

St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Littleborough

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105816
Local authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	377303
Inspection dates	3–4 October 2011
Reporting inspector	James Kidd

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	224
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anthony Cragg
Headteacher	DA Kirkpatrick
Date of previous school inspection	31 March 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 15 lessons or part-lessons, taught by eight teachers. They held meetings with pupils, staff, two members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including internal and external pupils' progress monitoring data, school development planning, safeguarding and child protection policies, reports written by the School Improvement Partner and pupils' workbooks. Inspectors also analysed 86 questionnaires completed by parents and carers, 21 returned by staff and 103 completed by pupils in Key Stage 2.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Whether the school's view that pupils' learning, progress and achievement are good is justified.
- Whether activities in lessons are closely matched to pupils' different learning needs and challenge all to reach for the highest standards of which they are capable.
- The accuracy and consistency of assessment across the school.
- Whether provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage, including the outdoor area, has improved since the previous inspection.
- The impact of the leadership's work to promote ongoing improvement.

Information about the school

This is a broadly average-sized primary school. Over time, there has been a larger percentage of boys than girls in the school. The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The percentage of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is just below that usually found, but has risen since the previous inspection. Most pupils are of White British heritage and there are very few pupils who are at early stages of learning English. St Mary's is a Numbers Count accredited school, has Healthy School status and holds the Activemark award for its work in physical education. It was the local authority Sports Partnership School of the Year in 2010.

There have been several staffing changes since the previous inspection, including the appointment of a new deputy headteacher and the establishment of an extended leadership team.

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: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. Perceptive and principled leadership has ensured that the school has improved well since the previous inspection. Teaching and assessment are better, the curriculum meets the needs and interests of pupils more closely and, as a result, pupils are now making good progress and achieving well in their studies, in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Attainment has risen, is now above average by the end of Year 6 and pupils do particularly well in reading. Attainment in numeracy is also higher but lags behind that in literacy, partly because of a lack of problem-solving activities, which lead to insufficient numbers of girls reaching the higher National Curriculum Level 5 in mathematics. The school is ever concerned to gauge its performance accurately and teaching and support staff are directly involved in evaluating progress in all areas of its life. The school, therefore, knows itself well and demonstrates good capacity to sustain its improvement.

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved since the previous inspection. However, routines and systems in the new unit are still developing and their impact on pupils' personal and academic development is not fully apparent. Similarly, although there is now an easily-accessible outdoor area, there are insufficient resources to reflect the six areas of learning found indoors.

Pupils are proud of their school and of everyone connected with it. Their attendance is consistently high and this demonstrates just how much they enjoy St. Marys. They behave well and are delighted to show visitors their work and to talk about the many extra-curricular activities in which they can take part. They look after each other and, in class, support each other's learning quite naturally. They speak highly of the good care, guidance and support they get from their teachers and teaching assistants and they say that whenever they are lonely or feeling unhappy, there is always someone there to help them. They have a good understanding of cultures and religions which are different to their own and demonstrate their enviable social conscience by their support for a variety of charities.

St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School is a school in which the well-being of its pupils is paramount. It strives to raise their aspirations and to encourage them to try their best in everything they undertake. Moreover, parents and carers are very positive in their views of what the school does for their children. In their words, 'The school continues to improve and innovate. Teachers are dedicated and approachable. Our children feel part of a 'school family.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop pupils' mathematical skills by providing more problem-solving activities, to enable more girls in particular to reach the higher National Curriculum Level 5 in this subject.
- Continue to improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by
 - developing the routines and systems in the new unit to maximise their impact on children's learning and progress
 - ensuring that the outdoor area is fully resourced and that these resources reflect the six areas of learning to be found indoors.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils enjoy their lessons and are keen to learn new things because, as they say, 'We have so many interesting activities now and our teachers tell us we are going to do well.' In most lessons there is a buzz of activity and pupils are never afraid to ask their teachers, their teaching assistants or their peers for help. They are also delighted when their classmates succeed, for example when a pupil in Year 6 wrote, 'The leaves cried and groaned in agony, disintegrating and withering to the ground.'

