

# St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	108840
<b>Local authority</b>	Sunderland
<b>Inspection number</b>	377826
<b>Inspection dates</b>	05–06 October 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Susan Brown HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	473
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Maureen Dale
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sean Brown
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	11 December 2008
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 24 lessons, taught by 15 different teachers, and held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents including examples of pupils' work, assessment and tracking evidence and minutes of governing body meetings. Inspectors scrutinised 234 parental questionnaires and the sample of pupil and staff questionnaires submitted by the school.

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

- The effectiveness of assessment and tracking procedures in identifying pupils and groups of pupils at risk of underachievement and the effectiveness of subsequent support.
- How well teachers use the school's assessment and tracking evidence when planning lessons to meet the needs of all pupils and ensure that they make good progress in line with their capabilities.
- The effectiveness of leaders and managers in bringing about improvement since the last inspection.

## Information about the school

This is a larger than average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. Most pupils come from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is smaller than average. The school holds many awards from external bodies including Artsmark, the International School Award and Eco Schools Silver.

**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?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

## Main findings

St Mary's provides a satisfactory quality of education. Attainment is above average and aspects of pupils' personal development are good and occasionally outstanding. Pupils speak enthusiastically about the broad range of activities provided both within and after the school day. One pupil said 'When I wake up I'm excited about going to school!' However, academic progress, although satisfactory overall, is variable because of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.

Children start school with knowledge and skills that are above those typical of this age group. The vast majority of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make the progress expected of them given their starting points and a minority make good progress. In the Early Years Foundation Stage children settle quickly and make good progress. In Key Stages 1 and 2 rates of progress vary between classes. Nevertheless, by the time they leave school in Year 6 pupils reach standards that are consistently above the national average.

The quality of teaching and the use of assessment to support learning are satisfactory overall. In the best lessons, pupils make good progress because teachers have high expectations. They use assessment information well to plan activities that match closely pupils' identified learning needs and build on their prior learning. In some satisfactory lessons, activities do not match the needs of different groups of pupils closely enough. In others, there is too much emphasis on practising skills rather than applying and developing them further. In both, the rate of progress slows.

The school's curriculum provides relevant and often exciting opportunities for learning and contributes very effectively to pupils' personal development as does the good care and support provided for all pupils. Pupils are known and valued as individuals. Almost all say that they feel very safe in school and the vast majority of their parents and carers agree. Although they are sure that bullying or racist behaviour are not prevalent in school, pupils hold strong views about these issues in society and are adamant that they should not be tolerated. They are caring and considerate of others and show empathy towards their peers, younger children and those less fortunate than themselves. They have a very good understanding of the key factors that lead to a healthy lifestyle and most participate in extra-curricular physical activities. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

A very large majority of parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and report that they are kept well informed about their children's achievements and how they can support their learning. One parent/carer wrote, 'St Mary's is a very good school to bring up your child in the world today'. Nevertheless, in their responses to the questionnaire for parent and carers, a few did not agree that the school takes sufficient account of their suggestions and concerns or that the school was led and managed effectively. Their concerns centred on the quality of communication between the school and parents and carers. Although this was not the view of the majority of parents and carers, senior leaders and the governing body recognised and expressed a determination to tackle the issues raised.

Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection. Improvements have been made to the curriculum and middle managers are now much more involved in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning within the age groups for which they hold responsibility. The Early Years Foundation Stage is now good. The school's capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory. Leaders and managers, supported by the governing body, are committed to bringing about further improvement. They have identified accurately the school's strengths and weaknesses and the key areas for development. However school improvement plans lack consistently challenging and measurable targets against which progress can be evaluated. Timescales for actions and lines of accountability are not always sufficiently clear.

Up to 40% of the 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?**

- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils in all classes make good or better progress in their learning by:
  - using assessment information more effectively to plan lessons and activities that build upon and extend all pupils' prior learning
  - increasing opportunities for pupils to apply and develop, rather than simply practise, their basic skills.
- Enhance the quality of school improvement planning and implementation by ensuring that all action plans have challenging and measurable targets, specific timescales and clear lines of accountability.
- Improve systems for keeping parents and carers informed and involved in aspects of the school's work by creating clear and accessible channels of communication.

