



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**St Mark's V.A.P. School
St Issell's Avenue
Merlins Bridge
Haverfordwest
SA61 1JX**

Date of inspection: December 2011

by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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Context

St. Mark's Primary School is a voluntary aided Church in Wales school situated in the village of Merlins Bridge, on the outskirts of Haverfordwest in Pembrokeshire. Pupils attend the school from the village and the surrounding areas.

Currently, 116 full-time pupils aged between 4 and 11 years attend the school. In addition, 10 pupils attend the nursery class (5 in the morning and 5 in the afternoon). Pupils start the school on a part-time basis at the beginning of the term following their third birthday, and on a full time basis at the start of the term following their fourth birthday.

Nearly all pupils come from English-speaking homes. There are no pupils from homes where Welsh is the first language. Very few pupils are from a minority ethnic background and no pupils have English as an additional language. Currently 45% of pupils are entitled to free school meals. This is well above the local and national averages. Forty-three per cent of pupils are identified as having additional learning needs.

The headteacher was appointed in September 2005 and the school was last inspected in November 2005. The deputy headteacher left the school recently to take up a post at another school. The school currently has an acting deputy headteacher.

The individual school budget per pupil for St Mark's V.A.P. School in 2011-2012 means that the budget is £3,577 per pupil. The maximum per pupil in the primary schools in Pembrokeshire is £5,323 and the minimum is £3,000. St Mark's V.A.P. School is 27th out of the 61 primary schools in Pembrokeshire in terms of its school budget per pupil.

Summary

The school's current performance	Good
The school's prospects for improvement	Good

Current performance

The school's present performance is good because:

- pupils' performance at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 in English, mathematics and science in combination compares well with results in similar schools;
- teaching is good;
- the quality of care, support and guidance is excellent and this impacts extremely well on pupils' standards and their wellbeing;
- the inclusive ethos of the school impacts very positively on pupils' self-esteem, and wellbeing; and
- the partnerships with a range of specialist services are very well established and provide very good support for pupils.

Prospects for improvement

The school's prospects for improvement are good because:

- the school has made significant improvement since the last inspection;
- the headteacher is extremely committed to the school and provides excellent leadership;
- self-evaluation and planning for improvement are effective;
- the school uses data very effectively to monitor pupils' progress;
- governors are actively involved in the school and their role in holding the school to account for the standards that pupils achieve is developing well; and
- the school takes very good account of national priorities and these impact well on the standards that pupils achieve.

Recommendations

In order to improve, the school needs to:

- R1 raise standards in Welsh;
- R2 further develop assessment for learning;
- R3 share the good practice in teaching across the school; and
- R4 make sure that the more able pupils are sufficiently challenged in all lessons.

What happens next?

The school will draw up an action plan which shows how the school is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will invite the school to prepare a written case study, describing the excellent practice identified during the inspection.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

A significant minority of pupils enter the school with below the expected level of skills in communication and numeracy. By the age of seven, teacher assessment indicates that most pupils achieve the expected standards in English, mathematics and science. Pupils' performance in these subjects combined is consistently in the top 25% when compared to the performance of pupils in similar schools.

In 2011, outcomes for pupils aged 11 were good. Over the past four years, pupils' performance, at the expected level, in English, mathematics and science combined, has been in the upper 50% when compared to the performance of pupils in similar schools.

By the time they reach Year 6, pupils receiving additional support make significant progress from their starting points. This is a major strength of the school. Pupils who are entitled to free school meals generally perform as well or even better than those pupils not entitled to free school meals in key stage 1, but not as well in key stage 2. Girls tend to perform better overall than boys at key stages 1 and 2, but the gender gap is not significant.

In lessons, pupils' progress and achievement are generally good. Many pupils recall previous learning well and apply their skills and knowledge appropriately to new situations. Most pupils' independent learning skills are developing well.

The majority of pupils develop good oral communication skills. They talk to adults confidently and share their ideas appropriately. By the age of seven, the majority of pupils can use several strategies to decode words and generally read suitable texts competently. They can also write simple sentences well and most pupils make appropriate progress. Key stage 2 pupils talk enthusiastically about the books and authors they enjoy. Many are able to use higher-order reading skills, such as inference and deduction, effectively. By Year 6, the majority of pupils can write appropriately for a range of purposes. However, a small minority of more able pupils do not write with sufficient accuracy and detail in the Foundation Phase and lower key stage 2.

