

St Mary's CofE Primary School, Dilwyn

Dilwyn, Herefordshire HR4 8HR

Inspection dates

4–5 April 2017

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| Overall effectiveness | Good |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Good |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Outstanding |
| Outcomes for pupils | Good |
| Early years provision | Outstanding |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and governors have created a successful school. Through their vision, commitment and ambition, they have steered improvements and overcome any challenges along the way.
- Teaching is good, behaviour is excellent and community links are very strong.
- This is a small school with a big curriculum. Pupils of all ages and abilities are given plenty of opportunity to try new things and experience success in a range of subjects. Consequently, they enjoy school, feel confident and are well prepared for their next school when they leave St Mary's.
- At the end of key stages 1 and 2, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above national averages.
- Pupils' achievements in reading and science are notable strengths. Pupils of all abilities make excellent progress in these two subjects.
- Progress in mathematics and writing is good. However, there is scope to push standards even higher in these two subjects.
- Caring relationships and a belief that all pupils should enjoy learning and aspire to high standards are at the heart of the school's work.
- Pupils work hard, support one another and respond very well to the good-quality teaching provided. They are extremely responsive in class, play happily with others on the playground and, for most pupils, attendance is high.
- Parents are highly supportive of the school. During this inspection, Ofsted received many positive comments from parents about the school's values and the quality of education and care provided.
- The school's procedures for keeping children safe work as they should. Pupils are taught about everyday risks and how to manage these in a sensible way. Training for staff is up to date and checks on staff and visitors are carried out correctly.
- Children get a superb start to school. The early years provision is managed very well within a mixed-age class because of highly effective leadership, teamwork and teaching. In addition, liaison arrangements with the local pre-school and parents are excellent.
- Pupils who find aspects of learning difficult or who have faced problems in their lives thrive at this school. Staff understand their needs and give them the support, guidance and teaching they require.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Boost pupils' progress and raise standards even higher in mathematics and writing by making sure that:
 - the mathematics curriculum and teaching give pupils sufficient opportunities to apply and develop their reasoning skills
 - pupils' progress in writing accelerates so that it is in line with the faster rates of progress seen in subjects such as science and reading
 - leaders and staff continue to forge links with other schools in order to share and learn from the most effective practice.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal leads the school with determined and clear-sighted vision. Through his commitment and ambition for pupils to enjoy learning and reach high standards across a broad and varied curriculum, he has led the school to its current level of success. He makes his expectations of staff and pupils very clear and brings a calm, thoughtful and evaluative approach to most situations. He is a highly visible presence throughout the school day and bases his decisions on what is best for the pupils. Consequently, he has gained much respect and trust from parents and the community served by the school. Staff willingly give of their best.
- Parents are extremely supportive. Their written comments on Parent View and their comments to the inspector during the inspection were full of praise for all aspects of the school's work. Several parents who had moved their children from other schools described how their children had flourished as a result of the education and care provided at St Mary's. In all cases, parents reported that they felt very informed about their children's education because of the excellent communication between home and school and the approachability of staff. This wealth of support from parents is a key strength that helps pupils to succeed.
- The curriculum is a significant strength. The school gives plenty of attention to basic skills but also provides pupils with a rich range of subjects and activities. Subjects are often knitted together in themes and enhanced by trips to places of interest, special events or visitors to school. French, science and music stand out as notable strengths, with some high-quality learning experiences in these subjects. In addition, pupils develop a range of worthwhile skills while working in the nearby forest school area. Furthermore, pupils are able to attend a mixture of different clubs and regularly get involved in local events.
- Specific funds to provide support for disadvantaged pupils and for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are put to good use, with spending tailored to individual needs. The primary school sports funding is also used well. Despite the small number of pupils, the school regularly takes part in local tournaments and pupils have gained recognition and rewards for their achievements. All pupils benefit from swimming lessons.

