

# St Mary's RC Lower School

## Inspection report

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|                                |                      |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Unique Reference Number</b> | 109630               |
| <b>Local Authority</b>         | Central Bedfordshire |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 377955               |
| <b>Inspection dates</b>        | 16–17 November 2011  |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b>     | Norma Ball           |

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>                 | 3–9                                     |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                    | Mixed                                   |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b> | 154                                     |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>               | The governing body                      |
| <b>Chair</b>                               | Richard Neal                            |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                         | Steve Chiswell (Interim Headteacher)    |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b>  | 30 June 2009                            |
| <b>School address</b>                      | Dunstable Road<br>Caddington<br>LU1 4BB |
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| <b>Fax number</b>                          | 01582 667191                            |
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|---------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Age group</b>          | 3–9                 |
| <b>Inspection date(s)</b> | 16–17 November 2011 |
| <b>Inspection number</b>  | 377955              |

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 11 lessons as well as small teaching groups withdrawn from class, observing a total of seven teachers. They also made shorter visits to classes to look at displays and observe individual pupils and groups at work. The team met parents and carers informally during the inspection and held meetings with the headteacher, teaching staff, members of the governing body and pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised samples of pupils' work, teachers' planning, the school's systems for tracking pupils' progress and management, curriculum and safeguarding documentation. In addition, inspectors took account of responses to questionnaires from 71 parents and carers, 13 staff and 43 pupils.

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

- Do all groups, especially boys, make at least good, consistent progress, especially in writing?
- Is assessment information used consistently by all teachers to enable all groups of pupils to improve by providing them with appropriately challenging work?
- How rigorous and effective are leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, in monitoring the work of the school to ensure that attainment is improved consistently?

## Information about the school

St. Mary's is a smaller than average size primary school. The majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic heritages is higher than that found nationally and a few of these pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to that found nationally. A larger than average number of pupils is known to be eligible for free school meals. In the Early Years Foundation Stage there are two classes, one Reception class and one Nursery which children attend for half day sessions only.

The acting headteacher has been in post for three terms following a prolonged period of discontinuity, with ten headteachers in nine years. The school holds national Healthy Schools status. The St Mary's Breakfast and After School Club are managed by the governing body.

**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. A significant feature of the school is the good care, guidance and support that pupils receive from staff. This care is extended well by a wide range of good partnerships with other schools and agencies to help pupils feel secure and to accelerate their progress. Pupils' enjoyment of school is evident in recent year-on-year improvement in attendance, which is now average. Their personal development is good. They behave well and have a good sense of right and wrong. Pupils' spiritual development is outstanding and contributes very well to the happy and harmonious ethos of the school. Less well developed, although satisfactory, is their awareness of other faiths and cultures. Parents and carers are very pleased with all that the school provides. One parent said, 'My child thoroughly enjoys St. Mary's. A lovely school'.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage children learn well in teacher-led activities but less so when they choose their own tasks. This is because activities do not always excite them and not all staff successfully encourage them to extend both their ideas and speaking skills. Overall, children make satisfactory progress but, reflecting their below average starting points, enter Year 1 with skills and abilities that are still below those expected for their age.

The school's assessments show that pupils make satisfactory progress and by the end of Year 2 and Year 4, they are attaining standards that are approaching national averages. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those from ethnic groups and with English as an additional language make satisfactory progress. Pupils' progress is now tracked carefully through the school. However, this information is used inconsistently by teachers to plan challenging tasks for pupils of different ability, particularly so for more-able pupils. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are promptly assessed and they receive a range of satisfactory and sometimes good support.

The curriculum has improved. The themed approach and links between subjects make learning more interesting and also provide exciting writing experiences to engage all pupils, especially boys. Teaching is satisfactory and there are examples of good practice. Targets to help identify the next steps in pupils' learning are developing in literacy but they are underdeveloped in mathematics. The acting headteacher has united staff quickly after a prolonged period of interrupted leadership and has provided them with a clear, stimulating and shared vision for improvement. Senior managers are helping to integrate a range of valuable initiatives to improve pupils' progress and attainment. Members of the governing body have

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improved their skills so that they are better placed to evaluate the school's work and challenge it more incisively to help accelerate improvements. Some issues from the previous inspection have been satisfactorily addressed with others now receiving attention in line with action planning. Safeguarding arrangements are good. The school's self-evaluation procedures are mostly effective and accurate, demonstrating a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