Most pupils in the Foundation Phase make appropriate progress in Welsh and by the end of Year 6 most pupils achieve good standards. However, pupils' progress across the school is inconsistent. By the end of key stage 2, most pupils read at an appropriate level. They understand and use high frequency Welsh words and phrases well in a wide range of context. Generally, pupils throughout the school have good attitudes towards Welsh and have a good understanding of their Welsh heritage.

Wellbeing: Good

Nearly all pupils are proud of their school and speak positively about the experiences provided for them. They are enthusiastic about their learning and contribute positively to discussions. As a result of high quality care, support and guidance, all pupils take part in all aspects of school life.

The school council is well established and makes a positive contribution to the school. The members understand the importance of their role and feel that their views are listened to. They feel happy and safe in school and are confident that any concerns are treated seriously and acted upon quickly and fairly. Pupils generally work well together to solve problems, although their ability to improve their own learning is in an early stage of development.

Pupils are very respectful of their peers and show care and concern for each other. Nearly all pupils understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle, including the need for regular exercise. The school has successful initiatives in place to promote healthy living for pupils and families.

Behaviour across the school is generally good and pupils are courteous and polite to each other and visitors.

Over the last three years, attendance has been around the average or just below that of similar schools. Nearly all pupils arrive at school on time.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good
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Learning experiences: Good

The school provides a good range of learning experiences. Teachers' medium and short-term planning is generally appropriate. Pupils have suitable opportunities to contribute to planning and the teachers take good account of pupils' interests when planning the learning experiences.

The Foundation Phase has been implemented successfully and there are good opportunities for pupils to learn through play. Planned activities generally engage most pupils successfully and provide appropriate opportunities for outdoor learning.

All key stage 2 pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that meets National Curriculum requirements. Visitors to the school enhance learning experiences well. For example, the local pastor's work with groups of older pupils impacts positively on their Welsh language skills. A good range of educational visits enrich the curriculum successfully. Pupils enjoy and benefit from the extensive range of extra-curricular activities on offer.

Provision for pupils to develop their skills is generally good. Teachers identify effectively opportunities for pupils to use literacy and information and communication technology skills to support their work in other subjects. The majority of sessions promote the development of pupils' independent learning, problem-solving and thinking skills.

Overall, the school provides effective opportunities to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of the history and culture of Wales. The provision for developing pupils' Welsh language skills is not consistent across the school.

The provision for education sustainable development and global citizenship is good. Pupils are actively involved in fundraising for international aid agencies as well as for local charities and other good causes.

Teaching: Good

Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Teachers have good up-to-date subject knowledge and use a range of approaches, including effective questioning, to engage and appropriately challenge most pupils. However, more able pupils are not always challenged well enough.

Teachers generally share learning objectives with pupils and provide a clear focus for the lessons. Relationships between pupils and staff are good. The high quality support, provided by learning support staff, makes a significant contribution to the quality of pupils' learning. Teachers make good use of resources, including the use of technology to enhance learning.

In the few less effective lessons, a minority of pupils are not fully engaged and this results in some low level disruption.

The school makes very effective use of data to track pupils' performance. This enables them to identify effectively when pupils need extra support. However, teachers' day-to-day marking and assessment procedures do not always inform pupils well enough about what they need to do to improve their work.

Parents and carers are kept well informed about their children's achievements, wellbeing and development.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The school understands the needs of its pupils very well. It provides an excellent and extensive range of services, initiatives and strategies, which help pupils to overcome the difficulties that prevent them from learning. The highly effective multi agency support for groups of vulnerable pupils is having a significant impact on pupils' behaviour, confidence and self-esteem. This high quality support provides this group of pupils with the skills they need for lifelong learning.

Pupils and staff work together very effectively to gain a shared understanding of the aims and values of the school. This work is having an excellent impact on pupils' attitudes and social skills. It is also contributing effectively to their moral, spiritual and cultural development.

The school successfully promotes the importance of healthy living through class work and also through a wide variety of extra-curricular activities.

The support for pupils who have additional learning needs is very strong. Very good use is made of specialist agencies and support services, with the school ensuring

that pupils have access to professional support when necessary. The school is very effective and proactive in building on collaborative working with other key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to pupils.

