

Stella Maris Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	118862
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	379695
Inspection dates	23–24 February 2012
Lead inspector	Jon Carter

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	194
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joe Ciantar
Headteacher	Tony Holdsworth
Date of previous school inspection	3–4 June 2009
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Age group	4–11
Inspection date(s)	23–24 February 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Jon Carter

Additional inspector

Eileen Chadwick

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 13 lessons taught by seven teachers, listened to pupils read and discussed different aspects of their work with them. Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body, two groups of pupils and members of staff holding leadership responsibilities at the school. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed the school's work, and looked at assessment information, the school's analysis of pupils' progress, curriculum plans, the governing body minutes and records of the school leaders' lesson monitoring. Inspectors also analysed responses from the 50 questionnaires received from parents and carers.

Information about the school

Stella Maris is smaller than the average primary school. Each year group has its own class and there is one Reception class in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes to the teaching staff. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is broadly average, with some variation between classes. Pupils' special educational needs are mainly moderate learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. The largest ethnic group in the school is pupils from White British backgrounds. The school has a larger than average percentage of pupils of minority ethnic heritage. A larger than average and increasing proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

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

Key findings

- Stella Maris is a satisfactory school. There has been a trend of sustained improvement in the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement, and leadership and management of the school since the previous inspection. However, actions taken to secure better-quality teaching have taken an extended period of time due to a number of staff changes. Some initiatives have only been consistently implemented more recently and are yet to demonstrate their full impact on pupils' achievement. As a result, overall effectiveness is satisfactory rather than good.
- Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and improving. Pupils' progress in English is better than that in mathematics and has been sustained over a longer period. However, lower-attaining pupils are sometimes held back by a lack of structure to phonics teaching (where pupils learn about the sounds letters make). The most-able pupils do not always make as much progress as they could in mathematics.
- Improvements in the quality of teaching are ensuring that teaching, although satisfactory overall, is good in an increasing proportion of lessons. Increasingly consistent and confident use of the structured framework for learning chosen by the school is engaging pupils more effectively and providing more frequent opportunities for them to use and apply their mathematical skills.
- Pupils respond well to engaging teaching and are often well behaved in lessons. A newly adopted model of positive behaviour management is beginning to have impact on pupils' ability to take responsibility for their own behaviour. The more challenging behaviour of a few pupils is, however, not always consistently well managed and occasionally their progress slows as a result.
- School leaders have taken robust action to secure improvements in the quality of teaching through effective performance management. The school's capacity to improve has been enhanced by improvements in the effectiveness of the work of middle leaders who support colleagues to improve the quality of their teaching.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring

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visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the achievement of lower-attaining pupils in English by ensuring consistent development of their knowledge and application of phonics skills through:
 - better use of structured records that identify what pupils already know and the next step of their systematic phonics development
 - training teaching assistants to provide consistently good-quality models of the different sounds made by letters and groups of letters.

- Improve the achievement of the most-able pupils in mathematics by ensuring that:
 - teachers and teaching assistants have a comprehensive understanding of what pupils need to achieve to reach higher levels of attainment
 - teachers and teaching assistants are sufficiently well trained and confident in working with pupils at the higher levels of attainment
 - teachers routinely plan learning activities which set high expectations of more-able pupils and extend their skills and knowledge effectively.

- Improve the consistency with which the more challenging behaviour of a small minority of pupils is managed by providing suitable training and support for staff in meeting the behavioural needs of these pupils.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Children start school in the Early Years Foundation Stage with levels of skills which are generally below age-related expectations. They make good progress during their time in the Reception class. Their language and communication skills develop well through independent role play and constructive interaction with staff, for example during exploratory play. Children's attainment in writing is less strong than in other areas of learning.

In Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils are beginning to make increasingly good progress due to the impact of recent improvements in teaching in both key stages. This is helping to secure levels of attainment which are broadly average overall. Pupils are increasingly well motivated because the topics they study in lessons are stimulating and interesting. For example, in a Year 3 mathematics lesson, pupils made good progress in building on their knowledge of estimation, weighing and the use of standard units to measure ingredients for a cheesecake. Their skills in working independently of staff are improving due to more frequent and structured opportunities to collaborate with other pupils.

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Over the time since the previous inspection, pupils' skills in mathematics have developed more slowly than those in reading and writing. However, recent improvements in teaching, together with more frequent opportunities for pupils to use and apply their mathematical knowledge, have led to accelerated progress. As a result, the gap between pupils' attainment in English and mathematics is now closing more quickly, particularly in Key Stage 2. However, the most-able pupils do not always attain as well as they can in mathematics. Progress in literacy in Key Stage 1 is less consistent, particularly for those pupils who are less able than their peers. Recent initiatives are beginning to address this issue, although it is too early to see the full impact. Inspection evidence and pupils' current work indicate that attainment in reading at the end of both key stages is broadly average and that this is improving over time.

Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs benefit from effective support to improve their reading and writing skills. As a result, they make good progress. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make progress at a similar rate to their peers, although their attainment in mathematics is less strong.

A few parents and carers indicated concern about the progress made by pupils in particular classes in the last two academic years. School leaders confirmed that these issues had been identified and appropriate action taken. The pupils involved are currently making good progress and parents and carers note that the changes made have brought about significant improvements this year. The positive and negative views expressed in the comments made by parents and carers about the progress their children make are substantiated by the evidence collected by inspectors.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is satisfactory rather than good because of the variations in the quality of teaching across the school and over time. Teachers are becoming increasingly confident and competent in organising lessons so that skills and knowledge from different subjects are learned through activities that are strongly linked to themes which engage and excite pupils. This approach also provides a suitable range of opportunities to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. This was clear in a series of themed lessons based on the fairy tale *The Snow Queen* and connections were effectively made with other work, such as where pupils had expressed their sense of wonder through poetry.

