

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122036
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	380389
Inspection dates	22–23 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Michael Bartleman

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	176
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Hugh Williams
Headteacher	Lisa McGarrity (Acting Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	21 January 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 15 lessons involving eight teachers. They held discussions with staff, groups of pupils, members of the governing body, external partners, and parents and carers. Inspectors observed the school's work and reviewed documentation, including improvement plans, the systems for tracking pupils' progress, the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and a sample of pupils' work. The inspectors analysed 14 questionnaires returned by parents and carers and those from 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 progress of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and how effectively provision and leaders and managers contribute to their improvement.
- Whether attainment is improving quickly enough for all groups of pupils in all subjects.
- The impact of leaders and managers and the governing body on school improvement, raising attainment and improving attendance.
- Whether the curriculum is adapted well to boost attainment in reading, writing and mathematics.

Information about the school

St Mary's Catholic Primary School is a slightly smaller-than-average primary school. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. An increasing proportion of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest of which are from Black African or Caribbean heritage. An above-average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average as is the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals. A before- and after-school club runs daily managed by a private provider and was not part of this inspection. There is an increasing trend of pupils arriving or leaving part way through the school year. There have been considerable changes to the teaching force and organisation since the last inspection. The acting headteacher was appointed in September 2010. The school has recently restructured its senior leadership framework.

The school has achieved enhanced Healthy Schools status.

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

This is a satisfactory school. The quality of teaching, the curriculum, attendance and pupils' attitudes to learning are all improving rapidly and helping to tackle the low attainment which has been evident in recent years. In this caring, safe and welcoming setting pupils are thoughtful, polite and respectful. They rightly say they feel safe. Behaviour, while satisfactory overall, is well managed and often good in lessons. These good personal attributes, along with pupils' improving progress, from starting points that are well below expected levels, ensure that pupils are prepared adequately for secondary school. All stakeholders strive to fulfil the school's inclusive vision to meet the personal and academic potential of all pupils, based firmly on the school's Roman Catholic ethos. As one parent put it, 'Teachers' individual approach to each child helps them feel valued and encourages them to achieve their best.'

Children get off to an effective start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and make good progress across all areas of learning due to the good provision. Pupils' achieve satisfactorily in the rest of the school. Attainment at the end of Year 6 is low for all groups of pupils but is now rising rapidly and securely, with an increasing number of pupils attaining expected levels. As a result, all groups make similar progress to their peers. Pupils' progress is accelerating, particularly since September 2010, because the quality of the teaching is improving. It is accelerating at a faster rate in reading and writing than in mathematics. In literacy, increasingly effective use is made of assessment information, marking, questioning and the balance between teacher talk and pupil activity. These good practices are, however, not consistently applied and are least evident in mathematics with activities often not engaging and challenging pupils well enough. There are sometimes not enough opportunities for pupils to develop and practise their mental calculation skills or to apply them, such as through solving problems in other curriculum areas.

The broad, creative curriculum is at an early stage of development but provides rich learning experiences for pupils which are enhanced by a range of visits, visitors and improving partnerships with local schools. Pupils make an increasing contribution to their school and local communities, such as in the newly formed school council and in raising funds to support a mission school in Kenya.

The acting headteacher provides a clear and effective lead. Together with the newly restructured leadership team, she has evaluated accurately the school's performance, pinpointing improvement priorities precisely, and has successfully enlisted the support of everyone in their quest to drive the school forward. Several recent

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initiatives in strengthening the quality of teaching, involving leaders at all levels, provide a positive platform upon which to raise attainment, and are starting to bear fruit. However, the roles of middle leaders are at an early stage of development, despite greater involvement in monitoring. Robust systems are now in place to track pupils' performance across year groups, classes and subjects and for supporting those who are not meeting the raised expectations. The governing body is increasingly being effective in its role as members develop systems for holding school leaders to account and in their understanding of data. The improving trend in raising attainment and accelerating progress gives the school a satisfactory capacity to improve.

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?

- By July 2012, in order to accelerate pupils' progress and raise attainment, strengthen the overall quality of teaching to good by:
 - sharing more widely the good practice that exists within the school so that the majority of lessons are good or better
 - addressing inconsistencies, especially those linked to marking, the pace of lessons and the balance of teacher talk and pupil activity.
- By July 2012, ensure that at least 70% of pupils throughout the school are reaching age appropriate expectations in mathematics by:
 - ensuring that pupils have the basic skills and knowledge to support their mental calculations
 - providing additional opportunities to use mathematics and problem solving in other areas of the curriculum
 - ensuring pupils develop a positive view of mathematics and are fully involved in all aspects of the lesson.
- Ensure that all leaders consolidate the use of their skills to track, monitor and analyse pupils' progress and provision across the school.

