

# St Mary's Catholic First School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113824
<b>Local Authority</b>	Dorset
<b>Inspection number</b>	378757
<b>Inspection dates</b>	7–8 October 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Christine Huard

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The registered childcare provision, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	93
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Sue Cox
<b>Headteacher</b>	Helen Brown
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	30 April 2009
<b>School address</b>	Folly Lane Wool Wareham BH20 6DS
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<b>Email address</b>	Office@stmaryswool.dorset.sch.uk

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<b>Age group</b>	4–11
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	7–8 October 2011
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed 10 lessons or parts of lessons. Five teachers were observed teaching. Meetings were held with staff, members of the governing body and pupils. Parents and carers were spoken to as they accompanied their children to school in the morning. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at some of the documentation. This included the school development plan, monitoring, tracking and assessment information as well as planning and the minutes of meetings of the governing body. The school's procedures for ensuring pupils' safety were closely scrutinised. In addition, 54 parents' and carers' questionnaires were analysed as well as those returned by staff and pupils.

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

- The actions taken by the school to raise standards in mathematics, and how successful these have been.
- How well teachers use marking and targets to inform pupils of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further.
- The extent to which the school promotes community cohesion and how this affects pupils' awareness of cultural diversity in the United Kingdom.
- The extent to which the school worked with, and managed to alleviate the concerns of, parents and carers over the change over from a first school to all-through primary.

## Information about the school

St Mary's Catholic First School is much smaller in size when compared to other schools. It serves the parish of St Joseph's in Wool, and draws its pupils from a wide area. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The school makes provision for pupils with a wide range of needs although most are related to moderate learning difficulties. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The school has fewer pupils who are at an early stage of learning English than most schools. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are catered for in the Reception class. The school has a number of awards including Healthy Schools, Activemark, ICT Mark and the Bronze Eco-award.

The school will become an all-through primary school from September 2012 as a result of reorganisation within the county.

**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?**

**1**

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

**1**

## Main findings

St Mary's is an outstanding school. The excellent curriculum ensures pupils receive an exceptionally high level of both personal and academic education. Its Christian ethos underpins all that it does. This is reflected in the dedication and commitment of the headteacher and whole staff team in what has been a difficult and turbulent year while the school and parents and carers waited to hear what the future of the school was going to be. The very large majority of parents and carers are exceptionally supportive of the school and the provision it makes for their children. Indeed one commented: 'The school has gone from strength to strength, the standard of teaching and the commitment of the teachers and support staff is fantastic. We feel very privileged that our children have had the opportunity to avail of such a high level of education.'

Children in the Reception class get an excellent start to their education. The school provides a wide range of exciting activities inside and outside, which mean that they learn extremely effectively and make excellent progress. This continues as pupils move through the school because teaching and learning are excellent. Pupils are very well motivated saying, 'lessons are really interesting'; bubbling with enthusiasm as they explain, 'the teachers always try to make learning fun for us'. As a result, they make consistently good or better progress through each class. Because of this they make outstanding progress from their various starting points to when they leave the school at the end of Year 4. The curriculum is exciting and stimulating and pupils are encouraged to become actively involved in their own learning by contributing their own questions and ideas of what they would like to learn about as part of each theme.

Teachers rigorously track the progress pupils make. A highly effective system, introduced since the last inspection, enables the school to identify any possible concerns of underachievement so that these can be addressed before they become problems. On a day-to-day basis, pupils are given very clear guidance by teachers as to how well they are doing and how they can improve their work. However, not all teachers approach their marking and target setting in the same way and this means pupils are not always clear about which system is being used when they start a new class.

Pupils behave extremely well in and around the school. They willingly take on

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responsibilities and make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community. They care for each other in a practical and sympathetic manner; for example, the Red Hats Friendship Squad are always on the lookout for pupils on their own in the playground. Pupils are proud that there is no bullying in the school. Through their work towards the Rights Respecting School award pupils understand well that they are expected to take responsibility for their own actions and resolve, as far as possible, any conflicts that might occur. Pupils receive outstanding care, support and guidance and, as a result, they pursue their education in a safe and positive environment which ensures they are challenged to reach their full potential in all that they do.

The headteacher provides very clear direction for the school. Although all the preparations for the future are time consuming and add to an already considerable workload, the leadership and management have not lost sight of what is happening in the school now. Staff and the governing body know how well the school is doing. There are robust systems to ensure improvements are sustainable and embedded. The self-evaluation is accurate, although occasionally a little cautious. This is because members of the governing body and staff always feel they can improve further. There is an outstanding capacity for further sustained improvement. This is illustrated by many factors. For example, since the last inspection, attainment and progress, particularly in writing and mathematics, by the end of Year 4 have considerably improved. School leaders have successfully addressed the issues raised at the time of the last inspection.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Refine marking and target-setting procedures to ensure that they are consistent across the school by September 2012.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****1**

