

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Wolverhampton

Inspection report

Unique reference number	104375
Local authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	377075
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2012
Lead inspector	Gordon Ewing

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	377
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anthony Whithurst
Headteacher	Karl Russell
Date of previous school inspection	19 September 2007
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Introduction

Inspection team

Gordon Ewing Additional Inspector

Verna Plummer Additional Inspector

Frances Millett Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 27 lessons, observing 18 teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, members of the governing body, members of staff and groups of pupils. Informal discussions were conducted with some parents and carers, and with pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work including the systems for assessing and monitoring pupils' progress, pupils' work, and teachers' planning and marking. Policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils were scrutinised. Inspectors also took account of questionnaires completed by 184 parents and carers, 32 staff and 121 older pupils.

Information about the school

St Mary's is larger than the average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average. The largest group of pupils (42%) is of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language is above average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with statements of special educational needs is above average; predominantly, these pupils have moderate or specific learning difficulties.

The school meets the current floor standards for attainment and progress. These are the minimum standards expected by the government.

The school provides a breakfast club and separate after school provision that operate during term time. These are both managed by the governing body.

The school has experienced significant turbulence in staffing, particularly at senior leadership level, in recent times. The current headteacher was appointed in April 2012, after a period as acting headteacher. Prior to that, he was the deputy headteacher at the school. Other senior and middle leaders have also been appointed internally.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. Concerted efforts to secure stable staffing are proving to be successful in providing a good standard of education. The school is not outstanding because, although progress is good, relatively, it is not as strong in Years 1 and 2 in writing. In addition, pupils' learning and progress in mathematics in Key Stage 2 lag behind their good and sometimes outstanding achievement in English.
- Achievement is good and has been sustained over time due to the leadership's effective focus on improving teaching through robust performance management. As a result, all groups make at least expected progress and most make good progress. Current Year 6 pupils are on track to achieve above-average levels in English and at least average levels in mathematics.
- The quality of teaching over time is good. Most teachers have good subject knowledge, know their pupils well, and use questioning effectively to advance learning well. In Years 1 and 2, teachers do not always adjust the challenge and range of writing activities to match pupils' day-to-day learning needs. In addition, some do not have sufficient proficiency in developing writing across different subjects. In Key Stage 2, teachers do not consistently challenge pupils in mathematics so that they develop greater independence in applying their skills through open-ended investigations in a range of contexts.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. Pupils understand clearly how to keep themselves safe. The school has taken stringent steps to increase attendance, which is now average and improving.
- The headteacher has established an effective culture of self-improvement, so that raising outcomes for pupils is a successful and collective enterprise. Sustained improvements in teaching have been secured by the leadership's effective procedures to hold teachers to account for their pupils' progress.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise levels of attainment and progress in Key Stage 1 in writing, so that by July 2013, pupils achieve levels at least in line with those found nationally, by:
 - ensuring, through focused training and support, that all teachers have a confident knowledge of what constitutes good practice in developing writing across the curriculum
 - tracking closely the progress of all pupils, so that any underachievement is identified swiftly and intervention is triggered to help pupils close the gap rapidly
 - reducing the reliance of some teachers on published literacy schemes, so that they use their professional judgement shrewdly in tuning activities more closely to pupils' needs in order to increase the level of challenge.

