. This is particularly effective when the latter work closely with their peers and with adult support, for example, when engaging in role-play to solve the mystery of the stolen vase. The good curriculum promotes good learning of basic skills, including information and communication technology (ICT). Enrichment is particularly effective through residential visits and a wealth of after-school activities, such as instrumental sessions, cookery and many sporting activities that have resulted in a recent Activemark award. Arrangements to ensure pupils are well cared for and supported are secure. Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. Good academic guidance is provided for pupils. They understand what is required to succeed. The detailed tracking system is used effectively to assess progress in all subjects throughout the year. As a result, secure and effective steps are in place to provide additional support for pupils at risk of underachieving.

Leadership and management are good. Teamwork is strong. The school exudes a strong ethos within which all pupils can grow and flourish, and learn to respect the integrity of individuals. The school makes a positive contribution to community cohesion at local and national levels and has plans in place to further extend international links. Governors are well briefed and provide the headteacher with effective support. The school has a good capacity to improve based on the good improvements since the last inspection.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and helps children to achieve well. Staff in the Reception class, ably supported by the headteacher, have introduced a new approach to learning which encourages greater independence and choice by the children. On entry, children's knowledge and skills are below age-related expectations. They get off to a good start in a stimulating environment where teaching is good and where all children are well cared for and supported. As a result, many achieve in line with national expectations in all areas of learning by the time they start Year 1. Parents comment on how pleased they are with the progress made and how happy their children are. An outdoor play area has developed well since the last inspection and is used effectively to support learning. Children are encouraged to explore and use their imagination; for example, they had great fun in the café creating a teddy bears' picnic. Although staff provide a wide range of exciting activities to engage and motivate the children, the balance of child-initiated and staff-led activities is not always appropriate to ensure all children make good progress. Less progress is made in writing. Although the children have free access to writing materials, support for them to practise and develop their skills occurs less frequently. Welfare arrangements are carefully attended to and ensure children are safe and well cared for.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement a whole school behaviour policy to secure greater consistency in managing pupils' behaviour in classes and around the school.
- Ensure there is an appropriate balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage to assist children's progress, especially in writing.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

From their below age-related attainment on entry to Reception, pupils make good progress by the time they leave Year 6. Previous underachievement in writing and mathematics in Year 2 is no longer evident. Standards by the end of Year 6 are above average in English, mathematics and science and, in 2008, Year 6 pupils exceeded their challenging targets. Current standards in Year 6 are broadly average, but based on the pupils' below-average attainment at the end of Year 2, good progress is being made. This progress is linked to good and, occasionally, outstanding teaching, high expectations and palpable enjoyment of learning in Year 6. Pupils are on track to meet their challenging targets in 2009. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those learning English as an additional language also make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are self-assured, display positive attitudes to learning and generally try hard. Good attendance mirrors their excellent enjoyment of school and their enthusiasm to take part in all the activities the school has to offer. The moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. Spiritual development is outstanding. In assembly, for example, the children were enthralled as the headteacher linked the story of Moses in the wilderness with their camping holidays and so helped the pupils develop an understanding of their beliefs. The school has developed a partnership with a school with a high number of pupils from minority ethnic