The school has procedures and an appropriate policy for safeguarding.

Learning environment: Good

The school is a caring, welcoming and orderly environment where every child is valued, respected and treated equally. All pupils have access to the full range of the school's provision regardless of gender, faith or background. Due to the well-embedded policies and procedures, pupils display positive, caring attitudes and demonstrate a good understanding of equality and diversity issues.

The school provides a safe and secure environment for pupils to learn and play. The main building is in good condition and outdoor areas are very well maintained. The accommodation is used well to promote effective teaching and learning. Informative displays throughout the corridors and classrooms create a stimulating and inviting learning environment. The school has enough good quality resources that are well matched to pupils' learning needs.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Good
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Leadership: Excellent

The headteacher's leadership of the school is excellent. She communicates her vision and priorities to everyone connected to the school very successfully. Her consistently high expectations challenge pupils and staff to achieve well. All staff value her guidance and know that their efforts are appreciated and respected. The focus she has placed on creating a caring and supportive ethos is having a positive impact on many aspects of school life.

School leaders analyse a wide range of school performance data very effectively. They prioritise actions and initiatives coherently to improve pupils' performance and emotional wellbeing. The school understands the needs of the pupils and the community very well. This aspect of the school's work is a major strength.

All staff have performance management targets, which are closely linked to school improvement and national priorities. The school provides very good opportunities to develop staff expertise in areas of the curriculum. This is having a very good impact on standards in the school, for example in literacy, and has led to staff working with other schools on behalf of the local authority to share their practice.

Governors carry out their roles effectively and conscientiously. They understand clearly how well the school is performing and they provide the headteacher with effective support.

School initiatives to meet local and national priorities are developing very effectively. For example, the provision for developing pupils' social and emotional wellbeing and the very effective support to families are having an excellent impact on the standards achieved by more vulnerable pupils.

Improving quality: Good

The school has made significant progress since the last inspection, particularly in the way its provision for care and support for the pupils and the wider school community has impacted on standards and wellbeing.

The school's self-evaluation process is thorough and based on a wide range of evidence. School leaders evaluate pupils' performance effectively by scrutinising their books and analysing data. They observe lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching on a regular basis and collect the views of pupils, staff and other interested parties. This allows them to identify the school's strengths clearly and identify areas that need to improve.

The school improvement plan provides an effective overview of the school's long term targets for improvement. There is a clear link between the improvement plan and the school's detailed self-evaluation report.

Leaders and managers support staff well by providing opportunities for continuous professional development. Staff are involved in several professional learning networks and communities both within the school and with other schools. These are having a good impact on standards and provision, for example in literacy.

Partnership working: Good

The school has strong links with a very good range of partners. These include parents, the local community, the church, local training college and the local authority's learning support services. Very good opportunities are offered to parents to work with the school and attend training to gain skills and qualifications. This strengthens the link between the school and the home and has a positive impact on pupils' wellbeing.

There are strong links between the school and cluster schools, especially the secondary school to which the pupils transfer. The very effective emotional support programmes provided for the older pupils of the school help to ease their transition to secondary school and ensure continuity and consistency in the support that they receive. The school has extensive links with a range of multi-agency partners, which impact successfully on the level of pupils' emotional wellbeing.

Staff work well to plan for development of various programmes and activities, which are well monitored and moderated. The school has good links with local businesses that promote pupils' understanding of the world of work.

Resource management: Good

The school manages its staff and resources well. It uses its strategic partners and multi-agency support extremely effectively to promote pupils' achievements and wellbeing.

Teachers and support staff have good subject knowledge in nearly all areas of the curriculum, although a few lack sufficient skills when teaching and using Welsh. The school's arrangements enable teachers to use their planning, preparation and assessment time effectively.

The school's spending decisions relate well to the priorities set out in the school improvement plan. The school makes effective use of its budget and any additional income to improve facilities, for example to the outside learning area. The improvements to the building are having a positive impact on pupils' learning experiences.

The school has been very successful in promoting pupils' emotional wellbeing, and ensures good progress in pupils' skills and knowledge during their time in school. Pupil outcomes are good and therefore the school provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Commentary on performance data

St Mark's is the second most challenged school in its family of schools (schools with similar characteristics in terms of free school meals, socio-economic factors and percentage of pupils with additional learning needs).

