



St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103438
LEA Birmingham
Inspection number 276920
Inspection dates 24 May 2006 to 25 May 2006
Reporting inspector Ian Knight AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Vivian Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Harborne
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Birmingham, West Midlands B17 0DN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 4642141
Number on roll	209	Fax number	0121 4642141
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	
Date of previous inspection	15 January 2001	Headteacher	Miss Helena Cusack

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's is a small Voluntary Aided Catholic primary school, serving the parish of St Mary's in Harborne, an area with positive socio-economic indicators. All pupils are Roman Catholic. Children enter Reception with attainment that is above average. The number of pupils who speak English as an additional language is low, but growing. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is low.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors and the school agree that the school is good and offers good value for money. Good provision in Reception enables young learners to make good progress in all areas of learning and they enter Year 1 with standards well above those normally found. However, the school acknowledges that the lack of a permanent and secure outdoor area to support learning in all areas for Reception children is a weakness of provision. Good teaching, based on a secure understanding of pupils' capabilities and a good curriculum, ensures that progress throughout the school is good. Current standards in Year 2 are exceptionally high, and well above average in Year 6. Pupils know how well they are doing because teachers share objectives for learning and they check their own progress against individual targets. They are polite, well behaved, work very hard and hugely enjoy school. The school takes outstanding care of pupils, promoting their moral development excellently. Parents appreciate the school's caring, Catholic ethos. One rightly said, 'it provides a safe, secure and strong moral environment'. Good links with other schools and outside agencies contribute further to this. However, although pupils gain a good understanding of their own culture, the school agrees that more could be done to promote their understanding of other cultures and to prepare them for life in multicultural Britain. Good leadership and management underpin the school's work. Excellent selfevaluation is the basis for effective actions taken, for example to raise standards after they fell in 2005. Governors are supportive of the school, but are not always involved closely enough in monitoring the progress of the school including through the development plan. Areas of relative weakness identified at and since the last inspection have been robustly dealt with and the ensuing improvements show that the school has a good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the permanent and secure outdoor provision for children in Reception so that it can be used effectively to support learning in all areas.
- Improve the provision to enable pupils to understand other cultures and to prepare them better for life in multicultural Britain.
- Ensure that the governing body is more closely involved in monitoring the progress of the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement throughout the school is good. Standards in art and design are outstanding. Children enter Reception with above average standards. As a result of good teaching they achieve well to leave with standards that are well above average in all areas. Good teaching and achievement continue throughout the infants. Standards in the 2005 National Curriculum tests in Year 2 were exceptionally high across the board, especially in writing following a whole-school focus. Current standards are similar to those gained in 2005. Achievement is also good in the juniors, with standards well above average. This is a better picture than that painted by the results in the 2005

National Curriculum tests for pupils in Year 6. External factors, including high numbers of pupils joining or leaving the school, affected the achievement of that year group. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are supported very well in class, informed by good individual education plans, and make the same good progress as their peers. Good informal support for the few pupils who speak English as an additional language has enabled them to make good progress. Challenging targets are set for all pupils and reviewed annually. Those in danger of underachievement are identified and the use of good 'personal learning plans' helps them to catch up. As a result, targets are met and there is no significant underachievement in the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They enjoy coming to school and feel safe in the secure knowledge that if they have any worry they can approach adults or their peers in the school. Their behaviour is always very good. They concentrate well and give their best. Pupils have well developed social skills and their moral development is outstanding. The school's strong emphasis on its religious ethos has a positive impact on pupils' spiritual development. Pupils have a good understanding of their own culture, but they know less about other cultures and beliefs. The school is continuing to maintain its high levels of attendance and has effective systems in place to monitor trends and deal with any concerns which arise. Pupils have a good awareness of health issues, such as diet and exercise. They are keen to take on responsibilities, for example by helping with classroom and whole-school routines or as members of the school council. They demonstrate their concern for others, both locally and further afield, through fundraising for charities. Their performance in the key skills of numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) prepares them well for the next stage of their education. The recent introduction of a healthy tuck shop, a school council suggestion, is providing opportunities for pupils to learn elementary entrepreneurial skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well because teaching is good. In the Reception class, adults provide good role models for children and promote good progress through their interactions. Activities led by adults are well planned and effective. However, the range of activities provided for children to choose from does not always link explicitly to the overall objectives for learning. Throughout the school, teachers have high expectations of pupils that are reflected in their detailed planning. Pupils cheerfully rise to the challenge and work solidly on their tasks, even when they are not directly supervised. They have explicit targets for their learning and are closely involved in deciding when they have been met. Adults use questioning well to probe and extend pupils' developing understanding, to deal with misconceptions and to recap their prior knowledge.