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

Pupils are keen to learn and respond particularly well to opportunities to discuss their ideas together. Most pupils have a positive attitude to school and take pride in their work. In a well-planned Year 6 English lesson, for example, pupils' knowledge of biographical writing was developed well following a drama and art activity. The lesson proceeded at a rapid pace, built effectively on prior learning and met the needs of all pupils well. The teacher's interaction with the pupils and her outstanding questioning skills ensured all were fully engaged. In other lessons progress

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sometimes slows when pupils sit for too long listening to their teacher or when working independently, particularly when activities are insufficiently challenging or exciting. In some mathematics lessons, pupils lack confidence and are not all able to make quick mental calculations, which has an impact on their ability to progress at a good rate.

The school has a proven track record of helping those with special educational needs and/or disabilities to have a positive view of their education. The strengthened links with support agencies and improved management by the special needs coordinator has helped to ensure their academic progress is now satisfactory and they are well supported in school. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make satisfactory progress and their rate of progress is improving securely and quickly. Although there are good opportunities to develop the spiritual dimension, for example, in assemblies, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. Pupils are aware of the needs of others both locally and around the world and help to support those who are facing difficulties through their fundraising.

Pupils learn together in a harmonious school community, showing respect for one another's similarities and differences. Although pupils say there are rare incidents of bullying it is quickly sorted out by the teachers. Pupils cooperate well in lessons, and participate fully in the increasing range of extra-curricular activities. All groups of pupils are eager to contribute to their school, for example, as school councillors, monitors and buddies, which is having a positive impact on their personal development. Opportunities to engage with the local community are developing well particularly through sports, music and church links although links with groups beyond the immediate community are at an earlier stage of development.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
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
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will	3

¹ 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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contribute to their future economic well-being	
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Teachers' enthusiasm, positive relationships and pupils' increasingly good behaviour in classes are making a strong contribution to learning and improving progress. In many lessons, teachers discuss the purpose of lessons, ensuring pupils are clear about what is expected of them. Teachers' planning takes good account of pupils' different needs. This is reflected in the tailored questioning of individuals and in practical activities that challenge their thinking. Marking of work is effective when teachers indicate precisely what pupils need to do next to improve, particularly in literacy. These good practices are not consistently applied in all lessons, particularly when the pace of lessons is slow and not enough time is given for pupils to practise their skills. At times, teachers do too much of the talking and there is not enough time for pupils to engage in independent activities.

The curriculum is improving with meaningful links being made between subjects. Pupils' enjoyment of school is enhanced by the increasing range of activities beyond day-to-day lessons which broaden their life experiences. This was seen during the inspection with the school's first curriculum 'WOW' day when all the lessons were linked by a historical theme. Attainment in writing is rising because opportunities for pupils to practise their skills across a range of curriculum subjects are increasing. Across the school pupils' progress in mathematics is not improving as rapidly because marking is less detailed and there are not enough opportunities for them to develop their calculation skills or to use and apply them in solving problems.

Day-to-day care is satisfactory and improving rapidly as targeting of support has become more effective recently due to good management and assessment by the special needs coordinator. Routines and procedures are well established and effective at keeping pupils safe. Staff know the pupils' personal circumstances well and take appropriate steps to overcome any barriers they may face to their full participation in school life. Pupils, whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, receive increasingly good support and are nurtured sensitively so that school is a positive experience. The contribution of the Family Support Worker is much valued by pupils and their families. Induction and transition arrangements are smooth and have become progressively effective. Attendance is rapidly improving as a result of effective initiatives. The before- and after-school club managed by a private provider is greatly appreciated by parents and carers.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

Despite the challenges arising from recent staff turnover and management changes, the school is improving. Staff say that 'the school has undergone an amazing transformation' and that they are keen to rise to 'new and higher expectations'. The acting headteacher and senior leaders provide effective leadership and a clear vision for the school's future. The school's development plan contains appropriately identified priorities for improvement. Effective use is being made of the new systems to track pupils' progress, to identify underachievement earlier and to hold teachers to account. Partnerships beyond school, such as with the local authority and with other schools, are also helping to secure improvement, particularly by providing effective professional development opportunities for staff. Partnerships with parents and carers are satisfactory. New opportunities for them to find out about how their children learn and to provide them with support for learning at home, such as in reading and mathematics, have been welcomed.