backgrounds. Behaviour is good overall. By the time they enter Year 6, pupils have developed very positive attitudes towards learning and eagerly take on extra responsibilities such as play leaders. School councillors take their role seriously and make a marked difference. They have their own budget and are active in developing resources for playtime. Pupils participate in local events and organise fundraising for charities and the school community. For example, just before the inspection the school raised £1,600 for school resources at a spring fair. Pupils embrace a healthy lifestyle and are fully aware of the benefits of healthy eating and taking regular exercise. The emphasis on developing and using basic skills across all areas of learning means that their preparation for secondary school and the world beyond is good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching is good, although it ranges from outstanding to satisfactory throughout the school. Inspirational and creative methods that engage pupils in realistic role-play situations contribute very well to their learning. In an extremely well planned and resourced literacy project on solving a crime, pupils in their various police officer roles examined evidence and solved the mystery of the stolen vase. Planning of lessons is very detailed and use of assessment information enables teachers to provide appropriately for the full range of pupils' abilities in each class. Teachers routinely share with pupils what they are expected to learn. Relationships are consistently good. Effective use of electronic whiteboards demonstrates and models what pupils are to do and learn. Intervention for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is effective, both in and out of class, because of good teaching and the impact of a well-skilled team of teaching assistants. In the small number of satisfactory lessons, discipline is sometimes too lax and leads to distractions, as pupils call out or do not stop talking when requested to do so. Parents appreciate the approachability of staff and the partnerships that are made when children are in need of additional support.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. Pupils enjoy a wide range of additional experiences, beyond statutory requirements, to enhance their learning. The variety of visitors to the school and visits add powerfully to pupils' learning and personal development. Good attention is paid to developing basic skills, and the school is currently reviewing the curriculum to develop more meaningful links between subjects. The range of opportunities for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities helps them to be confident and achieve well. Learning opportunities for the more-able pupils are also very well developed. Throughout the school, pupils are responding positively to initiatives to raise standards, for example, taking part in the Spell Binding Book Awards, which inspired them to become avid readers. Very good enrichment opportunities offer a broad range of additional activities with a strong emphasis on sport and good health, the creative arts and modern foreign language development, which pupils value highly. All pupils have the opportunity to learn French taught by specialist teachers. This is having a strong impact on their knowledge and confidence in speaking another language, as pupils in Year 3 ably demonstrated during registration. Partnership with local high schools and businesses provides valuable support for curriculum development. For example, pupils in Year 5 enthusiastically recalled the experiments they had completed during their visit to the local high school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good care, guidance and support have a marked impact on pupils' all-round development and personal achievements. Pastoral care is good. Pupils are very well cared for in a happy and friendly environment. Relationships are good. Pupils feel safe and secure and say 'adults listen and help if you have a problem'. Child protection and other checks to safeguard pupils' health, safety and well-being are fully in place. The special educational needs leader, ably supported by the well-qualified teaching assistants, provides very good support for vulnerable pupils, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the few children for whom English is an additional language. All pupils' progress is monitored regularly and appropriate action is taken if anyone is falling behind. Staff respond well by providing extra support and exciting activities to engage and develop pupils' self-esteem. As a result, all are included fully in activities and make good progress. Academic guidance is good. Marking is very thorough, giving clear guidance to help pupils improve. Teachers give good academic guidance and track pupils' progress, identifying and addressing all needs well.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher knows the school very well and has a clear view of its future direction. Strong teamwork and a greater sharing of responsibilities mean that management tasks are distributed more equitably. Staff welcome their added responsibilities because of the impact and contribution they have on improvements. The school improvement plan and self-evaluation are very detailed and an accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Monitoring systems are accurate, particularly in relation to pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and learning. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are included fully in school life, and parents value the support their children receive. Alterations to the building and improvements in resources for ICT are all contributing well to the high level of pupils' enjoyment. Governance is good. Effective use is made of governors' extensive professional expertise to benefit the school. They are very supportive and through recent training are aware of the need to further develop their already competent role as a 'critical friend'. The school has a good understanding of local community needs. It takes the opportunity to share local cultural and faith traditions, particularly through the close links with the local church. Links with a school in a more culturally diverse and socially mixed area nearby ensure that pupils become familiar with different faiths, cultures and ethnicity. A very recent development building on a topic in the national assessments was used to help pupils learn how Dutch people live. Plans are in place to extend existing links with France.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

20 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's CofE Primary School, Cumbria, LA9 7QH

Thank you for making the inspection of your school so enjoyable. Please also thank your parents for their helpful comments. You attend a good school. You clearly enjoy school very much.

This is what impressed us about your school.

- Most of you work hard all the time and, as a result, you succeed in everything you do.
- You have worked hard to improve your writing, especially in Year 2; your writing about the Netherlands was very interesting.
- You are all well cared for, especially those who need a little extra help with your work.
- Your teachers work hard and make your lessons really stimulating, for instance, the crime-scene investigation.
- The care and great respect that your headteacher shows you contribute very well to your overall well-being.
- Children starting the Reception class enjoy being able to learn inside and outside.

A few things could be better. Misbehaviour in a few classes distracts some of you in lessons. You can help by always listening to your teachers and not shouting out in lessons. In the Reception class, the adults who work with you need to make sure that you are supported more, especially when you are learning to write.

Good luck to you all and enjoy the rest of your time at school.

Yours faithfully

Rosemary Rodger

Lead inspector