

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	113825
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	378758
Inspection dates	31 January – 1 February 2012
Lead inspector	Hazel Callaghan

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	101
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Louise Huxley
Headteacher	Mrs Angela Herrera
Date of previous school inspection	15 October 2008
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Age group	3–11
Inspection date(s)	31 January – 01 February 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Hazel Callaghan

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector observed seven lessons taught by five teachers over a period of almost four hours. Pupils' work was scrutinised and the schools' records of pupils' attainment and progress were studied. The inspector met with staff, pupils, members of the governing body and representatives of the local authority. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at documents in respect of safeguarding, the school's improvement plans and reports made about the school. Questionnaires returned by the pupils in Key Stage 2, the staff and by 28 parents and carers were also scrutinised.

Information about the school

This is a much smaller than average size school. Pupils come from a wide area and nearly all are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than average. Only a few are disabled pupils or have special educational needs. The number of pupils leaving or joining the school at other than the normal times is greater than usually found. Since April 2010, three headteachers have been supporting the school at different times. A new substantive headteacher took up her post in September 2011. Classes were rearranged in December 2011 because of the increased number of children joining Reception. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught with seven pupils from Year 1. The remainder of Year 1 pupils and those in Year 2 are taught together and Year 3 and Year 4 are in another class. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 are taught as a group each afternoon but as separate classes each morning. The school meets the current floor standard.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- The school provides its pupils with a satisfactory education.
- Uncertainties during the changes of leadership in the school created a number of difficulties and pupils' attainment fell sharply in 2010. This was addressed effectively in 2011 and attainment rose to above average. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs achieved well.
- Some concerted and effective actions have been taken to improve pupils' learning but unevenness in the quality of teaching remains, with the result that pupils make satisfactory progress overall.
- Children make a good start to their education in the Reception class. The Early Years Foundation Stage teacher is effective in promoting children's good personal development and their eagerness to learn.
- Assessment of pupils' work is used to set targets for their next steps in learning but it is not always sufficiently accurate. As a result, activities do not build effectively on what has been learnt and are not matched well enough to pupils' abilities, especially for the more-able pupils.
- The curriculum is appropriately broad and planned satisfactorily to meet most pupils' needs. It successfully supports the progression of pupils' literacy skills and their spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development. It is not completely successful in motivating boys to learn.
- Most pupils behave well and concentrate and fully participate in their lessons. There are a few pupils who have behavioural or emotional difficulties which sometimes cause upsets but these occasions are reducing rapidly.
- The new headteacher has made a strong start in ensuring the school has smooth and efficient management systems. Her accurate evaluations underpin an effective school development plan, which is providing a clear map for further improvements. Other leaders in the school have not had many opportunities to develop strategies for monitoring their areas of responsibility.
- Governors are developing their roles, although their strategies for holding school leaders to account are not fully effective.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By July 2012, improve the quality of teaching to good so that all groups of pupils make good progress in their learning by:
 - improving the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' learning and attainment
 - using accurate evaluations of pupils' prior learning to plan activities that challenge their thinking and extend their understanding, especially for the more-able pupils
 - ensuring teachers clearly identify what is to be learnt within the lesson and share this with pupils so they can evaluate how well they are doing.
- Strengthen aspects of leadership and management by:
 - developing the roles of middle leaders so they have the time and expertise to monitor and lead their areas of responsibility
 - developing the role of the governors so they have a strong hold on the school's effectiveness and provide challenge for senior leaders
 - developing a curriculum that better meets the learning needs of all pupils and which motivates boys' greater interest in their learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils make satisfactory progress from their different starting points. In some classes, they make better progress because teachers have an effective understanding of their abilities and what they need to do to achieve well. In other classes, this is not as well established and so progress is uneven across the school. Good progress is made in Year 6, particularly last year, enabling all pupils to reach the expected Level 4 and for many to reach the higher Level 5 in both English and mathematics. Any gaps in attainment, including those for disabled pupils, for those with special educational needs and for those known to be eligible for free school meals, were closed very successfully. Most pupils in the current Year 6 are attaining at similar levels. Pupils are confident to ask questions. They work together effectively to work out mathematical challenges and to consider ways of making their work better, such as developing a more powerful and persuasive argument for a letter. Pupils' reading skills develop satisfactorily across the school. By the end of Year 2, their attainment in reading is broadly average. In Year 6, it is above average but there are gaps in some pupils' knowledge of letters and sounds, which slows their ability to decode new words and to spell accurately.

Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs made good progress last year because a strong focus was placed on providing different forms of support. Intervention groups in English and one-to-one sessions in mathematics all helped them to succeed and to reach the levels expected for their age. The progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs throughout the school currently mirrors that of their peers. Where teaching is good, all groups of pupils make effective progress but their achievement levels out over time because of the