From skills in line with age-related expectations on entry to the nursery, pupils' make good progress and achieve well from Years 1 to 6 and reach above average standards by the time they leave. Their attainment in English is particularly impressive and pupils read with increasing fluency. Attainment in mathematics is also above average, but an insufficient percentage of girls reach the higher National Curriculum Level 5 in this subject. As a result of good support and guidance from both teachers and teaching assistants, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable make the same good progress as their peers.

Pupils speak highly of their school and feel safe within it because, in their words, 'The grown-ups spend time with us when we are worried about things and they make sure there is hardly any bullying in school.' They also have a good awareness of what makes a balanced diet and why physical fitness is important to their lives. They attend a range of after-school sporting activities and their prowess in team games has been recognised by the local authority. Pupils willingly take on responsibility as 'playground pals' and through their work in the Eco group. The school council is developing well and pupils are beginning to become involved in decision-making and helping the school function smoothly. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is promoted well by pupils' active involvement in the thought-provoking assemblies. They are sensitive to each other's feelings and show kindness towards each other. They are actively engaged with pupils from different cultures and religions in other schools within the local authority and further afield and value the partnership with the school in Malawi.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

As a result of a greater emphasis on identifying what makes good learning and comprehensive feedback after lesson observations, the quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now good across the school, with examples of outstanding practice in Key Stage 2. Indeed, increased accuracy and consistency in the assessment of pupils' learning needs have led to focused lesson preparation and pupils themselves say that the activities in class are now more interesting and more challenging. In the best lessons, an outstanding Year 3 science lesson for example, pupils are required to think for themselves and teachers encourage them to act as extra learning resources for each other. As a result, pupils are often surprised at what they can do and this leads them to aim for even higher standards. The school recognises that in a minority of lessons there is too much teacher talk and that, in mathematics in particular, there is insufficient emphasis on problem-solving activities. Pupils receive detailed oral and written feedback on their work and they are generally well aware of their targets and of what they need to do to reach them. They value the many occasions when teachers revisit the learning intentions during lessons, when they can gauge how well they are doing and also assess the performance of their classmates.

A greater emphasis on topic-based, thematic programmes allows pupils to see the links between subjects and ensures they can reinforce their skills across all areas of the curriculum. In addition, the Numbers Count initiative and a more sharpened focus on literacy have resulted in increased pupils' progress in both mathematics and English. Furthermore, the opportunities for pupils to consider ethical and moral issues have a positive impact on their personal development and on their understanding of right and wrong. Music and sport are strong elements of the curriculum: many pupils represent their school in local sports competitions and St. Mary's received a number of 'High Commendations' at the recent local authority

¹The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

music festival. There is a good range of well-attended extra-curricular activities and pupils comment, 'We now have more trips and more visitors than we used to have!'

Teachers and support staff have a good understanding of the varying needs of their pupils and target support appropriately. The committed team of teaching assistants, including those with the higher level qualification, supports individuals and groups well, ensuring that pupils who often find the work difficult are fully included in all activities. Induction procedures into the Early Years Foundation Stage are valued by parents and carers and the strong links with local high schools ensure that pupils are well prepared for entry into the next stage of their education. Great emphasis is placed on regular attendance and any absence is followed up rigorously. As a result, pupils' attendance is consistently high. The caring ethos throughout the school means that pupils are, on the whole, confident, polite and welcoming to visitors.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The talented and forward-thinking headteacher, ably supported by a committed and proactive leadership team, comprising teaching, support and administrative staff, ensures that there is a clear and shared vision for how the school is to develop. As a result, staff with all levels of experience and responsibility are committed to ongoing improvement. There is no room for complacency and the school is honest about its overriding aim: to ensure the school does all it can to enhance and maximise its pupils' learning experiences. Members of the governing body have a good understanding of the school's performance and are never afraid to challenge the leadership if they feel it is necessary to do so.