However, opportunities are occasionally missed to develop pupils' understanding through more open-ended questioning that encourage a greater range of answers. As a result, some pupils could only respond superficially to questions about a story ending they had read in class. Good links are established between subjects. For example, pupils in Year 6 researched mountains and used their impressive knowledge as the basis for the writing of a formal report in English.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. However, the outdoor curriculum in Reception is underdeveloped. An interesting range of activities is offered during the school day, which adds to pupils' enjoyment at school. A large number of them enthusiastically participate in extra-curricular sessions after school hours. Where necessary, specialists are recruited to teach, for example chess, drama and French. Overall, these activities contribute well to pupils' personal and social skills and their physical well-being. Effective curricular planning ensures that the provision for literacy and numeracy is good, including for the most capable. The greater use of ICT across the curriculum reflects the effective contribution made by an external specialist. Art and design has a significant profile and its outstanding quality is reflected in the work displayed across the school. Pupils requiring additional support are very well catered for because their needs are carefully identified and work matching their needs is thoughtfully planned.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support provided by the school are outstanding. Parents are delighted with what the school does for their children; a view that was aptly summed up by a parent who said, 'we feel privileged to have a child at this school'. The pupils feel safe and supremely well cared for at school because of the deep commitment of all staff. Their views are sought and valued: one pupil said, 'teachers listen to us if we have something to say'. Bullying is rare and when it happens it is dealt with firmly. The school has excellent procedures for identifying pupils who are at risk and need support; these pupils are effectively supported through a precise programme of activities, including expert external support. More capable pupils and those with specific talents are also helped to build on their strengths. Pupils' progress is systematically tracked to alert teachers when pupils are in danger of underachieving and to prompt them to take action when needed. Effective child protection arrangements are in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is led and managed well. All staff share the clearly articulated vision of the headteacher and her deputy of a school in which every pupil is enabled to reach their potential within a supportive environment that stems from the school's Catholic ethos. Excellent self-evaluation has been a significant factor in the improvement, led by

senior staff, in standards this year. This shows that the school has a good capacity for further improvement. Teaching is closely monitored by the headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior managers and subject coordinators through a rigorous schedule of lesson observations, checks on planning and analyses of pupils' completed work. As a result, good practice has been disseminated and support offered where necessary. Senior managers know the school very well and areas for development are accurately identified and realised within the school's good development plan. Outcomes, however, have been affected by some long-term staff absence. Pupils are consulted via the school council and through focused interviews with senior staff. A questionnaire and suggestion box ensure that parents' views are sought. Some parents felt that the school does not actively consider such suggestions or even dismisses them, but a scrutiny of the school's responses over the last year shows this not to be the case. The governing body is supportive of the school and has worked tirelessly to obtain grant funding for school projects. However, it relies too heavily on information from the headteacher regarding, for example, the progress of the school development plan, rather than being closely involved in monitoring the school's progress itself.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Pupils Thank you for being so welcoming and helpful when we visited your school. We really enjoyed meeting you and seeing Year 3 take part in the Ascension Day mass at St Mary's Church. I am writing to tell you what we found out about your school. We think your school is good. Your teachers do a good job and you make good progress. They plan carefully so you all have work that is hard, but not too hard! You help by behaving really well and working very well. You told us about your targets for learning that help you know how well you are doing and what you need to do to get better. The school takes excellent care of you, both in keeping you safe and in making sure you all do the best you can. Your school councillors work hard for you and we were pleased to see their suggestion of a healthy tuck shop in operation. The school is getting better and this is because the headteacher and other senior teachers do a really good job of checking how well the school works and then improving anything that is not quite right. There are a few things the school could do to get even better. Children in Reception do not have an outdoor area that they can use to help them learn in all of the areas they do. You get a really good understanding of your own beliefs and way of life but not so much on others, so we have asked the school to do more on this. And finally, we have asked the governors to play a greater part in checking how well the school is doing. Thank you again for helping us, and I hope you continue to do well. Yours faithfully Ian Knight Lead Inspector