

St Mark's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	103468
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	376914
Inspection dates	3–4 July 2012
Lead inspector	Joseph Peacock

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	202
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alistair Campbell
Headteacher	Christine Walker
Date of previous school inspection	27 November 2008
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Age group	4–11
Inspection date(s)	3–4 July 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Joseph Peacock

Additional Inspector

Teresa Hill

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors spent nearly six hours visiting 14 lessons and observing eight teachers. Both visited the daily breakfast club, organised by the school for up to 12 pupils. The inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They held meetings with the headteacher, Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, and other staff with leadership roles, and talked with pupils, parents and carers. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at assessment data and pupils' completed work. They read and evaluated documentation including improvement planning and policies relating to safeguarding and children's welfare. The inspectors scrutinised 82 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, and those returned by staff and pupils.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school. Children join the Reception class from 12 different nursery settings. Pupils travel to school from a diverse and wide catchment area. Two thirds are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the main group being of Indian origin. Most speak English as an additional language and nearly all of those from Eastern European countries are at the very early stages of learning English. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is broadly average. The proportion who are supported at 'school action plus' or have a statement of special educational needs is also broadly average. The number known to be eligible for free school meals is above average.

The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. There was significant mobility of pupils in 2010 and 2011 but this has reduced now the school is nearing its capacity in most classes. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are supporting a nearby Catholic primary school in an executive capacity. The school has National Healthy School Status and the International School Award. The breakfast club each morning is from 7.30 until school begins.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school. It has improved from satisfactory in its last inspection because of the expertise and commitment of senior leaders and the drive and determination of governors to provide the best possible education for pupils. Consequently, all pupils enjoy school and make excellent progress.
- Achievement is outstanding throughout the school. Children have an excellent start in Reception because of the well-managed provision and outstanding teaching. The challenging targets set for all pupils in each year ensure that standards are high by the end of Year 6 in English and in mathematics.
- Teaching is outstanding. Teachers constantly strive to provide inspiring learning experiences and magical moments in lessons to fully engage pupils and foster an enjoyment of learning. Lesson planning is firmly based on regular and detailed assessments of pupils' prior learning. Marking is thorough but pupils often do not respond to teachers' comments about how they can improve their work. Pupils of all abilities are ably supported in lessons by the conscientious and caring teaching assistants.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding. Attendance levels are high, reflecting pupils' enjoyment of school. Their responsibilities as class ambassadors or learning leaders encourage extremely positive attitudes and a pride in belonging to St Mark's school. Excellent behaviour in lessons ensures that there is invariably a calm, purposeful atmosphere for learning. Pupils are kept safe and all are well cared for by staff before school in the breakfast club and throughout the day.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Staff and governors work as a cohesive team to bring about improvement. The management of performance is constantly under review with all leaders and governors checking frequently and effectively on standards and the quality of teaching. This ensures that the school has an excellent capacity to go on improving.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that pupils are given time to respond to teachers' helpful marking comments in order to further improve their work.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The attainment of children on entry to Reception is well below the level expected for their age. Two-thirds speak English as an additional language and communication and mathematical skills are generally weak. The high quality of provision in Reception, including support from a teacher with expertise in teaching English, ensures all children make rapid progress, preparing them exceptionally well for Key Stage 1. Pupils enter Year 1 with skills that are below average but continue to make excellent progress in Years 1 and 2. Throughout Key Stage 2, outstanding progress ensures that high standards have been maintained by Year 6 over the past two years. A scrutiny of work for pupils currently in Year 6 and the school's assessment records show that pupils are once again reaching high levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. In mathematics, for example, eight pupils are working within Level 6, which is very advanced for their age. Year 5 are already demonstrating exceptional writing skills. They tasted popping candy and created poems to describe the experience. 'It's like a wasp in my mouth,' explained one excited pupil.

Pupils who join the school partway through their primary school education make the same exceptional progress as other pupils because detailed assessments enable teachers to plan carefully to meet their particular learning needs. Reading is taught exceptionally well throughout. In Reception and Key Stage 1, there are 10 groups formed from the three classes to promote skills in phonics (the sounds that letters make), reading and spelling. Pupils display an excellent knowledge of phonics when reading. All readily use a range of strategies to read long or difficult words. Pupils learning English as an additional language make excellent progress as they benefit from the support of other pupils and individual support from a specialist teacher and staff in lessons. Most pupils show skills that far exceed expectations for their age when using computers.

The achievement of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is outstanding because staff analyse their progress in depth and accurately identify their individual learning needs each half term. Actions to accelerate the progress of any who are falling behind are constantly refreshed to ensure individual needs are being effectively met. In the returned questionnaires, parents and carers were extremely positive about the progress their children make. 'Children thrive at this school' was a typical comment.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is highly effective in meeting the learning needs of all pupils. Teachers share a strong belief that every child can succeed and their dedication and effort support this belief. The challenging and engaging activities planned in all subjects reflect teachers' high expectations of pupils. Reading is well taught throughout as

pupils build successfully on the firm foundations laid in Reception. Exemplary assessment procedures quickly identify any pupil requiring additional support to meet the school's challenging targets, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and pupils who speak English as an additional language. Common features of the excellent teaching include the careful match of work to pupils' different ability levels, the high-quality support provided by teaching assistants, and the exciting tasks that motivate and engage pupils. 'Lightening chucked the rain at an unsuspecting victim' is a striking example of pupils' expressive writing. Many tasks set real-life problems to be solved. Year 6 pupils, for example, calculated quantities from a cake recipe to make enough to feed every pupil and adult in the school. They also designed, built and modified electrical circuits to light bulbs or run motors when dad's car went bust! Teachers constantly use computers to support and enhance pupils' learning with tasks such as number games in Reception and analysing features in poems in Year 5. Teachers' marking routinely gives pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work. However, there is little evidence of these comments being followed up by pupils. Homework is set regularly and supported well by parents and carers.

Parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire clearly hold positive views about the school in general and about the quality of teaching in particular. 'Staff love children' was a typical comment. Pupils' positive attitudes and keenness to learn reflect the outstanding social and moral aspects of their personal development. 'Teachers encourage us to push ourselves to the limit,' and 'Everyone is expected to work hard' are typical comments.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are proud of their school and the contribution they make as class ambassadors, learning leaders or school councillors. All have very high expectations of behaviour in lessons. This led to a few concerns about behaviour by pupils. 'Some just have to talk in lessons,' was a telling comment reflecting their high expectations. Behaviour at the breakfast club, in lessons and around school is exemplary. In lessons, most pupils show how keen they are to learn and do well. No disruptive behaviour was observed. Pupils invariably work conscientiously and sensibly in groups or with their partners and clearly respect one another's views and opinions. They listen attentively and are quick to respond to class instructions. Their outstanding behaviour is a key factor in the school's continuing success. There is an excellent atmosphere for learning in class and adults are highly effective in encouraging and motivating pupils to do their best. The excellent progress made by disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs reflects the expertise and commitment of staff to care for and support them.

The school deals promptly and effectively with any form of bullying or thoughtless behaviour. A few parents and carers expressed concerns about behaviour and bullying. However, virtually every parent and carer who responded agreed that the school is a safe place. Pupils say that any incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly and effectively. Inspection evidence supports these views. The concern of some parents, carers and pupils about disruption to learning in lessons is unfounded. The reward system for good behaviour encourages all to behave responsibly. Pupils

understand about the different forms bullying can take and say that they feel free from any worries about racist bullying or intimidating behaviour. Pupils' attendance is above the national average, confirming how much pupils enjoy coming to school.

Leadership and management

Parents and carers are very positive in their praise of the inspirational and caring leadership. They say that the headteacher always does what she promises and that there is a warm welcoming atmosphere in school. Since the previous inspection, the headteacher and staff, with the support of the governing body, have led a very effective drive towards improving all aspects of the school's performance. Every member of staff feels personally responsible for bringing about improvement and all work effectively as a cohesive team. The search for perfection is a constant focus for everyone. The leadership team has been strengthened with an assistant headteacher to support the headteacher and a deputy when they are advising and supporting the neighbouring school. Professional development is a strength, with all staff willingly attending training sessions to keep abreast of the latest developments. A recently introduced new scheme for mathematics, for example, is raising standards. All are fully involved in regularly evaluating attainment and the quality of teaching and learning. The commitment and dedication of staff are supported by a governing body whose members have a wide range of professional expertise. They are knowledgeable and fully involved in identifying areas for improvement from their frequent monitoring visits. Together, staff and the governing body ensure that the school has an excellent capacity to improve further.

The continuous improvements to the curriculum ensure that all pupils are provided with interesting and often exciting learning experiences including residential visits. There is a particularly strong focus on developing basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Good use is made of computers to promote research skills and learning. Pupils are taught to speak French and Polish and enjoy attending a wide range of school clubs.

The highly effective promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral and social development contributes enormously to pupils' positive attitudes and high achievement. Through topics and frequent visits to different places of worship, pupils have a good understanding of cultures and religions other than their own. Their multicultural awareness is enhanced by close links with the Gambia. The International School Award recognises the quality of their work and pupils' knowledge.

All safeguarding policies and procedures are reviewed regularly and safety checks are frequent and rigorous. The school has an effective policy for ensuring all pupils are treated equally. It is a truly inclusive school in which there is no evidence of discrimination and all pupils have their individual needs met exceptionally well. The extremely positive responses made by parents and carers to over half the questions in the inspection questionnaire shows their appreciation of the school and all that it is doing for their children.

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.



5 July 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's Catholic Primary School, Birmingham, B42 1NU

Thank you for your welcome when we inspected your school. We enjoyed our time with you very much. A special thank you goes to those of you who shared your views with us through questionnaires, in meetings and at lunchtime. You told us that you feel extremely safe and very well cared for and we found plenty of evidence to support this view in the well-organised breakfast club, in lessons and around the school. Your excellent attendance is a credit to you all.

We judged that your school is outstanding. You clearly enjoy school and behave exceptionally well in and out of lessons. We found that the things you learn about in lessons are well planned, challenging and often fun. Teaching at your school is outstanding.

Your headteacher, all the staff and governors do an excellent job in leading and organising the school. Every member of staff is involved in arrangements to check how well you are doing and to find anything that is not as good as it should be. As a result, you make excellent progress and achieve high standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Reception children settle quickly and make rapid progress, especially those who are learning to speak English. In Key Stages 1 and 2, the curriculum gives you lots of fantastic things to do such as learning to speak Polish, visiting Liverpool as part of your studies into the slave trade or turning a canal barge into a pirate ship! You also have an excellent choice of after-school clubs to enjoy.

In most lessons, you make full use of your reading, writing and computer skills and your work is of a high standard by the time you leave school. We have asked your teachers to give you time to make corrections to your work to make it even better. We hope that you will continue to work hard to reach even higher standards. Congratulations on what you have achieved so far and best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Joseph Peacock
Lead inspector

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