At key stage 1, when compared to the performance of schools with similar percentages of free school meals, pupils' performance, at the expected level for seven years of age (level 2), has been in the top 25% for the core subject indicator (the expected performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science in combination) for the past three years. In English and science, pupils' performance has been in the top 25% for two of the past four years.

Pupils' performance at the expected level, when compared to performance levels in the family of schools, is consistently above the family average in the core subject indicator and English. It is usually below in mathematics and science.

More able pupils' performance at the higher level (level 3) varies from the top 25% to the lowest 25% when compared to the performance of pupils in schools with similar percentages of free school meals. At key stage 1, the percentage of pupils achieving the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics in combination has been the best in the family and above the all-Wales average for the last four years.

In key stage 2, pupils' performance at the expected level in the core subject indicator is consistent. For the past four years, pupils' performance in the core subject indicator has been in the upper 50% when compared to the relative performance of schools with similar percentages of free school meals. In English, mathematics and science, pupils' performance has varied between the upper 50% and the lower 50%. By the end of key stage 2, many pupils achieve good standards.

The performance of more able pupils at the higher level (level 5), has been in the lowest 25% or lower 50% in three of the last four years when compared to that of schools with similar percentages of free school meals. Pupils' performance at the higher level in English, mathematics and science is consistently below the family average. However, school data suggests strongly that pupils capable of achieving the higher levels do so. The percentage of pupils achieving the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics in combination has been fourth in the family and around the all-Wales average for the last four years.

At key stage 1, boys consistently perform less well than girls in English and the core subject indicator. The gender gap is greater than the family, the local authority and the all-Wales averages.

At key stage 2, girls achieved better than boys in three of the last four years. The gap is significant in two of those years. Last year, boys performed better than girls. The school has relatively small cohorts and a high percentage of pupils with additional learning needs in each year group. As a result, the gender difference is not a significant issue in the overall picture.

Pupils who are entitled to free school meals generally perform as well or even better than those pupils not entitled to free school meals in key stage 1, but not as well in key stage 2.

Pupils identified with additional learning needs, or who are accessing additional support, achieve very well at St Mark's. During the last four years, most key stage 2 pupils were given additional support with aspects of their learning. The results indicate that these pupils make excellent progress.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Twelve parents or carers completed the questionnaire. All expressed a high level of satisfaction with the school, and say that their children like school and that staff treat their children fairly and with respect. All believe that pupils are helped to settle when they join the school and are confident that their children are safe there. All agree that the school encourages their children to eat healthily and take regular exercise and that behaviour is good. All parents who responded think that the school is well run and most understand what to do if they wish to make a complaint. All parents who returned the questionnaire think that their children are making appropriate progress. However, a few do not feel that they know enough about how well their children are doing and do not feel that homework always builds well on what their children are doing at school. All parents think teaching is good and are happy that teachers expect pupils to do their best. Most believe that teachers help their children to become more mature and take on responsibility so that they are well prepared for the move to the secondary school. Most parents think that their children receive enough additional support for their additional learning needs. Generally, these responses are similar to the average responses in other schools.

Responses to learner questionnaires

Sixty-six pupils in key stage 2 completed the questionnaire and responses to nearly all questions were positive. All agree that the school helps them to be healthy and provides them with plenty of opportunities to be physically active. Nearly all feel that they are doing well and all think that teachers and support staff help them to learn and make progress. All pupils say that they feel safe in school and nearly all know whom to talk to if they are worried or upset or are finding their work difficult. Nearly all pupils think that the school deals well with bullying. All think that there are enough resources to enable them to learn effectively and nearly all believe that homework helps them to improve on their work in school. Most pupils believe that behaviour in lessons is good enough and all believe that children behave well during lunch and break times. These responses are slightly more positive than the average responses in other schools.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Clive Phillips	Reporting Inspector
Stella Gruffydd	Team Inspector
Helen Adams	Lay Inspector
Sian Lewis	Peer Inspector
Mrs Debbie Davies [Headteacher]	School Nominee

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.uk)

Under the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school must provide copies of the report to all parents of the school. Where a pupil is subject to placement by a local authority, a copy of the report should be sent by the school to each relevant authority.

Year groups and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. Year 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of six during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The four key stages cover the following year groups:

Key stage 1	Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11