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?**

- Raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics by building on existing good practice to ensure that a greater proportion of teaching is good or better.
- Ensure consistent use of the assessment information available to:
  - identify meaningful learning targets for pupils in numeracy
  - plan work that is challenging for pupils of different ability, especially the most able.
- In Early Years Foundation Stage, ensure activities are engaging for children and adults take all opportunities to encourage children to develop their speaking skills and explain their ideas.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****3**

Pupils enjoy learning and especially relish discussing ideas, both in groups and with their learning partners. The successful focus on improving writing skills, especially for boys, is integrated well into lessons. For example, in a Year 4 class, pupils used their history skills to write persuasively as advisors to Henry VIII to guide him on the question of his divorce from Catherine of Aragon; the role play at the start of the lesson engaged pupils well and there was a lively exchange of ideas. Teachers monitor the progress pupils make carefully but this information is used inconsistently to plan tasks that stretch pupils of different ability. In a Year 2 literacy class, for example, pupils were planning their response to a writing task based on their work on Remembrance Day and the Poppy Appeal. Support was provided for some pupils but all used a planning frame for their task and this limited the challenge for the more able. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language contribute well to lessons because work is matched well to their needs.

Pupils show kindness and care to each other and courtesy to adults. The new school behaviour code is well integrated in the school and respected by pupils. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour are rare and dealt with quickly by staff. Relationships at every level are good and pupils show pride in the responsibilities they undertake,

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especially as reading partners to younger pupils and acting as friends in the playground. They understand clearly about being safe, including through safe use of the internet. There are extensive opportunities for pupils to enjoy a wide range of sporting activities in class and in extra-curricular clubs. Healthy Schools status exemplifies pupils' good awareness of what is important for a healthy lifestyle. Pupils' average attainment and good personal development ensures they are soundly placed for the next stage of their education and later life.

*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>   | 3        |
| 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>2</b> |
| <b>Pupils' behaviour</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>  | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b> | <b>3</b> |
| Taking into account:  |          |
| Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>   | 3        |
| <b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>  | <b>2</b> |

**How effective is the provision?**

Teachers' good questioning helps them to assess pupils' understanding and, in turn, extend their ideas. Regular marking of work gives pupils both praise and guidance on how to improve pieces of work. However, targets to identify for pupils what they need to learn next are not effectively developed in numeracy to match those in reading and writing. Teaching support staff are deployed well in classes and in small groups out of class to ensure all pupils, especially those who find learning difficult, are helped to develop confidence and independence in their learning. One pupil, typical of many, said, 'I really like my school because I enjoy my lessons. My teacher is kind and she makes learning interesting.'

The school's strategies to improve literacy and numeracy are used consistently by all teachers. Interesting writing tasks and problem solving in mathematics are being applied across the curriculum and there are early signs that they are helping to

<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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improve pupils' progress and attainment. In particular the linking of subjects in a themed approach to learning is engaging pupils' interest as well as providing more opportunities to extend their writing, research and information and communication technology skills in a creative manner. The St Mary's Breakfast and After School clubs provide good care for pupils and a stimulating range of activities is available. Visits out of school, visitors and school clubs offer satisfactory enrichment for pupils, and opportunities to develop their sports skills have improved. Pupils show great confidence in the staff who care for them, and so are happy to tell them of any concerns. Transition arrangements at all stages are sensitively organised so pupils are confident about moving to the next stage of their learning, in school or beyond.

*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>3</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>   | <b>2</b> |

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's good, ambitious leadership for the school has revitalised staff who had been left without consistent leadership for a long period. Careful analysis of the strengths and areas of development for the school has led to the successful implementation of a range of important improvement strategies. All areas of the work of the school are closely monitored and this now involves all leaders and managers and members of the governing body. Middle leaders are developing their roles and responsibilities in their subject areas rapidly, including close monitoring of teaching and learning. The governing body has links with each class to extend governors' understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for development, helping them to offer effective challenge and support in equal measure.

The promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory and pupils are helped to develop an appreciation of their own community. Not enough work has been done to provide pupils with a full appreciation of their future role as national and global citizens, particularly in extending their awareness of the richness and diversity of other faiths and cultures. The school promotes equal opportunities soundly, ensuring that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language achieve as well as their peers. Pupils are known and valued as individuals, and the school is free from discrimination. The learning environment is attractive and well resourced. The safeguarding of pupils' welfare is good and supported by clear policies that are efficiently integrated throughout all aspects of the school. All staff receive regular training to ensure they are alert to all safeguarding matters.