less stimulating and effective lessons in some other classes. Sometimes, the most able are not as well challenged as they could be, but they too make satisfactory progress overall. Inconsistencies in teachers' assessment and the less than rigorous monitoring of pupils' attainment and progress in the past made it difficult to ensure all pupils made good progress. Parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they were generally pleased with their children's progress but it was evident that they, too, were aware of the variability. Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy learning and teachers helped them to get better in their lessons.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is satisfactory overall despite much good teaching because of its unevenness across the school. Parents and carers were generally pleased with the quality of teaching and the care and support given to their children. However, several commented on the differences in the quality of teaching and the rates of pupils' progress in some classes. At its best, teaching shows a good understanding of pupils' abilities and their needs. Teachers monitor pupils' progress during the lesson, adapting their planning effectively to correct misunderstandings or to extend pupils' learning. Activities are matched to pupils' attainment and usually build effectively on their previous learning. A writing activity in the youngest class, for example, gave the children lots of opportunities to talk about their ideas and to learn from each other before settling confidently to writing. In many classes, the purpose of the lessons is often identified as an activity to be completed rather than what is to be learnt or the skills to be developed. Success criteria have been introduced in the older classes which, when used, give pupils a good understanding of the elements they need to include, especially in their writing. Teachers' expectations in terms of what needs to be completed within a certain time are usually clear but the expectations for the quality and quantity of their work are not always as clear. Teachers' marking has improved since the previous inspection. It gives pupils an understanding of how well they are doing and advice on how to improve. However, many pupils commented on the questionnaire that they were not sure how well they were doing.

The planned range of topics has been in place for quite some time and many are now a little 'tired'. Topics often lack the power to motivate and inspire pupils, and activities do not always engage the boys sufficiently. Opportunities to learn through first-hand experiences are not a priority but when used, pupils are fully engaged and well motivated so their progress increases. In some classes, there is a good emphasis on giving time for pupils to reflect on their ideas and to work together. Promoting pupils' personal and social development is a successful element of the curriculum and strong emphasis is placed on building self-esteem and confidence. In addition to its emphasis within the teaching, the ethos of the school and the caring relationships between staff and pupils effectively promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Most pupils behave well in their lessons and about the school. They show care for one another and are friendly and polite. Pupils recognise that sometimes some children do not concentrate on their work and there is some low-level misbehaviour

in lessons. They say it is because a few pupils are prone to showing off. All parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire judged behaviour overall as good, but they also thought that some lessons were disrupted by pupils' inappropriate behaviour. Observation showed, however, that where there had been concerns in the past about a small group of pupils who have emotional and behaviour difficulties, they now rarely interrupt lessons. Sometimes incidents occur at playtimes but the strategies used to help pupils learn how to control their emotions are working effectively. Any such incidents are also reducing in frequency and are managed well by the staff. Pupils felt that bullying of any kind was rare. If ever there was any, they are confident that the teachers would act quickly and put things right. This is confirmed by the rarity of incidents recorded by the school. There have been no exclusions for at least two years.

Attendance is average, although there are a few pupils who are persistently absent. Almost all parents and carers who responded said their children were safe at school. There is a much improved focus on keeping safe and pupils showed much common sense when discussing how they do so, showing an understanding of issues such as the dangers of the internet, and road safety.

Leadership and management

The school's capacity to improve further is reflected in the way attainment rose dramatically last year, the way leaders have acted decisively in the past to eradicate weak teaching, and in the support they are currently giving to those who need additional training or guidance. The new headteacher is firmly committed to school improvement and teachers' professional development. In a very short time, she has strengthened teachers' marking and established a more rigorous system for tracking pupils' attainment and possible underachievement. However, there has been insufficient time for improvements to have had a significant impact in ensuring consistency in the quality of teaching and learning that will lead to good achievement. Over the last three years, the monitoring of teaching has been undertaken by the various headteachers, and other leaders have not had the opportunity to use this as a strategy for monitoring their areas of responsibility.

There is now a clear expectation that teachers must take responsibility for the progress of pupils with additional needs in their class, which had not been the situation previously. Teaching assistants are supporting most pupils well but do not have the expertise needed when helping those with more complex needs. The new special educational needs coordinator has already rightly ensured that any necessary professional training is being undertaken.

The headteacher made a speedy response to the need to improve safeguarding procedures. Swift and appropriate actions are taken when concerns for a child's safety are identified, and the school has close working arrangements with appropriate outside agencies. The school fully meets all safeguarding requirements. The governing body has grown in strength since its restructuring and through the support given by the local authority has developed a rolling programme of review. It is now better informed and is more involved in monitoring the school's performance, although the impact of these strategies is not yet established.

The curriculum generally meets pupils' needs, aptitudes and interests, although it does not always provide sufficient motivation and inspiration, particularly for some of the boys. Staff ensure there is no discrimination and give all pupils equal opportunities to achieve. The breadth and balance of the curriculum have been maintained effectively since the previous inspection and have a strong impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



2 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Marnhull DT10 1JX

Thank you for making me so welcome and answering my questions when I visited you recently.

Here are some of the things I found out about you and your school.

- Your school provides you with a satisfactory education.
- Children in the Reception class are making a really good start to their learning.
- You make satisfactory progress throughout the school. In some classes, you make good progress in your work and in Year 6, you are often reaching standards that are above those usually seen in other schools.
- You want to do well and most of you try hard and enjoy your work.
- Most of you behave well. You are polite, friendly and helpful and you really enjoy coming to school and meeting your friends.
- Teaching is satisfactory. You are helped to understand what you need to do in order to improve but some of you are not sure of how well you are doing.
- There have been lots of changes in the school recently, which makes some of you feel a bit unsure, but you told me that you feel safe and you understand how to keep yourselves safe.

I have asked your teachers and the governing body to do two things to make your school even better.

- Help you to make consistently good progress in all your work. They can do this by making sure teachers know what you need to do next in your lessons, by making sure your activities build effectively on what you already know and can do, and helping you understand better how to improve.
- Develop ways of making sure the school gets better and better, and make your topics more interesting so you all feel excited about learning and the boys, too, want to find out more.

You can help by working hard and always behaving well.

Yours sincerely

Hazel Callaghan
Lead inspector

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