### **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

<b>3</b>
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During their time at St Mary's all pupils make satisfactory progress and achieve above average standards. The vast majority of pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning.

This is reflected in above average levels of attendance although a very small number of pupils are regularly late for school. Pupils' behaviour is consistently good. It makes a strong contribution to their successful learning in lessons, particularly when teachers provide them with challenging tasks and appropriate guidance. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make satisfactory progress.

Pupils develop skills and attitudes which will serve them well during the next stage of their education. When they are given the opportunity, pupils are able to apply their well-developed basic skills in other subjects and across a range of interesting activities. Most pupils are confident speakers, with a good range of vocabulary, and good listeners. Most are able to evaluate the quality of their own work and know what they need to do to improve further. They develop good working habits when working independently and in pairs or groups. Younger pupils made good use of their 'talk partners' to practise their ability to speak in sentences or to explain their story maps. Older pupils explored similarities and differences between the Victorian era and the modern day and were able to justify and exemplify their findings. In a science lesson, pupils were able to plan and carry out their own investigations into the respiratory system. However, during basic skills lessons tasks are too often mundane and lack sufficient challenge to bring about good progress.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They have a keen interest in ethical issues and take on roles and responsibilities within the school conscientiously. Older pupils act as effective 'buddies' in the playground and provide good role models for younger pupils through their work on the school council and the EcoTeam. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from targeted support that enhances their attitudes, behaviour and confidence.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop [workplace and other skills]/[skills] that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective is the provision?**

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. The school has regular and accurate information about the performance of individual pupils and groups. The use of this information to support and promote learning varies between classes and lessons.

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

In the best lessons, teachers use this information and their secure subject knowledge to plan well-matched, challenging and interesting activities which motivate and enthuse pupils of different abilities. Teachers and teaching assistants check pupils' understanding throughout these lessons and provide further explanation and support if necessary. A good example of this was seen in a lesson on the addition of decimals where the teacher maintained pupils' confidence through sensitive intervention when misunderstandings occurred. In lessons that are satisfactory, pupils sometimes spend too much time consolidating skills they have already acquired. For example in basic skills lessons pupils practised their handwriting and the correct use of adjectives or adverbs by copying from worksheets when they were capable of constructing their own sentences and making appropriate vocabulary choices.

Pupils enjoy the school's broad curriculum and speak enthusiastically about memorable experiences, such as the Tudor banquet and their visits out of school. Partnerships with other schools and agencies enhance and enrich the opportunities available to pupils. The curriculum makes a significant contribution to good and occasionally outstanding outcomes in pupils' personal development and well-being. Good quality care, support and guidance ensure that pupils sustain extremely positive attitudes to learning and develop effective relationships with adults and each other.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

## **How effective are leadership and management?**

Leaders and managers, together with the governing body, are committed to bringing about further improvement in the work of the school and the achievement of pupils. Since the last inspection, they have worked effectively to bring about improvements in the curriculum and to enhance the role and contribution of middle managers. They have identified accurately the school's strengths and targeted whole-school and phase improvement plans on key areas for development. However, the pace of improvement is hampered by the inconsistent application of measurable targets, defined timescales and clear lines of accountability in improvement plans.

The governing body provides satisfactory support to the school. It was instrumental in establishing a revised staffing structure which has enhanced the school's ability to evaluate its own work and deploy resources more effectively to match need. However, the governing body has been less successful in consistently providing the school with sufficient challenge. For example, it recognises that there is some validity in the concerns expressed by a few parents and carers about the quality of communication from the school and the extent to which the school takes account of parents' and carers' views. However, the governing body has been slow to respond to these concerns.