Children get an excellent start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and this prepares them very well for learning as they move through the school. By the time they move into Year 1 pupils' attainment is average having started from lower than expected levels for their ages. They leave at the end of Year 4 with attainment in mathematics and English that is significantly higher than that expected for their age. Actions taken to improve attainment in mathematics have been particularly successful since pupils were grouped in sets according to ability last year. Pupils make excellent progress because teachers ensure lessons build on previous learning. For example, in a mathematics lesson, pupils from Year 3 were discussing the properties of regular and irregular two-dimensional shapes. One pupil looked at a rhombus and was able to explain, 'that can't be a square because it hasn't got four right angles'. Pupils are keen to explain their responses to questions, demonstrating how well they have understood their learning. A practical problem-solving approach ensures that pupils are able to apply the basic skills they have learned and reinforce them in practical

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investigative tasks. Pupils from Year 4 investigated multiples of three, six and nine. Tasks were carefully matched to pupils' individual capabilities ensuring that all could make the maximum progress. A particular strength of the school is that pupils do not only attain high standards in English and mathematics but in other subjects such as geography, history and music.

All pupils receive the support or challenge that they need and consequently achieve exceptionally well. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school also ensures that higher-attaining pupils and those with particular gifts and talents are challenged extremely well, not only in class but also through a range of contacts with outside agencies and providers. There is no discernible difference in the progress made by boys and girls.

Pupils thrive in the nurturing atmosphere of the school. They have an excellent understanding of how to stay healthy and keep safe, fully justifying their Healthy Schools and Activemark awards. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils appreciate very well that they are growing up in a culturally diverse society. Many older pupils have developed a highly mature perception that *the church* is the people, rather the building. They are thoughtful and reflective, and gaining an excellent understanding of environmental issues which is reflected in their Eco Bronze Award. Pupils' excellent literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills, as reflected in the school's ICT mark, as well as their outstanding personal qualities, ensure they are getting an excellent grounding for the future. Attendance is above average, and has improved significantly since the last inspection.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>1</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>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2

<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

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**The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

**1**

### **How effective is the provision?**

The school has introduced a much more creative, thematic curriculum since the last inspection. Teachers make excellent links across a wide range of subjects which extend pupils' learning considerably. For example, one pupil excitedly told inspectors how, as a result of his Anglo Saxon topic, he was having the chance to write about Beowulf in literacy. This approach has had an excellent impact on progress because teachers make sure that pupils have plenty of opportunities to apply the skills and knowledge they are learning. Teachers clearly explain what pupils are going to learn in lessons and use resources, such as interactive whiteboards, skilfully. They are skilled at planning a wide range of tasks. Even within mathematics, where pupils are set according to ability, work is carefully planned to meet the learning needs of all pupils so that all are appropriately challenged or supported. Pupils have many opportunities to discuss and compare their thinking with partners. Although marking and feedback are of high quality there is sometimes a lack of consistency of approach across the school.

The curriculum is very well planned and combines pupils' learning experiences exceptionally well. The use of information and communication technology, for example, is fully integrated into all topics. Pupils have a wide range of opportunities to extend their learning using the internet and understand the importance of internet safety. The depth to which pupils conduct research is quite exceptional for pupils of this age. One pupil in Year 4 wanted to find out how mountains were formed, while pursuing the 'Mighty Mountains' theme. The pupil carried out some extensive research on the internet and then independently constructed a chart to show the results. Pupils benefit from a wide range of visits and there are particular strengths in opportunities provided for music. A wide range of clubs and out-of-school activities further provide excellent opportunities for pupils to enhance their learning.

The support and guidance the school provides are exceptional. Every child's needs are individually known and catered for. For example, a pupil with special educational needs and/or disabilities might be given specific chances to develop independence. The support assistant might withdraw a little to enable this to happen, while still closely observing the pupil's responses. As a result of this very individual approach, all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make excellent progress. The school works closely with parents and carers and a wide range of outside agencies to enable them to make the best possible provision. The breakfast and after-school clubs make excellent provision for the small number of pupils who attend. Transition arrangements into and out of the school are highly effective.

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*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

Staff work together exceptionally well as a team led by extremely skilful leadership. Leadership roles are all devolved extremely effectively and monitoring is robust ensuring that progress is sustained. The ambitious, but realistic, programme outlined in the school development plan shows that the school is planning highly effectively for when it becomes a primary school in September 2012. Equality of opportunity for all pupils is promoted exceptionally well. The school ensures that there are high quality opportunities for every pupil and that there is no discrimination. For example, the progress of all groups of pupils is extremely carefully monitored to ensure that boys, girls, pupils at an early stage of learning English, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities or those with gifts and/or talents all make the best possible progress. The school's partnership with parents and carers is excellent and provides many opportunities for them to support their children's learning through parents' evenings, workshops and regular newsletters. The school successfully ensured that parents and carers were kept informed of progress during the consultation period last year.

