

Stella Maris School

Independent school standard inspection report

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| Reporting inspector | Amraz Ali HMI |

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

Stella Maris School is an independent primary day school and is registered for up to 71 pupils between the ages of three and 11 years. It is a charitable trust, founded in 1979 by Stockport Convent and has a Catholic foundation. It accepts pupils of all faiths. It is located in the conservation area of Heaton Mersey, to the north of Stockport. Since the previous inspection in 2007, the number on roll has declined a little and there are currently 50 pupils at the school. There are four mixed-aged classes, including an Early Years Foundations Stage class for children aged from three to five years; this has six children in their Reception year with currently three children aged over three who attend full-time and three who attend part-time. Government nursery funding is received for 10 children. After-school care is provided on site until 5.00 pm each day. Most pupils are of White British heritage with around a third from minority ethnic groups. A small proportion of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities and one has a statement of special educational needs. One pupil is looked after by the local authority.

The school aims to:

'welcome children into a caring, happy, secure environment; where teaching provides new and stimulating experiences; where low pupil-teacher ratios and treating every child as an individual results in high levels of achievement and where pupils accomplish their full potential in moral, physical and academic areas'.

Evaluation of the school

Stella Maris successfully meets its aims. The quality of education has been maintained since the previous inspection and is good overall; the curriculum has improved. The Early Years Foundation Stage provision is satisfactory. A well-rounded education develops pupils' positive attitudes towards their work and others and ensures that they thoroughly enjoy their time in school and gain in self-confidence and self-esteem. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is reflected in the consistently good, and at times exemplary, behaviour of pupils. The provision for the safeguarding, welfare, health and safety of pupils is good.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

Pupils make good progress because of a good curriculum and teaching. The school meets almost all of the regulations for registration.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good. However, there is some variability in the quality of provision across the school and the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory overall. The curriculum has improved, notably in the range and extent of enrichment activities provided. Comments like 'We go on some amazing trips' reflect the value pupils place on the many visits out, for example, to see an exhibition on Tutankhamen. Such visits engage and stimulate a good quality of work across the school. There is a clear focus on English and mathematics and well-established practices, for example, daily reading to an adult in the Early Years Foundation Stage and infant class, help to ensure that pupils make good progress overall. By the time they leave, almost all pupils have a good understanding of grammar, punctuation and mathematical calculations. Pupils are able to study for examinations in speaking skills.

All pupils learn French and they talk very positively about this provision. Older pupils study a range of world religions which develops their understanding and tolerance of others. A particularly strong feature is the provision for singing and music. Specialist music tuition means that all of the pupils from Year 1 take part in singing competitions and from Year 3 they learn to play the recorder. Many go on to learn instruments such as the guitar and piano. Provision for sport has been improved, making use of nearby playing fields so that older pupils now have regular access to sports coaching, including for lacrosse. Teachers' subject knowledge and expertise is used to good effect, allowing, for example, all junior pupils to benefit from particular expertise in science and art. Although the resources for information and communication technology (ICT) are appropriate and include a small suite of computers, the use of ICT is underdeveloped across the school and some pupils stated that they would like to use the computers more. The after-school club is suitably organised and allows pupils to relax, play together or complete homework in a well-supervised environment.

Teaching and assessment are good. There are strengths in the positive relationships between adults and pupils, and also between the pupils themselves. Teachers ensure that classrooms are purposeful learning environments so that little time is wasted. Pupils say that they like school and enjoy their learning. Teachers know their pupils well and provide good support during lessons. Although all pupils in a class sometimes work on the same task, some will have received extra support in order to complete it successfully. While this system works for the vast majority of pupils, a recent increase in the proportion that have very specific learning needs means that more separate activities need to be planned for these pupils. Day-to-day assessment is effective, but is not always used well in all classes to ensure that tasks are consistently well matched to the needs of the least able. Consequently, the provision made for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those

with statements, is satisfactory overall. The school is aware that this is a new challenge for them and staff are beginning to develop individual learning programmes for pupils who find learning more difficult and to share good practice more widely. Extension activities are provided for more-able pupils. Work is marked regularly and the best examples tell pupils clearly what they have achieved and what needs to be done to make improvements. Pupils are beginning to be provided with targets for improvements. The most effective practice sees pupils setting their own individual targets, in negotiation with their teacher, and this is proving to be very effective but is not yet established in all classes.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school makes good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school's Catholic ethos is reflected in the class prayers and assemblies. Pupils of many faiths are accepted into the school and both Catholic and non-Catholic pupils are given good opportunities to reflect and think about people less fortunate than themselves. Pupils are polite, helpful and friendly and cooperate well with one another; the positive relationships between staff and pupils create a harmonious school community. New pupils say that they have been made to feel very welcome and they settle quickly into the school. Good provision is made for pupils' cultural development; for example, they are taught about a range of world religions and significant religious festivals. Consequently, pupils are tolerant and accepting of others. Pupils consider the needs of others and raise money for charities. Pupils are keen to take on additional responsibilities, such as acting as house captains and helping younger pupils in the playground. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and their attendance is above average. Their behaviour is good; they are polite and communicate confidently with adults and with each other. The focus on the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics along with appropriate preparation for entrance examinations to secondary schools means that pupils are well placed to continue their education when they leave the school.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good and the school meets all of the regulations. Staff, including the designated officer, are trained in child protection procedures at the required level. Risk assessments are in place for the playground and buildings. Appropriate procedures are in place to make sure that any outdoor activities and educational visits are as safe as possible and all required policies are in place. Playtimes and lunchtime are well supervised. Pupils get on with each other very well and know that the rules are designed to keep everyone safe. Pupils get good advice on how to live a healthy lifestyle and what they should include in their packed lunches. They are encouraged to drink water regularly during the day. There is a suitable fire safety policy and regular fire drills are held. If pupils are sick or injured, appropriate care is provided for them by staff with first aid qualifications. In discussion with pupils, and from their responses to the pre-

inspection questionnaires, it is clear that they feel very safe and well cared for. They are able to identify many adults to whom they would talk if they had a problem. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended, with a suitable policy to increase accessibility.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

