

St Margaret's-at-Cliffe Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118495
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	339227
Inspection dates	14–15 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Kevin Hodge

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Ward-Dutton
Headteacher	Helen Comfort
Date of previous school inspection	April 2007
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Age group	3-11
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 9 lessons, and held meetings with staff, governors and pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at school documents, including monitoring records, development planning and arrangements for safeguarding pupils. They also looked at questionnaires from staff and pupils, and 83 from parents.

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

- how well pupils achieve in Years 3 to 6, particularly in writing and mathematics
- what aspects of teaching can be 'fine-tuned' to improve pupils' learning still further
- how well senior leaders and governors use self-evaluation to tackle weaknesses and set priorities for improvements.

Information about the school

The school is slightly smaller than average and has a higher than usual number of pupils leaving or joining the school other than at the normal times in the school year. The pupils are mainly from White British backgrounds. The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. These pupils have emotional, social or behavioural difficulties. The school has awards for promoting pupils' healthy living. Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in one Reception class. A Nursery, which is not managed by the governors, is sited within the school grounds.

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

St. Margaret's is a good school that pupils enjoy attending. They like the range of activities on offer, from being green-fingered in their 'welly boot' gardening club, to learning the ocarina in music. The children feel valued, behave well and are never scared to offer an opinion; their ideas make a visible and effective difference and they enjoy showing visitors their new wooden pirate ship that often doubles as a climbing frame! They feel safe as the school cares for them well. As a result, the pupils have an excellent awareness of healthy lifestyles and they really try to eat healthy options, despite looking forward to chocolate pudding for lunch! The vast majority of parents appreciate the school's successes, recognising that pupils enjoy school, are enthusiastic in lessons and achieve well. Pupils' comments to inspectors, both in person and recorded in their questionnaires, highlight the many things they enjoy. One said, 'I think school is a fun place. You learn lots of things and it is interesting.'

'My child enjoys school so much; I think she would attend through the school holidays' is a very positive comment echoed by very many, but not all, parents. A very small number offered constructive pointers for improvement and many voiced praise for the effective teaching and good guidance. This enables all, particularly those who are vulnerable or have special educational needs and/or disabilities, to enjoy their learning. Children get off to a happy secure start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and these early gains in confidence stay with them as they move up through the school. The staff look closely at how pupils' personal needs develop and they are now looking much more closely at pupils' academic progress to spot those lagging behind. A marked improvement in pupils' writing and reading levels after a dip last year has been one result, but in mathematics these checks have not been as effective in remedying weaker areas or developing pupils' confidence in Years 3 to 6. Current work reflects the improved picture, particularly in language work, where pupils develop confident writing, reading and speaking skills. By the time they leave school, pupils generally reach above average standards in their English and science work, but not in their mathematical work, which is broadly average. Pupils contribute well to the school's day-to-day smooth running, for example by acting as playground, door and corridor monitors, which they enjoy. They make a good contribution to local community events, celebrations and the village horticultural society. Recently established community links with an African village, along with their links to a French school, are widening pupils' horizons. Their knowledge of the range of cultures and beliefs found nationally, however, is a

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weaker aspect of their understanding.

The school has a good capacity to improve further. Leading the drive to maintain academic levels and foster school improvement are the effective senior leaders, supported by governors who know the school well. Their close teamwork underpins the school's improvement drive, particularly in getting some subjects, such as writing, back on track. Their self-evaluation routines, resulting in 'key intents', are accurate and have made a real difference to aspects such as some outdoor resources, and to the increased use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the school. Actions to improve mathematics are beginning to take effect. Improvements to teaching have resulted in better writing standards for example, but there is still room to fine-tune it further. Staff feel valued and appreciate their involvement. Arrangements to gain feedback from parents and pupils via regular use of questionnaires are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' confidence and ability mathematics in Years 3 to 6 this coming academic year by:
 - developing pupils' confidence to apply their number skills to solve everyday problems
 - extending relevant and enticing opportunities for mathematical activities across the curriculum
 - keeping a close check on pupils' progress so those that need more help can be spotted quickly and supported appropriately.
- Raise the pupils' awareness of others with differing backgrounds and beliefs by:
 - following through with the link with the school in Africa
 - developing a link with a school in a contrasting locality and with pupils of differing backgrounds.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils are eager to learn, enjoy attending and are motivated within lessons. They have a clear opinion of what makes good learning and enjoy activities designed to enhance their writing such as using ICT skills and through science and artwork. Writing has improved considerably and current work reflects above average standards. In a Year 2 lesson, pupils enjoyed writing about the island of St Lucia, inspired by looking at pictures and having avid discussions about its good points. Pupils' good behaviour aids the use of 'talking partners' to extend discussion skills. Pupils share and discuss their ideas sensibly and maturely. This also helps them develop as articulate and confident speakers, even those in the Early Years Foundation Stage who readily express their likes and dislikes.