In the most effective lessons, planning makes good use of a range of assessment information. This ensures that learning activities are well matched to pupils' needs. For example, in a mathematics lesson for Year 5, different levels of challenge ensured that pupils of all abilities made good progress from their starting points in an activity that enabled them to demonstrate their understanding of lines of symmetry. However, this quality of planning is not consistent in all lessons. Not all teachers and teaching assistants have a sufficiently well-developed understanding of what pupils need to achieve in order to reach the higher levels of attainment in mathematics. As a result, planned activities do not always reflect high enough expectations and some

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opportunities are missed to extend pupils' learning, particularly for those who are capable of achieving higher levels of attainment in mathematics. Good-quality marking ensures that, mostly, pupils are given clear guidance about how to improve their work. Pupils understand what they need to demonstrate to achieve their next goals in each subject due to the record sheets in their books. Good-quality marking ensures that pupils are given clear guidance about how to improve their work.

Daily reading for lower-attaining pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, is accelerating their progress and boosting their levels of attainment. However, the needs of these pupils are not consistently met during phonics sessions, particularly in parts of Key Stage 1. This is because introductions are too long, tasks are too complex and teaching assistants do not always pronounce the sounds correctly. In addition, structured records on pupils' progress in phonics are not always used well to identify pupils' current standards and the next steps that they need to take. Occasionally, there are missed opportunities for children to practise their writing skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly when children initiate their own learning.

A large majority of parents and carers feel that their child is taught well at this school. Inspection evidence supports this view on the basis that the quality of teaching is improving. However, not all classes have received consistently good teaching over time since the previous inspection.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Actions taken by school leaders to secure improvements in teaching have generally been successful in ensuring that pupils are engaged with learning and behaviour is managed well, although some inconsistencies remain. Consequently, pupils typically have positive attitudes to learning and their behaviour in lessons and conduct around the school is often good. However, this has not been the case for all classes over the period since the previous inspection. Pupils in the classes most affected by instability in staffing, together with some of their parents and carers, are clear that improvements this academic year are significant. Where concerns remain, they are often associated with the needs of a few individual pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. These are not always met as effectively as possible to ensure that these pupils are fully engaged and making progress at similar rates to their peers; this is partly due to limitations in training for staff on how best to manage such behaviour.

A minority of pupils, parents and carers expressed concerns in their responses to the questionnaire about bullying and pupils' behaviour at the school. Inspection evidence shows that concerns about behaviour in the past are well founded but that effective action has been taken to address the issues. While some bullying occurs, the school usually takes appropriate action to deal with issues as they arise and supports pupils, parents and carers effectively to manage situations that happen outside school. Pupils are clear that the nature of bullying is not connected to racist behaviour, homophobia or other types of prejudice. Inspection evidence does not, therefore,

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substantiate the level of concern voiced by parents and carers.

Pupils value their friendly and respectful relationships with staff. This helps to ensure that a positive learning environment exists in most classrooms. Pupils therefore feel safe and secure. Their attendance is average and shows a trend of sustained improvement over the time since the previous inspection.

Leadership and management

Leaders and managers at all levels, including members of the governing body, have a sound understanding of what the school does well and the areas it needs to focus on to improve further. Senior leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning focuses well on clearly identifying strengths and weaknesses but does not always rigorously follow through the findings of earlier observations in subsequent monitoring activities. Leaders and managers at all levels promote equality and tackle discrimination effectively, although they are aware that there is a need to ensure that gaps in achievement between groups of pupils continue to close. The caring school ethos and awareness of pupils' needs ensures that equality is at the heart of its work.

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers, including members of the governing body, have responded robustly in dealing with inadequate teaching. These actions have been successful but have taken a considerable time to achieve, although this is partly due to factors beyond the school's control. Senior leaders have effectively maintained an appropriate programme of professional development for teachers and middle leaders during this period of change. As a result, the delivery of lessons based on using and applying skills in different circumstances is more confident and pupils' mathematical skills have improved more rapidly. This is also contributing effectively to a curriculum which is broad and balanced overall with increasingly good-quality links between subjects. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory and enhances thought-provoking reflection opportunities so that pupils usually find their learning interesting and engaging.

Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are managed appropriately, and positive behaviour and attitudes to learning have been sustained since the last inspection. The actions taken to improve the quality of teaching leading to rising standards in mathematics over time shows that the school has been able to improve achievement for pupils and has the capacity to improve further.

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.



27 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stella Maris Catholic Primary School, Folkestone CT19 5BY

Thank you for welcoming us into your school when we visited recently, and for speaking with us about your work and experiences at school. You told us that you like your teachers because their feedback gives you confidence. You also told us that your behaviour and progress are better this year because of the changes that have been made recently.

Stella Maris is a satisfactory school. You are making better progress in lessons this year because teaching at your school has improved recently. This has helped to make sure that those pupils who were making slower progress than expected are able to catch up, especially in mathematics. The way your teachers plan your lessons, so that you can practise your mathematics and English skills at the same time as learning about other subjects, is helping you to be more excited about and interested in learning.

The teachers who lead and manage your school do a satisfactory job because they have taken effective action to make sure that you are taught well.

Some pupils do not make as much progress as they could, so we have asked the school to improve:

- the way that phonics is taught to pupils who find reading difficult
- the support for pupils who are good at mathematics so that they do even better
- the support for pupils who have difficulties managing their own behaviour.

All of you can help by letting your teacher know if you think your work is not challenging enough for you.

Yours sincerely
Jon Carter
Lead inspector

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