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*These are the grades for leadership and management*

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>  | <b>3</b> |
| Taking into account:<br>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>2</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>3</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>   | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>  | <b>3</b> |

## Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter Nursery with skills and abilities below those of children of the same age. They are helped to settle quickly and are encouraged to become independent, to mix well and share with others. Children make satisfactory progress in their learning but this is not sufficient to bring their skills and abilities up to those expected of children of a similar age when they enter Year 1. A careful approach to helping children recognise letter sounds and then blend them to form words is used well by teachers to help develop early writing and reading skills. However, opportunities are missed by adults to intervene subtly when children are playing to encourage them to explain their ideas and thoughts, and so also and extend their speaking skills. Number skills are developed progressively and counting games and songs are much enjoyed. One child said enthusiastically, 'I can count to five now'; pointing to a basket of conkers in a lovely autumn display of leaves and cones she added, 'See, there are five conkers, and a lot more.'

Good resources are used to plan a sound range of activities in all areas of learning. However some activities, especially in using letters, are not always exciting enough to engage children's imagination and attention. Learning flows well between the indoor and outdoor classrooms. Large toys are a special favourite; children have good space to use their tricycles and pretend to be drivers. Staff work as a close and enthusiastic team. Children's progress is closely monitored both in their play and in their development of specific skills. Good links are developed with parents and carers, beginning with home visits in Nursery, and these help keep parents and carers closely involved with their child's development.



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

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>                   | <b>3</b> |
| 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 of the Early Years Foundation Stage | 3        |

## Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire was higher than average. A very large majority of these parents and carers are pleased that their children like school and are kept safe. They valued their child's happy learning experience and felt the school prepared their child well for the future. Parents and carers also felt the school was well led and managed and several commented on the contribution of the new headteacher. One parent, typical of a number, said that the headteacher 'has made a big difference to the school.' A few parents did not feel the school provided them with guidance to help support their child's learning. Inspection evidence indicates that the school works well to build good links with parents; and a good range of information is provided to help parents and carers help their children with learning at home.

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

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's RC Lower 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 71 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 154 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements  | Strongly agree |    | Agree |    | Disagree |   | Strongly disagree |   |
|---|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|---|-------------------|---|
|   | Total          | %  | Total | %  | Total    | % | Total             | % |
| My child enjoys school  | 54             | 76 | 16    | 23 | 1        | 1 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school keeps my child safe  | 54             | 76 | 17    | 24 | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school informs me about my child's progress   | 50             | 70 | 19    | 27 | 2        | 3 | 0                 | 0 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school   | 49             | 69 | 20    | 28 | 1        | 1 | 0                 | 0 |
| The teaching is good at this school   | 52             | 73 | 18    | 25 | 1        | 1 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning  | 46             | 65 | 22    | 31 | 3        | 4 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle   | 42             | 59 | 27    | 38 | 1        | 1 | 1                 | 1 |
| 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) | 40             | 56 | 24    | 34 | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school meets my child's particular needs  | 48             | 68 | 20    | 28 | 1        | 1 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour  | 44             | 62 | 24    | 34 | 1        | 1 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns   | 40             | 56 | 27    | 38 | 1        | 1 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school is led and managed effectively   | 54             | 76 | 16    | 23 | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school   | 56             | 79 | 14    | 20 | 1        | 1 | 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 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.**



18 November 2011

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of St Mary's RC Lower School, Caddington, LU1 4BB**

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and for being so polite and helpful. We enjoyed talking to you and looking at your work. You took great pride in showing us your prayer garden. We think it is a beautiful, calm area and the gardening club take great care to see it is an attractive and peaceful place for you go when you need to be quiet and think.

Adults take good care of you, so you feel safe. You behave well and care for each other. You told us that you enjoy learning and are proud of your school. In your lessons we saw how much you enjoy your work and you like to join in discussions and share your ideas. Your headteacher, teachers and governors are working hard to help you do the best you can.

We think that St. Mary's is a satisfactory school. This means that it does some things well, but also needs to make some things better.

- We have asked your teachers to share the good things they do to help you learn and to make sure they use what they know about how well you are doing to plan lessons that give you work that is not too easy or too difficult.
- So that you understand what you have to learn next we have also asked your teachers to give you clear targets for reading, writing and also mathematics.
- To help children in Nursery and Reception to make a good start to their learning we have asked that the activities planned for them are always exciting and that they are encouraged to explain their ideas and improve their speaking skills.

You can all help by continuing to work hard and doing your best at school. It was a great pleasure to visit St. Mary's and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Norma Ball  
Lead inspector

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