Governance of the school

- Governance is effective. Since the previous inspection, governors have reviewed the way they work and made changes so that they stay suitably informed about statutory duties. The clerking of governors' meetings has improved and governor training is now given a high priority. As a result, governors are able to make sure that policies and practice stay up to date. They fulfil their legal obligations.
- Governors routinely check aspects of the school's work for themselves and are very aware of the school's key strengths and the need to build further on these. Governors are ambitious for every pupil to achieve across a broad curriculum. They also aim to

make sure that pupils develop attitudes and values that will help them, and the communities in which they live, in the future.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The shortcomings in aspects of the school's procedures identified at the time of the previous inspection have now been rectified in full. Staff training is fully up to date and the school leadership routinely checks that staff know what to do should they have a concern. Just recently, for example, staff completed a safeguarding questionnaire so that leaders could evaluate the extent of their knowledge.
- Staff and governors also take steps to check pupils' understanding of how to stay safe in different situations. Parents are kept informed about the school's work to promote safety messages and are advised about the sort of risks that pupils can encounter when using the internet. During this inspection, parents expressed high levels of confidence in the school's work to keep their children safe. Governors make sure that safeguarding and safety matters are standing items on the agenda of each full governors' meeting. Safer recruitment procedures operate correctly and the single central record of checks on staff suitability to work with children is complete and up to date.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- In all classes, teaching is good. It is typified by strong subject knowledge and purposeful activities that are informed by regular and accurate assessments of what pupils know and can do. Consequently, pupils tackle work that builds on their previous learning and leads to secure understanding.
- A particular feature of teaching and learning at St Mary's is the ability of staff and pupils to quickly change the mood in order to suit the occasion. For example, when editing a text or practising spellings, pupils apply themselves with studious attentiveness. They readily reach for reference materials, such as dictionaries or thesauruses, without any prompting and an air of calm conscientious study allows all to get on. In other situations, such as when constructing a model of a Roman building, carrying out research in advance of a school trip to a historical site or singing with gusto during assembly, a sense of active, fun-loving excitement bubbles out from staff and pupils. This understanding of what is expected and the ease with which pupils and adults understand one another are distinctive features of teaching, learning and life at the school. It helps all to feel secure and valued and to do their best.
- In addition, the school has established clear routines that help to set and reinforce expectations. Spelling practice, reading sessions and phonics teaching, for example, all happen with consistent regularity in all classes. Indeed, the school places great emphasis on developing pupils' key literacy skills. Pupils regularly read for pleasure. They use and apply their reading and comprehension skills in many different subjects. The well-organised commitment to the teaching of reading results in success. In recent years, pupils have left St Mary's CofE Primary with excellent reading skills.