- Raise levels of attainment and progress in Key Stage 2 in mathematics, to the levels achieved in English, by July 2013, by:
 - increasing pupils' independence in mathematics by widening opportunities for practical investigations and developing their skills in checking their work themselves and thereby reducing avoidable errors
 - tracking closely the progress of pupils in mathematics, so that any underachievement is identified swiftly and additional challenge and intervention strategies are triggered to help pupils close the gap rapidly.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Rates of progress for most pupils, over time, are at levels above those found nationally. Attainment across the school is rising because teaching is increasingly astute in promoting pupils' personal development alongside their academic achievement. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make similar rates of progress to their peers because adults provide learning activities and support that are matched to their needs well. Intervention activities, for example, in reading and mathematics, boost pupils' learning through strengthening basic levels of skills and boosting confidence and self-esteem. Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills well below the levels expected for their age in all learning areas. They make good progress, especially in their personal, social, and emotional development and physical development because activities are engaging and support the development of key skills, so that children develop self-reliance and build up their own interests. A school-wide, systematic approach to the teaching of phonics (linking letters and sounds) is effective in developing early reading skills. Pupils' attainment in reading by the end of Year 2, though below average, is now improving. Attainment in writing by Year 2 is not rising as quickly because pupils do not have enough opportunities to write in a range of subjects. By the time they leave at the end of Year 6, attainment in reading is above average. Within this positive picture, on occasions, teaching assistants are not always proficient in sounding out letters and

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words when supporting pupils with their reading. Pupils for whom English is an additional language, those from minority ethnic groups, and those known to be eligible for free school meals make similar rates of progress to their peers, particularly in developing their literacy and numeracy skills. Almost all parents and carers say that their children are making good progress and inspection evidence supports this view.

Pupils, clearly, enjoy lessons and their very positive attitudes ensure that classrooms are busy and safe places in which to learn. Pupils are increasingly encouraged, by effective questioning from teachers, to evaluate their own work, or in using 'talk partners' to consolidate learning and sharing ideas. This was evident in a Year 3 physical education lesson, where pupils were honing their catching and fielding skills. The pace of the lesson was judicious and exciting and pupils worked very well to improve their skills. The teacher questioned pupils ably about their performance and set new short-term targets to challenge and stimulate them. Pupils worked cooperatively, even in competitive group activities, so that everyone gained from all aspects of the lesson. In a one-to-one mathematics intervention session, a pupil made good progress in identifying odd and even numbers. The teacher structured the activities ably, so that the pupil's understanding was shaped sequentially, building on her successes. The pupil was consistently encouraged to talk about her learning, so that the teacher adjusted activities swiftly to consolidate and boost learning further.

Pupils who attend breakfast club gain from the opportunities to develop their reading skills, as well as learn about the importance of a healthy meal to start their day. After-school activities are well attended and pupils benefit from participating in physical exercise such as sports and dance, as well as team and board games.

Quality of teaching

The overwhelming majority of parents and carers express the view that children are taught well. The very large majority of pupils agree. As one pupil commented 'Teachers make lessons fun.' Inspection findings support these views.

Teachers plan lessons systematically, set clear learning objectives at the start of the lesson, and manage behaviour effectively through well-judged use of reward and sanction. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are taught well because adults know them as individuals and plan effectively, so that they achieve as well as their peers. However, some teaching assistants are not always deployed to good effect and, consequently, this valuable resource is sometimes wasted. That is particularly evident at the start of lessons when the teacher is leading the class. The school has invested in a nationally recognised programme to support the development of pupils' reading and writing, which is helping to raise attainment, especially in reading. However, some teachers are too reliant on the programme and are not confident in adapting activities to increase the level of challenge and maximise learning in writing. In mathematics, teachers plan activities well to develop pupils' knowledge and consolidate their numeracy skills. However, pupils do not

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always check their calculations independently in order to improve accuracy. Opportunities for practical investigations in mathematics for Key Stage 2 pupils are less frequent than for other pupils.

Teachers use assessment information well to tune lesson activities to most pupils' needs. However, their marking, though positive and correctional, does not consistently give precise guidance on next steps to boost pupils' learning, or to increase independence. Pupils are not consistently set longer-term targets linked to National Curriculum levels and are not always confident about how well they are progressing. The best practice was observed in Key Stage 2, where most teachers set good short-term targets and engaged pupils through discussion about their learning and in re-shaping activities, based on how well pupils are progressing in the lesson. That was evident in a Year 6 science lesson, when the teacher questioned pupils' understanding astutely during their investigation into dissolving. Pupils grasped key concepts quickly, such as 'solution', 'solvent' and 'solute', because the teacher ensured that their understanding was secure before moving the lesson forward.