Safeguarding arrangements and systems for child protection are robust and fully meet requirements. The school regularly tracks the performance of groups and individuals to ensure equality of opportunity and provides good support when any evidence of underachievement is identified. The school promotes community cohesion effectively through a range of curricular and extra-curricular activities based on an informed understanding of the community it serves. As a result, pupils get on very well together irrespective of their backgrounds and aspects of pupils' personal development are outstanding. The school provides good value for money.

*These are the grades for the leadership and management*

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

## Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make good progress throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage and enter Year 1 with attainment that is above average. Constructive relationships are established between staff, children, and their parents and carers during home visits before each child starts school. Children settle quickly in the warm, welcoming and safe learning environment which is structured and resourced very effectively to cover all the areas of learning. Children enter confidently and happily after only a few weeks in the Nursery. This good provision continues into the Reception classes.

Throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage, children work and play productively alone or in small groups guided and supported by an adult. They become increasingly active learners able to make choices about the activities in which they will take part. They move confidently between the indoor and outdoor space both of which contain stimulating resources and well-planned activities. Children showed a strong desire for independence, for example, when putting on wellingtons or protective suits for outdoor and messy play. Children play well together, taking turns, sharing equipment and willingly join in tidying up activities. There is much laughter and obvious enjoyment.

Staff plan and provide a good balance of adult-directed and child-initiated activities for individuals, pairs and small groups. Children are given opportunities to solve problems and to apply basic skills in a practical context. One group was building a house based on their own designs, for the three little pigs. The children were able to



explain why the house that they built could not be blown down by the wolf and the more-able were encouraged to label their design with key words.

Frequent observations of children’s progress are used effectively to plan interesting and purposeful activities based on a secure understanding of what individual children can do now and need to do next. Achievements are recorded in individual ‘Learning Journeys’. Parents and carers expressed the view that these helped them to understand what their children were learning and how they could help them.

The leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage has a very clear understanding of how young children learn and all members of staff demonstrate a good understanding of the curriculum in the early years. They work well together and are an effective and dedicated team.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation stage</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

**Views of parents and carers**

A very large majority of those parents and carers who returned the inspection questionnaire responded positively about the work of the school. However, a few responded negatively, in particular to questions about how well the school takes account of their suggestions and concerns, and how effectively the school is led and managed. These concerns were followed up during the inspection and are referred to in more detail elsewhere in the report. Inspectors endorsed the view of the large majority of parents and carers that leader and managers are effective. The school is committed to tackling the issues raised by a few parents and carers and improving the way in which account is taken of their suggestions and concerns.

## 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 Voluntary Aided Primary School 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 234 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 473 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	141	60	84	36	8	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	137	59	90	38	6	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	84	36	127	54	16	7	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	91	39	119	51	15	6	4	2
The teaching is good at this school	105	45	106	45	12	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	98	42	112	48	22	9	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	85	36	130	56	14	6	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)	89	38	118	50	13	6	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	93	40	115	49	15	6	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	71	30	130	56	18	8	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	57	24	122	52	38	16	5	2
The school is led and managed effectively	75	32	110	47	23	10	14	6
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	109	47	104	44	18	8	1	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](http://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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



7 October 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School,  
Sunderland, SR2 7QN**

I want to thank you for the very warm welcome that you gave to me and my colleagues when we visited you recently. I would also like to thank you and your parents and carers for returning our questionnaire. You were keen to show us your books and explain how things work in your school. We enjoyed our time with you. Your good behaviour, positive attitudes and keenness to take on responsibilities make an important contribution to the success of your school.

St Mary's is a satisfactory school. The headteacher and all the staff work very hard to do their best for you and provide a range of interesting activities. You make satisfactory progress and by the end of Year 6 you reach standards that are above the national average.

We have asked the headteacher, the governing body and the staff to:

- make sure that you all make good progress taking into account what you have learnt when you were younger and give you more opportunities to develop your basic skills
- make sure that the plans they have for bringing about further improvement in the school have clear targets and deadlines
- improve systems for keeping your parents and carers involved in school life.

Please accept our very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Brown  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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