By the end of Year 2, pupils attain above average standards and pupils in Years 3 to 6 generally build on this good start. Last year's results dipped for the oldest pupils,

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particularly in writing. Due to a concerted effort to improve on this, pupils now write creatively and at length. By the time they leave, pupils' attainment in reading, writing, and science is above average, Pupils' mathematical progress, although improved due to some concerted action by staff, lags behind the other subjects as their confidence in number work and problem solving is not as secure. This represents good achievement overall, including for those with special educational needs and/or difficulties, who make similar progress to their classmates. Pupils develop good skills in ICT, as seen in their knowledge of computer-based work and use of digital cameras. The youngest pupils are confident in their use of programmes to aid their learning, and pupils in Year 3 enjoyed using a computer programme to look at pictures of construction joints and then comment upon their suitability. Pupils leave school with a good level of basic skills and are well prepared for the next stage of their education and the world beyond.

Pupils are proud of their role in shaping the direction of the school. They feel their contribution is valued and they enjoyed choosing the design of their pirate ship based climbing frame in the playground. The levels of activity in the playgrounds are good, aided by playground helpers who spot those who may be lonely or want to join in a game. Pupils' links with the local horticultural society and village life also reflect the pupils' good involvement within the wider community and help promote healthy eating. Pupils raise funds for charities and are beginning to develop links with a school abroad, to complement those with a school in France.

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

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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How effective is the provision?

'Lessons are fun', 'we do lots of exciting things' and 'I like music' were pupils' comments which reflected the style and approach that teachers foster within lessons. Teaching is typically good through the school. This aids pupils' good progress, particularly in the way that pupils' confidence and skills in writing have improved. A good pace is generally fostered in activities. Good use is made of ICT to support other subjects, including writing. Artwork has been a focus this term and displays reflect a good range of pupils' work covering differing artistic styles. Teachers often make good use of audiovisual whiteboards to enliven lessons further and practical activities such as identifying shapes in a Year 1 activity develop pupils' knowledge of shape and positional language. In some activities, teachers occasionally explain things for too long to the whole class, which causes some pupils to lose interest. In others, pupils know what they have to do, but do not always understand why they are doing it, which reduces their motivation. Teachers' marking is usually of good quality and gives pupils clear help in improving their work.

The curriculum broadens pupils' horizons, not least in the way it includes two modern foreign languages, aiding their links with a French school. Pupils enthusiastically talk about their after-school and lunchtime clubs and the 'Take One Picture' project linked to a London art gallery. Basic skills are planned for well in most respects, particularly in the way that writing is now promoted effectively through other subjects and to engage boys' interests. Planning in mathematics is under review. It is systematic, although does not always give enough opportunities for pupils to apply their number skills to solving everyday problems. Pupils are learning about others' backgrounds and cultures, partly through their links with a school in Africa. However, planning is not yet systematic enough to fully develop their awareness of others in the UK today. The range of extra-curricular clubs is excellent, ranging from sewing to learning the ocarina, cello and violin. These really help develop pupils' interest in the arts, and future gardeners are well catered for.

Pupils say they feel safe and appreciate the help of play leaders and staff who guide and support them when needed. This is not surprising, as the care, support and guidance for pupils are good. The good progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is down to several factors. First, the school identifies their needs carefully, and second, it makes good use of well-briefed teaching assistants. Lastly, the school has a culture of care and support so that those who are having any difficulties stand a much better chance of getting back on track so they can learn more effectively. Parents and pupils are rightly impressed with the school's well-targeted levels of support, guidance and care, although a small number of parents say they would like more involvement if things do not always run smoothly with their child. Pupils benefit from clear planning for their needs. Links with outside agencies to extend the expertise available are used effectively. Links with parents before pupils start school, such as open afternoons and drop-in sessions, are appreciated and help both children and their parents to have a happy start to school.

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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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, supported by an effective senior team, including governors, is always seeking ways of improving the school. Together, they have successfully reversed a dip in results last year. The school's 'key intents' for improvement successfully guide those areas needing attention and draw upon a range of evidence to set new priorities to tackle. The school's monitoring of teaching is systematic. While the monitoring of teaching indicates where improvements are needed, it does not always focus closely enough on the quality of pupils' learning. Governors know the school well and visit regularly to keep their 'finger on the pulse' of what goes on. Although they gather a wide range of information, they are looking at ways of making this more focused so the information gained can inform their new 'steering group' which meets to look at the long-term direction of the school. They ensure that school deals fairly with all parents and children to ensure equality of opportunity.