The school engages well with parents and carers, who welcome the recent introduction of the 'learning logs', which help them support their children's learning at home. Equality of opportunity is promoted well and the school tackles discrimination in all its forms and whenever it occurs. Safeguarding and child protection procedures meet current requirements. The school promotes community cohesion well and has good links with schools with different cultural and socio-economic intakes. Global links are developing rapidly and pupils speak highly of their partnership with a school in Malawi and of how much they enjoy the activities and the food on 'Malawi Day.'

Finances are managed efficiently and spending is linked directly to the school priorities outlined in the development plan. Value for money is good.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children generally enter the nursery with skills which are broadly in line with those expected for their age. On occasion, their skills in communication, language and literacy are lower than this. They settle quickly into their new surroundings and share, cooperate and play together confidently. They behave well. Arrangements to ensure children's welfare are good and staff have positive relationships with parents and carers.

Provision in the new Early Years Foundation Stage unit is satisfactory overall but is improving day by day. There are now more opportunities for children in the Nursery and Reception classes to engage with each other but systems and routines are not fully embedded and their impact on children's learning and progress is, therefore, not maximised. Similarly, although the school has done much to create and develop the outdoor area, there is a lack of stimulating resources and they do not always reflect the six areas of learning indoors. As a result, children's learning, progress and achievement across the unit are satisfactory: their learning indoors is not always reinforced in the outdoor area.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall but staff have identified areas for development accurately. Assessment is now more secure and teaching and support staff have a more accurate view of the personal and academic progress of their children than was the case at the time of the previous inspection.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation stage	3
Taking into account: Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

There was a 38% return of questionnaires, which is slightly higher than the national average return for primary schools. Almost all parents and carers who returned the questionnaires are entirely happy with their children's experience at St Mary's. A very large majority is of the view that their children enjoy school, that it keeps them safe and that it helps them have a healthy lifestyle. Similarly, most parents and carers believe that teaching is good, that pupils make enough progress and that the school meets their children's individual needs. A very small minority is concerned that the school does not deal effectively with inappropriate behaviour. Inspectors examined this issue and found that behaviour management is good across the school and that pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and around the site.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Littleborough to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 86 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 224 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	39	45	44	51	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	44	51	39	45	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	24	28	51	59	9	10	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	21	24	55	64	5	6	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	27	31	50	58	3	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	27	31	48	56	9	10	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	36	42	45	52	4	5	1	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	27	31	50	58	1	1	2	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	24	28	57	66	2	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	26	51	59	9	10	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	24	28	57	66	1	1	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	26	30	55	64	3	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	35	41	50	58	1	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and 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.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



5 October 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Littleborough, Littleborough, OL15 8DU

The inspection team really enjoyed visiting your school recently and we would like to thank you for your warm welcome. A special 'thank you' goes to those of you who gave up part of your lunchtime on Monday to come and talk to us. This is what we found out about your school.

St Mary's has improved a lot over the past three years and we agree with you that it is now a good school. You are making good progress in your lessons because your attendance is excellent and because your teachers give you interesting work to do. Your standards in numeracy are getting better and better but they are still not quite as good as in English. We have asked your teachers, therefore, to give you more problem-solving activities, especially so that more girls can reach Level 5 in mathematics.

You behave well in lessons and around school and older pupils like looking after younger ones. You do a lot of work for charity and you enjoy the links you have with other schools, including the one in Malawi. You are very good at music and it was a joy to hear your brass instrument practice on Tuesday afternoon. All the adults who work with you look after you well and you are confident that they will always be there for you when you are feeling a little unhappy.

All the adults in school want to make St Mary's even better. I have asked them, therefore, to make sure that they use the new Early Years Foundation Stage unit well to help the children make more progress and also to provide more resources for learning in the outdoor area.

Thanks again for being so kind and polite to us. We enjoyed watching you learn.

Yours sincerely

James Kidd
Lead Inspector

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