Excellent financial management has enabled the school to provide year group classes of a small size each morning in order to teach the key skills of literacy and numeracy. The school promotes excellent levels of community cohesion through enduring links with a Catholic charity as well as through pupils' involvement in the school and local community. As a result, pupils' knowledge of the differing cultures represented in the United Kingdom is excellent. Members of the governing body have an excellent overview of the school's direction and the priorities which they help formulate. They monitor the performance of the school highly effectively through regular visits and meetings with staff. Safeguarding procedures are extremely thorough. There are very careful checks on all adults who work in the school, and health and safety checks as well as risk assessments are carried out rigorously.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1



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<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>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>1</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make excellent progress and reach standards well in line with the average by the time they join Year 1. The 'preppies', a regular, planned series of visits made in the summer before they start, ensures that children settle quickly and happily. They rapidly learn to play cooperatively with each other and take turns. Their behaviour is excellent. They listen with eager anticipation to what their learning is going to entail for each day and respond enthusiastically to the entreaties of 'Sadie' (a puppet doll) when she exhorts them to teach her the 'inky mouse' song to reinforce the teaching of the letter 'i'. Teaching is stimulating and the activities provided excite the children. The invitation to the Skeleton's Romp was received enthusiastically and produced many opportunities for reinforcing what they had learnt about 'Marvellous Me' as well as developing role play and creative skills highly effectively. There is an extremely good balance of those activities led by the teacher and those that children choose for themselves. The curriculum is excellent and covers all elements of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. There is an excellent focus on developing and extending pupils' technical vocabulary. When learning about size, pupils were encouraged to roll out their snakes so that they were larger or smaller than a given object. There are many opportunities for children to use the outside area and to explore more extensively in the school's superb grounds. The care and attention given to children's welfare are outstanding and children's individual needs are catered for extremely well. The excellent leadership and management are reflected in the way the school takes care to involve parents and carers in their children's learning from the start. Learning diaries are comprehensive and provide an excellent record of children's development and parents and carers are able to contribute to these through 'wow' sheets.

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

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	1

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Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

## Views of parents and carers

There was an above average response to the Ofsted questionnaire with 54 questionnaires returned, representing just over half of the families attending the school. A very large majority of parents and carers are very confident that their children are safe and well cared for. They also express confidence in the leadership and management of the school. Most are happy with the experiences their children are receiving and pleased with all that the school has to offer, and this was reflected in the comments made both on the questionnaires and in person to the inspectors.

A very few parents and carers expressed some reservations about the pupils in Years 3 and 4 being taught in one class during the afternoons. The class is no larger than many other mixed-age classes seen in all-through primary schools and is working extremely well as the afternoon sessions focus more on thematic work and other subjects such as sport and music.

A very few parents and carers raised some concerns about incidents that happened last term. These have been fully investigated by inspectors who found that the school's handling and recording of these were extremely exhaustive and exemplary.

### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary’s Catholic First 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 54 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 103 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	42	78	9	17	1	2	2	4
The school keeps my child safe	39	72	10	19	3	6	1	2
The school informs me about my child’s progress	27	50	20	37	4	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	38	70	12	22	1	2	2	4
The teaching is good at this school	39	72	14	26	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	32	59	17	31	3	6	1	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	38	70	12	22	2	4	0	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)	26	48	22	41	0	0	1	2
The school meets my child’s particular needs	32	59	20	37	2	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	25	46	21	39	3	6	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	28	52	18	33	3	6	2	4
The school is led and managed effectively	35	65	14	26	0	0	4	7
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	42	78	7	13	3	6	1	2

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 are 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.**



10 October 2011

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of St Mary's Catholic First School, Wool, BH20 6DS**

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed seeing you work so hard in lessons and play so happily outside. The many of you who were kind enough to speak to us showed how proud you are of your school. You are right to be, because it is an outstanding school!

#### **What we found out about your school:**

- The children in Reception get a wonderful start to school life. They enjoyed learning their sounds and I found the Skeletons' Romp great fun.
- You all enjoy school and make excellent progress to reach standards that are much higher than those found in most schools.
- You behave extremely well, both in class and out in the playground.
- You get on exceptionally well with other pupils and always look after each other.
- You know a lot about how to stay safe and live healthy lives.
- Your headteacher is excellent at running the school and has exceptional support from all the other staff and members of the governing body. They all understand how they could make it even better.
- Your teachers are doing an outstanding job. They work hard to plan interesting lessons and make your learning fun.
- All staff at the school take exceptionally good care of you and keep you safe.

#### **What we would like the school to do now:**

- Your teachers mark your work very well and give you lots of useful feedback, but they all do it in different ways. We would like to see them all tell you how well you are doing in a similar way so that you do not find it confusing when you change class.

Good luck for the future. All of you can help your school to keep doing so well by continuing to enjoy your learning and by doing the best you can.

Yours sincerely  
Christine Huard  
Lead inspector

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