- Mathematics teaching, too, is well organised and effective. Pupils' work shows that they cover a lot of ground, acquire secure number skills and solve problems. It also shows that they apply their mathematical skills in subjects such as science. Opportunities for pupils to practise and develop their reasoning skills, however, are less apparent.
- Teaching in subjects such as history and geography is regularly enriched by school trips and imaginative topics. In music and French, specialist teaching leads to high standards.
- Teamwork between staff, whether visiting teachers, teaching assistants, part-time staff or school leaders, is strong. This is a school that makes the best use of the available expertise and preserves the school's traditions, but is open to new ideas and welcomes innovation. To this end, staff are looking to build further on existing links with other schools in order to share practice and expertise.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Bullying is a very rare occurrence at St Mary's and pupils report that unkind behaviour is simply not accepted. Staff make sure that pupils understand what is meant by bullying, the different ways it can happen and what to do should it occur. Pupils are confident that other pupils or adults would be quick to stop any poor behaviour. They also say that they would always tell an adult at school if they were worried about anything and trust the adults to listen and help them.
- Staff teach pupils about the risks they can face, both now and in the future, and how to manage these. For example, pupils recently completed a questionnaire about internet safety. Staff analysed their responses and used this information to provide informed guidance about what to do and how to stay safe in different online situations. Pupils get regular reminders about road safety, and important health and safety messages are woven into the school's curriculum. In science, for instance, pupils' work about the effects of exercise on the body led neatly into an opportunity to teach pupils about the risks associated with alcohol and tobacco.
- Pupils also learn to be resilient. By learning outdoors in the forest school area, they get to solve problems and test out their abilities beyond the classroom. Musical instrument tuition and the chance to compete in sporting events help pupils to realise the link between effort and success and equip them with 'can-do' attitudes that serve them well.
- Pupils who have particular needs, including those who have faced difficulties in their lives, get sensitive and constructive support that builds confidence, self-esteem and emotional well-being.
- In short, the level of care and attention given to each and every individual is exemplary.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils take pride in their school, show respect for their teachers and arrive looking smart and ready to learn.
- As was the case at the previous inspection, pupils' conduct is exemplary. In class, they work hard, readily volunteer their ideas and ask thoughtful questions. At breaktimes, pupils of all ages show interest in one another. They play happily together and the older pupils keep a caring eye on the younger ones.
- Pupils who have found it difficult to manage aspects of their behaviour in the past have been helped to change their ways. Staff bring a sense of calm authority to all situations and encourage pupils to reflect on the consequences of any poor behaviour or unwise decisions. In turn, pupils come to understand that they must set high standards for their own behaviour. In many cases, pupils remind other pupils about what is acceptable at their school, applauding positive actions and gently, but firmly, pointing out any behaviour that falls short of the school's code of conduct.
- Over time, pupils' attendance rates have been high. While attendance dipped to close to average in 2016, for the current year to date it is back up to its usual high level. Since the beginning of the 2016/17 academic year, more than half the pupils at the school have over 98% attendance and around one quarter have yet to miss a single day.
- During this inspection, staff, parents, visitors and local people alike all praised the conduct and positive attitudes of the school's pupils. Inspection evidence supports these views.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Since the previous inspection, academic standards have continued to rise. At the end of both key stages 1 and 2 in 2016, the proportions of pupils reaching age-related expectations in reading, writing, mathematics and science were some way above national figures.
- Pupils' achievements in reading and science are particular strengths. Whatever their starting points and abilities, almost all pupils make excellent progress in these subjects.
- In mathematics and writing, most pupils make good progress. In both 2015 and 2016, standards at the end of Year 6 were above national averages, although the proportion reaching the greater-depth standard in writing did not match the higher results seen in reading and mathematics. Pupils' current work and the school's assessment data show that progress in writing is accelerating. In the current Year 6, for example, there is some exceptionally high-quality written work. In mathematics, too, progress across upper key stage 2 presents a very positive picture. However, in other year groups, progress rates in these two subjects are not consistently strong and this a key reason why outcomes remain good rather than outstanding at this time.
- There are too few disadvantaged pupils at the school for an analysis of their progress and attainment data to generate meaningful statistics. However, a study of the school's test results, assessment information and pupils' work confirms that all pupils, whether disadvantaged or not, are making at least good progress. The money that the school

receives to support disadvantaged pupils is spent in different ways, depending on pupils' different needs. In all cases, it is used effectively.

