

St Mary Roman Catholic Primary School, Royston

Melbourn Road, Royston, SG8 7DB

Inspection dates 12–13 September 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Most pupils make good progress and learn well in reading, writing and mathematics. A small proportion achieved very high standards in the 2012 standard assessment tests (SATs).
- Teaching and learning are good across the school and some teaching is outstanding in Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils and plan interesting, practical learning activities. Pupils engage fully, leading to purposeful and enjoyable experiences within a rich, broad range of subjects.
- Pupils enjoy school and are very respectful of each other and adults. Behaviour is exemplary, attendance above average and there are no exclusions. Pupils feel safe because they are well looked after.
- The headteacher leads by example. There is a strong, equally committed team in which all contribute well to the school's high standards of work and conduct. Rigorous monitoring by senior leaders has led to improved teaching and learning.
- Governance is effective because governors understand how to interpret assessment information to check how well pupils learn.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupil assessment is not consistent, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage, which affects the accuracy of planning for individual needs.
- Handwriting and presentation are variable across the school.
- Marking does not give sufficient guidance to enable pupils to know precisely what they must do next to improve further.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 16 lessons, of which four were joint observations with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. In addition, the inspectors made a number of shorter visits to lessons.
- Inspectors discussed school matters with two groups of pupils, talked to the Chair of the Governing Body, the local authority consultant, members of the school leadership team and middle leaders.
- Inspectors took account of 11 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the school's own survey.
- Inspectors looked at a number of documents, including the school's own data on the progress of individual pupils and groups in all classes, planning documents, the school's key improvement priorities, governing body minutes, attendance records and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

June Woolhouse, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Bimla Thakur

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school achieved academy status in July 2012.
- It is average in size for its type and admits pupils from other faiths as well as those from the Catholic community.
- Very few pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of pupils, identified as disabled or with special educational needs supported through school action, is broadly comparable with national averages; a below-average proportion is supported at school action plus. No pupils have statements of special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils learning English as an additional language is average.
- There is a breakfast and after-school club, both of which operate in term time.
- Children aged 3 join the Nursery class of the Early Years Foundation Stage on a part-time basis and attend the Reception class full-time.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expected for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching by:
 - increasing the accuracy of assessment of pupils' learning, particularly the youngest
 - engaging periodically with other teachers outside of school to moderate these judgements
 - marking pupils' work more thoroughly and advising them, in writing or through discussion, precisely what they should consider next to improve and make further progress.
- Improve presentation of work by:
 - establishing a school-wide policy on handwriting
 - ensuring that all staff, teachers and teaching assistants, model letter and numeral formation correctly in all classes
 - ensuring that increasing fluency in cursive handwriting is an integral part of learning to spell.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6 and Year 2 have been consistently above the national average since 2007. The dip in 2011 standards at the end of Year 6 has been reversed. Standards in 2012 were again well above national averages, and a number of pupils attained Level 6 in the national tests, which is much higher than the nationally expected level.
- Pupils begin learning from average starting points and make good progress across both key stages. More pupils achieve two levels of progress in English and mathematics by Year 6 compared with national averages.
- Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills expected for their age. They make the expected progress in all six areas of this curriculum by the time they enter Year 1.
- Pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs make good progress because their specific needs are identified quickly and they receive extra support.
- The few pupils eligible for pupil premium support make at least the expected progress because they receive dedicated teaching from teaching assistants in reading, writing and mathematics. These pupils benefit from wider curricular experiences through visits and trips as part of the school's policy for inclusion, eliminating discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity.
- Pupils whose first language is not English make good progress because they are quickly integrated into school procedures which include regular assessment of their learning.
- Almost all pupils in Year 1 reached the required standard in the test of their knowledge of letters and sounds (phonics). They recognise the names and sounds letters make, individually or combined, because they start to acquire these necessary pre-reading skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Standards in reading are high throughout the school because teachers know it is the passport to independent learning. It is well taught, systematically and regularly. Parents and carers contribute by supporting their children's reading at home. The school expects and encourages their support on a daily basis.
- Reading diary comments provide a good link between home and school. Pupils read widely. They successfully acquire information in other curriculum subjects; for example, history, geography, religious education and science.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good in most subjects. There is appropriate emphasis on regular teaching of the key literacy skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. Mathematics teaching provides sufficient opportunity to use calculation skills in real-life mathematics problems, for example to interpret graphs.
- Teachers have high expectations and require a lot of effort from their pupils. They plan interesting lessons suited to pupils' ages and different abilities in each class. They enable pupils to take an active part in learning by discussing with a partner what they are going to do next or by jotting down their initial ideas on white boards.