The governing body has a satisfactory understanding of the school's strengths and areas needing development, and is improving the way it holds it to account for its performance. A strong emphasis is placed on the inclusion of everyone, with pupils' welfare a priority. The school promotes equality of opportunity adequately, as reflected in satisfactory outcomes for all groups of pupils and a lack of any discrimination. Good and robust safeguarding procedures have recently been reviewed and strengthened. Efficient procedures are securely in place to safeguard those at most risk. The school makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion. It is responsive to the needs of the local community and has a clear understanding of its context and of the challenges it faces. It is developing greater global and national links.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3

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The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Good induction processes, including well-managed home visits, ensure that children settle into school quickly. The teacher and teaching assistants work hard together to make sure learning is always interesting and enjoyable for children. They make good progress due to a combination of good provision, a vibrant curriculum both inside and outside the classroom and regular assessments which ensure that learning is challenging to individual children and well-tailored to their interests and needs. The strong focus on books and sounds letters make is having a good impact on developing children’s reading and writing. During the ‘dinosaur day’ the teacher modelled writing well, emphasising letters and sounds links, following a whole class story. Interactions with adults in the ‘dinosaur party’ extended language skills and vocabulary well.

The well-planned curriculum covers all areas of learning and the free-flow of children between the inside and outside areas encourages their good independence in learning. A good balance is maintained, with children having opportunities to explore and investigate independently through practical and play opportunities as well as having opportunities to work in guided activities with adults. Children’s behaviour is good. They learn to listen well and get on well with each other. The good relationships between staff and children ensure that all individuals feel valued and keen to do their best. Adults keep a useful review of children’s achievements in ‘learning logs’ which are supplemented by parents and carers who write ‘post-it’ notes to show developments at home. However these are not fully developed as a two-way communication. The Early Years Foundation Stage is effectively managed. The coordinator has a good overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the setting and is focused on developing provision further to inspire boys’ writing and further independence in the outside areas. The staff are extremely caring and provide strong pastoral support for all children. They are vigilant in ensuring that all safeguarding and welfare procedures are followed through rigorously.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

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The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
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Views of parents and carers

The rate of return of parent questionnaires was very low compared with that seen nationally. From those the inspection team received, most parents and carers have positive views of the school. Evidence from the inspection supports parents' and carers' views that the majority of children enjoy school, and are safe. The largest group to show any concern amounted to three parents and carers who indicated that they did not feel that their child's needs were being met, but made no comment. Evidence from the inspection shows that the school is trying hard to reach out to and communicate with parents and carers, and to meet pupils' identified needs.

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 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 14 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 176 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	7	50	2	14	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	7	50	7	50	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	6	43	7	50	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	3	21	10	71	1	7	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	3	21	8	57	1	7	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	4	29	9	64	1	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	3	21	10	71	1	7	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)	1	7	11	79	1	7	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	3	21	8	57	1	7	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	5	36	8	57	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	3	21	9	64	1	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	5	36	7	50	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	5	36	8	57	0	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 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).

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.



24 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Northampton, NN5 7HX

We would like to thank all of you for your help during the inspection. We enjoyed seeing you in your classrooms and talking to you at playtimes and lunchtimes. Inspectors judge that you go to a school that gives you a satisfactory education. By Year 6, your attainment is lower than expected for your age; however you make satisfactory progress. Lots of things are changing in your school and so you are now learning more quickly.

These are some of the strengths of your school.

- Your school is welcoming and sets a positive climate for your learning.
- You enjoy school and your behaviour in lessons is improving.
- You have good relationships with the adults who support you.
- You feel safe in school and enjoy the curriculum.
- Most of your parents and carers are pleased with your experience at school.
- Your attendance is improving rapidly.

We have asked your school to make some further improvements.

- We have asked your teachers to make sure that more of you make faster progress. As part of this, we have asked them to make sure that they set a consistently good pace in lessons, and that marking gives you more feedback about improving the quality of your work.
- We have asked your teachers to help you to do better in mathematics and to give you more opportunities to use your skills in other areas of the curriculum.
- We have asked teachers and leaders to become more fully involved in monitoring and tracking your progress.

You can help too by working hard and taking advantage of the improvements that your school will be making. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Bartleman
Lead inspector

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