- The most able pupils do very well because teaching continually feeds their thirst for knowledge. Over time, these pupils have reached higher standards in mathematics and reading than in writing. School leaders and staff are alert to this and are taking action to develop and extend their writing skills. This is clearly paying off, as the standards of writing in the current Year 6 indicate.
- As noted in the previous inspection report, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities get bespoke support which helps them to move on in their learning. In several instances, pupils who have struggled with aspects of school life elsewhere have moved to St Mary's and responded positively to the guidance, care and support provided. Staff use a variety of methods to assess pupils' needs and capabilities and then set realistic, yet suitably high, expectations for pupils' behaviour and achievement. Through calm management, effective teaching and good communication between home and school, pupils are helped to overcome barriers to learning and to experience feelings of success.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Due to the small numbers in each year group, it is not possible to describe a typical cohort. Children's knowledge, skills and needs vary – sometimes quite significantly – from one year to the next. However, whatever their starting points, children settle in quickly and make excellent progress. Year after year, the proportions of children reaching a good level of development before the start of Year 1 have been above national averages. It is clear that this track record of success is due to highly effective leadership and provision.
- The quality of communication between the nearby pre-school provider and the school is a key factor in ensuring that children get off to a great start. Before joining the mixed Reception and key stage 1 class, pre-school children make regular visits and get to know staff and the school's routines long before they join the class full-time.
- Furthermore, the early years leader has worked with pre-school staff to develop a consistent approach to early years assessment. In both settings, staff use electronic tablet technology to record evidence about children's achievements and they regularly meet together to benchmark standards. Consequently, work builds carefully and progressively on earlier learning. The transition from pre-school to the Reception Year is seamless. In a similar vein, the mixed-age class arrangement means that the move up from Reception to Year 1 is very smooth and learning continues without disruption.
- The organisation of the curriculum and the consistently strong teaching in the mixed-age class enable children to make rapid gains in their learning and allow imaginations to soar. Time and resources are used exceptionally well and staff offer encouragement and reassurance, while also gently insisting on high standards of behaviour and application across a wide range of activities.
- Superb questioning by the teacher allows children to push on quickly with their letter sounds, while careful attention to accurate letter formation leads to some excellent early handwriting and long-lasting habits.

- Creativity is also given ample opportunity to flourish. The classroom's outdoor area might be small but it is crammed full of exciting things to do. During this inspection, for example, children were busy creating a monster hunt, having been inspired by a storybook. At other times, they build, paint, dance, sing, play and explore for many different reasons in many different subjects. The classroom provides a safe and exciting learning environment that leads to top-quality work.
- Parents are kept very well informed about their children's progress. In fact, they regularly contribute information to the school's assessments via online technology. Coincidentally, during this inspection, a parents' evening took place and many parents went out of their way to tell the inspector how pleased they were with the care and education provided for their children. As already noted, inspection evidence fully supports these positive views.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 139241 |
| Local authority | Herefordshire |
| Inspection number | 10026898 |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Academy free school |
| Age range of pupils | 4 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 54 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Madeleine Spinks |
| Principal | Mr Peter Kyles |
| Telephone number | 01544 318 277 |
| Website | www.stmarysprimarydilwyn.co.uk |
| Email address | enquiries@stmarysprimarydilwyn.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 11–12 February 2015 |

Information about this school

- St Mary's CofE Primary School, Dilwyn opened as a free school in January 2013. The school is administered by an independent charitable trust and is housed in the original school's buildings, owned by the local church trust. As a church school, it is a member of the Hereford Diocesan Schools Trust.
- The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school. Pupils are taught in three mixed-age classes.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils at the school is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average.

- The school offers early years provision for Reception-age children in one mixed-age key stage 1 and early years class.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The government's floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress, do not apply to schools of this small size.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in all three classes. The inspector also examined pupils' work in books and considered test and assessment information.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour, and the school's procedures, at the beginning and end of the school day, at lunch and breaktimes, during assemblies and when pupils were moving about the school and taking part in a fire drill.
- Meetings were held with staff, school leaders and governors. The inspector also spoke with pupils and listened to pupils read.
- By the end of the inspection, there were 31 recent responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and 16 free-text comments. The inspector took account of these and also spoke with parents and staff during the inspection.
- A number of school documents were examined. These included information about pupils' achievement, evaluations of the school's performance and numerous policy statements. Records relating to governance, staff performance management, training, the quality of teaching, external advice, behaviour, early years, attendance and safety and safeguarding were also scrutinised. The school's website was also checked.

Inspection team

Martin Pye, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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