Both staff and governors ensure that safeguarding procedures are of good quality and policies are clear, robust and effective. The school promotes good community cohesion. The school knows the needs of its local community well and is actively involved with village events such as harvest festivals and the local horticultural society. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive, although a very small number pointed to improvements they would like to see. A high proportion of parents consider the school to be a valuable part of the local community and the school works extremely well with them.

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

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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

Children make a good start in the Reception class. Parents comment about how quickly their children settle down and come home happy. This is not surprising, as the welfare arrangements are excellent, and children and their parents have opportunities to get to know their teacher and class before they make a formal start. There is a good balance between activities that the teacher chooses and those that the children want to do. Due to consistently good provision, they often reach above average levels when they enter Year 1 and they achieve well from their starting points, which are broadly typical for their age. Children like making sandwiches and they could not wait for their dough to rise when breadmaking. Planting bulbs in the class flower beds promoted children's manipulative skills and environmental awareness. Others explain what they are doing clearly, and simple writing and reading skills develop well. Children behave well and willingly share resources, despite being new to school. Very confident teaching, aided by well-briefed teaching assistants, ensures that children make good and sometimes excellent progress. Occasionally, in the lessons observed, staff spent a little too much time directing one activity, rather than circulating to others to develop them further. Staff are effective at assessing children's individual needs, which develops their confidence in a short time. Children have access to a large outdoor area with resources for learning. It promotes children's physical development as well as providing a quiet space in the class outdoor 'twigwam'. Some resources, although adequate, are well worn and would benefit from replacement or updating. The school establishes good links with parents very quickly, due to good levels of management, and this ensures children have the best start they can. The information on their progress is collected effectively and results in each child taking home a folder of their 'unique story' of their year.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

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Views of parents and carers

The parents who responded to the questionnaires were overwhelmingly supportive of the school. All agreed that their child enjoyed school and around 90% agreed or strongly agreed with many of the questions. Those that commented spoke about the good start that the school gave their children. Often, parents offered some constructive criticisms alongside other supportive comments. Some of these pointers included wanting more information on pupils' progress, knowing more about what happens when children are badly behaved and less focus on health and safety issues that may otherwise restrict activities. The inspectors found no evidence to support the parents' concerns. For example, parents receive regular updates on pupils' progress, including mid-year reviews and end-of-year reports. While inspectors cannot comment on individual responses about pupils' behaviour, the systems in the school are effective in promoting good behaviour and routines to keep parents informed generally are of good quality. The school is diligent about looking after the health and safety of its pupils. There was no evidence of the school being more cautious than necessary, given the high standard which is currently expected.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Margaret’s-at-Cliffe 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 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 83 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 200 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	53	64	28	34	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	52	63	30	36	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	41	49	32	39	7	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	38	46	35	42	5	6	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	40	48	35	42	3	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	46	55	30	36	4	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	46	55	37	45	0	0	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)	35	42	33	40	3	4	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	40	48	31	37	5	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	32	39	33	40	8	10	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	26	31	43	52	5	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	41	49	34	41	2	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	46	55	33	40	2	2	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 all 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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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>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 pupils' 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.

16 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Margaret's-at-Cliffe Primary School, Dover CT15 6SS

I am writing to let you know about the findings from the inspection we carried out recently. The vast majority of your parents and carers think your school is good and we agree.

Here are some of the things we found out:

- The youngest children settle in the Reception class well and are enjoying all of the activities that take place. They really like their big climbing frame.
- You reach above the expected standards when you leave, and you achieve well in most aspects of your work.
- Most of you behave well and try hard in lessons.
- You are good at keeping active at playtimes and your new 'pirate' ship certainly helps to keep you really 'shipshape' and very healthy.
- The staff really work hard and effectively to make your parents and carers feel part of what goes on in the school.
- Nearly all of you said that you feel safe and can ask for help because staff care about you well. We agree with you!
- The range of things you do such as French, German, music, sports and gardening clubs sound great!
- The school helps those of you who sometimes find work difficult or have a particular physical difficulty to achieve really well.
- The teaching is usually good, has few areas to improve, and helps you to learn well.

We have asked the school to do two things to help it improve further:

- Give those of you in Years 3 to 6 help to improve your maths work by helping you apply number skills to solve problems.
- Develop more links with other schools in this country so you get to find out about other children who live in a different type of area or who are a bit different from you.

You can help your teachers by keeping up your behaviour, and continuing to give your opinion!

Yours faithfully

Kevin Hodge
Lead inspector

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