- Some teaching is outstanding. In these lessons, pupils are inspired by compelling visual and auditory images, for example Second World War battles, which enable them to empathise quite closely with what they see and hear. These experiences are translated very effectively into good quality writing.
- Teachers make good use of teaching assistants to support small groups or individual pupils with particular learning needs. These pupils have time to practise their reading, writing and number work in order to consolidate their learning or receive immediate help if they get stuck. Other pupils have sufficient resources to solve problems independently.
- Teachers regularly assess pupils' work using national guidance matched to National Curriculum levels of attainment. Results are recorded systematically on a school tracking system and each pupils' progress can be retrieved for each term and year throughout the key stage. Assessments are increasingly more accurate, although there is further to go to assure this is also the case in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Teachers do not give enough relevant information to pupils when they mark their books. This means that not all pupils know precisely what they need to do next to improve their knowledge and understanding in a particular subject. Teachers do not plan in time to talk to younger pupils in detail about their mistakes.
- No consistent school policy for teaching cursive (joined-up) handwriting exists. Pupils do not always form their letters and numerals correctly which slows down their recording. They have too few opportunities to embed the link between letter strings in their spellings, for example 'ight', and fluency in handwriting. Mediocre handwriting affects the overall quality of presentation in some books.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary in class, around the school and at playtimes. Pupils are naturally polite and considerate towards each other because all adults provide this role model for them.
- Pupils learn that all people are equally valued in their school, that everyone can contribute to the common good and that these beliefs are at the core of the school's particular ethos. These aspirations permeate all its work and make a significant contribution to pupils' well-being and enjoyment of learning.
- Pupils talk with understanding about fairness and what is right and wrong in the world. The school's rich and broad curriculum and well-developed religious education programme are significant factors in pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils attend school very regularly, are punctual and want to learn because teachers understand their needs and plan accordingly. In class, pupils thrive and make good progress because they are actively involved in learning tasks and do not have to sit too long listening to adults.
- Pupils are very clear about what very good behaviour looks like and are categorical about the absence of bullying in their school. If anyone starts to stray, 'The teachers sort that out immediately.' There have been no exclusions.
- Pupils enjoy being a school buddy to younger pupils and understand that being small might be quite daunting for some children. They extend this consideration to lunchtimes. The excellent behaviour of older pupils and sensitive adult supervision sets the tone for a civilised and sociable time. Good quality, freshly-prepared food is another significant factor.

- Pupils feel safe because the school's procedures for safeguarding and health and safety are thorough and comprehensive. Pupils are taught about internet safety as well as how to be safe in and outside of school. Parents and carers appreciate the care that is extended to their children by the school.

The leadership and management are good

- Informed and incisive leadership by the headteacher is translated into effective primary provision by all staff and leads to good pupil progress and outstanding attitudes to learning. The school's ethos reflects clearly its particular aims, set out in its mission statement, and impacts strongly on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
 - Effective management of teachers' performance and well-targeted professional development opportunities have improved attainment in mathematics and writing. Teaching is carefully monitored and accurately evaluated to identify areas for improvement.
 - Systematic and daily teaching of phonics and reading underpin the importance the school attaches to developing successfully the crucial first steps of literacy. High levels of attainment are testament to the success of this approach.
 - Well-managed pupil performance data provide all staff with information on individual pupil progress. Senior leaders identify any pupils who make less progress than they should, and plan further support to accelerate their progress.
 - Rich and varied curriculum activities motivate pupils, enable them to apply their literacy and numeracy skills and deepen their understanding. Art and design, music, physical education, religious education, science, information and communication technology, history and geography are equally well-planned to interest and challenge all pupils.
 - Widely-promoted, good quality ICT resources are well managed and used very effectively as communication and learning tools for pupils, staff and adults and carers alike.
 - Accurate self-evaluation, led by the headteacher, has sharpened the focus of where improvements are needed in both school resources and teaching skills. The Early Years Foundation Stage has improved since the last inspection, well-supported by the local authority. The accuracy of assessments have fluctuated until recently. Children now have good opportunities to investigate and explore both inside and out-of-doors.
 - Extensive and varied means of communicating with parents and carers ensure they are well-informed about their children's progress and well-being. They are considered as equal partners with the school in the education of their children and are valued for their contributions in school, accompanying trips and raising funds.
 - The local authority provides effective support, including for the improvement of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- **The governance of the school:**
- is informed, well-led and fully supportive of the school's work and priorities
 - holds the school to account effectively for its performance because governors are increasingly knowledgeable about how to interpret the range of evidence that informs their actions.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	138292
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	408511

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	221
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Jones
Headteacher	Robert Dunbar
Date of previous school inspection	12 June 2008
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