A single central record of staff checks is kept up-to-date and shows clearly that all staff and regular visitors have been subject to an enhanced check by the Criminal Records Bureau before they are allowed to work at the school. The school has a staff appointment system which ensures that most of the necessary checks are made before staff are appointed. However, a check on medical fitness to work in a school has not routinely been carried out for all staff.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The accommodation is satisfactory. The building is clean and well maintained with a regular programme of redecoration and ongoing improvements. There is a good sized yard and an outdoor play area for the youngest children. However, the layout of the building means that it is difficult to provide continuous access to an outdoor area for the youngest children. There is a hall which is used for assemblies, music and physical education lessons and for whole-school productions. There is a small library with a suite of computers. The school uses nearby sports fields and has recently secured the use of an area next to the school for science activities such as growing plants.

Provision of information

A good range of information is provided to parents and prospective parents and carers through the school's prospectus and its website which mostly meets requirements. Although the complaints policy is available via the website, information about the number of complaints received under the formal part of the procedures is not made available to parents and prospective parents. Regular newsletters provide parents, carers and others with a good range of information about school life. There are two detailed written reports each year. For pupils who are partly or wholly funded by a local authority an annual statement of income received and expenditure occurred has not been routinely provided to the funding local authority.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has a complaints procedure, which has recently been updated which complies with most of the regulations. However, the policy does not make clear that a complaints panel can make recommendations nor does it stipulate that a copy of findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the

complainant and, where relevant, to the person complained about and are made available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the headteacher.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. The staff ensure that children are welcomed into a warm and caring environment which ensures that children settle quickly into the class. Overall, outcomes are good, given children's starting points. They achieve particularly well in the areas related to numbers, counting and language for communication and thinking. Most children are able to write words and some can write simple sentences by the time they leave the class. The learning environment is adequate but some of the resources are old and space limits children's access to some of the resources, such as sand and water. There are good opportunities to develop fine motor skills, for example, through cutting, pasting and playing with dough. There is a good balance of child-led and adult-led activities during the day. The provision is satisfactory as the absence of ongoing access to an outdoor area means that children have more limited opportunities to explore and play safely outside, except at playtimes with the rest of the school. The teacher and nursery nurse know the children well as unique individuals and manage their differing needs well overall, especially in focused small group activities. However, assessment practices lack the necessary rigour to clearly inform the next steps in children's learning and to ensure that all children are always sufficiently well challenged. Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory and children's welfare needs are well met and safeguarding procedures meet all requirements. However, there is currently no action plan for development of the setting.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors (standards in part 4) and must:

- ensure that medical checks are completed on all staff (paragraph 19(2)(b)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information (standards in part 6) and must:

- make available to parents and other interested parties details of the number of complaints registered under the formal complaints procedure during the previous school year (paragraph 24(1)(b))
- where a pupil who is registered at the school is wholly or partly funded by the local authority, ensure that an annual account of income received

and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of that pupil is submitted to the local authority (paragraph 24(1)(h)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the manner in which complaints are to be handled (standards in part 7) and must:

- ensure that the complaints procedure provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulates that a copy of the findings and recommendations are:
 - sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about and
 - made available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the headteacher (paragraph 25(i)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

School

- improve the use of the information that teachers hold on pupils, including their day-to-day assessments, in order to increase opportunities for more individualised learning, especially for less-able pupils
- ensure that good practice in teaching is pursued more consistently across all classes.

Early Years Foundation Stage

- improve the range of the indoor and outdoor provision such as sand and water play and the opportunities for independent exploration
- improve the use of assessment information to inform the planning of the next steps to ensure the children are appropriately challenged.

Inspection judgements

| outstanding | good | satisfactory | inadequate |
|-------------|------|--------------|------------|
|-------------|------|--------------|------------|

The quality of education

| | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| Overall quality of education | | ✓ | | |
| How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils | | ✓ | | |
| How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs | | ✓ | | |
| How well pupils make progress in their learning | | ✓ | | |

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

| | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | | ✓ | | |
| The behaviour of pupils | | ✓ | | |

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

| | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils | | ✓ | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|

The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

| | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage | | ✓ | | |
| The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage | | | ✓ | |
| The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage | | | ✓ | |
| Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage | | | ✓ | |

School details

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|---|---|-----------|-----------|
| School status | Independent | | |
| Type of school | Primary | | |
| Date school opened | 1979 | | |
| Age range of pupils | 3-11 years | | |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | | |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils) | Boys: 21 | Girls: 26 | Total: 47 |
| Number on roll (part-time pupils) | Boys: 1 | Girls: 2 | Total: 3 |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs | Boys: 0 | Girls: 1 | Total: 1 |
| Number of pupils who are looked after | Boys: 0 | Girls: 1 | Total: 1 |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £5,670 | | |
| Address of school | St John's Road Heaton Mersey Stockport Cheshire SK4 3BR | | |
| Telephone number | 0161 432 0532 | | |
| Email address | office@stellamarisschool.co.uk | | |
| Headteacher | Mr Andrew Whittell | | |
| Proprietor | Trustees of Stella Maris School | | |