The broad, balanced and varied curriculum is enriched well by a range of visits and extra-curricular activities. Links between subjects are developing well, but there is more to do in building links across subjects in order that pupils can apply their basic skills across different contexts. Nevertheless, the curriculum has a positive impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The very large majority of pupils, parents and carers judge that there is a good standard of behaviour at St Mary's. Inspection evidence endorses that view because pupils are, typically, thoughtful, polite and respectful towards their peers and all adults.

Pupils are cared for well and the excellent relationships across the school community add to the positive ethos that permeates through all aspects of the school's work. Pupils enjoy participating in a community where harmony and tolerance are celebrated through the curriculum and the inclusive culture of the school. Pupils say they feel safe, report that bullying and racism of any kind are rare, and that they are confident that someone is always there to help them. The vast majority of parents and carers concur with their children's views. Exclusions are rare. Pupils are keen participants in helping to improve aspects of school life, for example, in raising money for charity and for sports equipment, acting as school councillors and helping others by being playground 'peer supporters'. The school has been very active in improving attendance by providing transport for some pupils and in offering regular attendance awards, which pupils value greatly. Its work to engage with hard-to-reach families is successful in reducing persistent absence and in boosting the learning of targeted pupils.

Leadership and management

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The headteacher leads by example and is supported effectively by his senior and middle leadership teams, so that staff morale is high and everyone is a keen participant in achieving the school's ambitions and objectives. Self-evaluation is focused and accurate. Consequently, leaders, including the governing body, have a clear grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses and rigorously hold the senior leadership to account. Leadership and management are distributed effectively across the staff, so that everyone takes a key role in improving outcomes for pupils. There is a strong focus on performance management and staff training, so that teachers are held to account for pupils' progress. As a result, secure improvements in teaching are delivering improved outcomes for pupils in key areas, for example, in reading. Taking into account the improved stability in staffing, sustained increases in pupils' achievement and the strong support of all stakeholders, the school has good capacity to secure improvement.

Safeguarding procedures, including those for pupils attending the breakfast and after-school clubs, are rigorous and robust. All staff work effectively to ensure that all aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development are good, as well as in promoting equality and tackling any form of discrimination. Pupils genuinely appreciate the broad and colourful range of learning opportunities that the school offers. The good curriculum celebrates well the cultural diversity within and beyond the school and provides pupils with memorable experiences that allow them to develop as sensible young citizens, able to take the next steps in life with confidence. As one parent commented, 'I am so happy that my son is at this school.' The very large majority of parents and carers would recommend the school to others.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Wolverhampton, WV10 8PG

Thank you all very much for the warm welcome that you gave us when we visited you recently. We enjoyed the opportunities to talk with quite a lot of you and we have told your teachers that you were great ambassadors for the school and for your generation. Your views, including those expressed in the inspection questionnaires, assisted us in coming to a judgement about many aspects of school life. Your improving attendance and very positive attitudes tell us that you enjoy coming to school to learn and play. We were impressed with the way you take on responsibilities such as playground peer supporters, school councillors, and in raising funds for a range of charities. Your school prepares you well for the challenges ahead at secondary school and beyond. We judge that you are taught well and most of you are making good progress in reading, writing, and mathematics. The school works hard also to provide you with memorable experiences in other subjects and through special events and educational visits. That is why St Mary's is a good school.

Everyone has the best interests of the school at heart and is keen to make it even better, so we have asked the staff and governing body, in particular, to do the following:

- improve further your levels of achievement in writing in Years 1 and 2 and in mathematics in Years 3 to 6 by making sure that more lessons are as good as the very best and that you have more opportunity to apply your literacy and numeracy skills in different subjects.

You can help by continuing to work hard, acting upon the advice of your teachers, and doing your best at all times. You can also help your headteacher by letting him know, through your school council, what other improvements you would like to see.

We wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Ewing
Lead Inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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