

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Greenfield Road, Gillingham, Kent, ME7 1YH

Inspection dates 31 January–1 February 2013

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		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- St Mary's Catholic Primary is a school that lives up to its aim of providing 'a warm, supportive, happy, community Catholic school with high expectations of pupils and staff'. Parents and carers, pupils, governors and staff are very proud of their school and its achievements.
- Achievement is good. From their low starting points, pupils make good progress across the school and by the time they leave, they are well prepared for the next stage in their education. Above average attainment has been maintained over five years despite significant changes to the school population.
- Teaching is never less than good and sometimes it is outstanding. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons that are fun and well matched to the interests and abilities of the pupils.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is exceptional. Pupils are invariably polite, friendly and considerate. They have very positive attitudes to learning and work very hard in lessons and when completing written tasks. They feel very safe in school because they know that the adults they work with are committed to their welfare and there is no serious bullying.
- School leaders are passionate in their ambitions for the pupils and all the staff are united in finding ways to overcome barriers to learning and improving the quality of teaching.
- The curriculum is extremely successful in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is further enhanced by the school's distinctive Catholic character.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Not enough teaching is outstanding and pupils' achievement is good rather than outstanding. Some pupils do not fully understand how targets can help them make even better progress and teachers do not always find ways of challenging higher ability pupils in lessons.
- Pupils do not routinely have the opportunity to respond to comments made by teachers in their books.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 27 lessons, of which three were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors listened to pupils read in Years 1, 2 and 6 and attended an assembly.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including the self-evaluation improvement form, the school's safeguarding documentation, governors' minutes, teachers' planning and attendance data.
- Meetings were held with representatives of the governing body and the local authority, the school project manager who arranges counselling and sessions in the Place2Be and the Home School Support Worker. Interviews were held with key staff, including senior leaders and subject leaders, and groups of pupils.
- Inspectors took account of the 40 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and a paper questionnaire distributed to parents and carers by the governing body. Informal meetings were held with parents and carers at the beginning of the school day. Staff questionnaires were also taken into account.

Inspection team

John Sweet, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Nicholas Rudman

Additional inspector

Victoria Turner

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mary's Catholic Primary School is a larger than average primary school.
- A much larger than average proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic groups.
- The proportion of pupils whose first language is not English is well above average.
- The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding (additional money given to schools for particular pupils, including those who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those that are looked after) is lower than average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action is above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- Since the last inspection, a nursery class has been added which runs two sessions each day.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision for its pupils.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding by ensuring that:
 - staff are able to access appropriate training
 - there is consistency in the use of pupils' targets
 - pupils are more involved in setting and evaluating their progress towards targets
 - lessons are adapted to take account of what pupils know.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start in the Nursery class with skills and abilities that are well below the levels expected for their age. They get off to an excellent start and make quick progress because there is a strong focus on developing children's ability to communicate with each other and learn about the world around them.
- All groups of pupils from Reception to Year 6 make good progress and reach standards which are above average in both English and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 2.
- In Year 1, pupils' attainment in the phonics (blending of sounds) screening check was below average in 2012. However, the recently introduced reading and writing programme is already leading to significant improvements in this area.
- The school carefully monitors the progress of all groups and adapts the teaching methods to ensure that their good progress is maintained. The largest group is the number of pupils for whom English is an additional language. These pupils make good progress across the school because there are many opportunities in class and in other school activities for them to hear and speak English in a supportive atmosphere. As a result, they gain confidence quickly.
- At Key Stage 2, boys do a little better than girls in mathematics and girls do better than boys in writing. The school is aware of this and has put in place measures to correct this difference. As a result, more boys are now making better progress in writing and girls are making better progress in mathematics.
- Progress in mathematics is good because teachers have good subject knowledge and lessons are active and fun. In 2012, many more-able pupils made better than expected progress and reached the highest levels.
- Pupils' progress is regularly reviewed by all staff and pupils likely to fall behind are quickly identified and support arranged to help them keep up.
- The school places a high value on the importance of reading, both as a source of pleasure and as a tool for learning. Pupils make good progress throughout the school as a result of enthusiastic teaching and a well-structured programme of phonics teaching. By the end of Year 6, standards in reading are above average. Many pupils are committed readers. One such pupil in Year 2 said that she had read *Great Expectations* already and that she is not sure which she likes the most, reading or her bed!
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. They are very well supported in lessons and with specialist programmes, often run by well trained teaching assistants.
- Those pupils supported by the pupil premium make at least as good progress in English as other groups in the school. In the national tests for 11 year olds in 2012, their attainment was higher than the same group nationally by 1.5 average points in English. Compared to other groups in the school, the gap is closing.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers plan imaginative lessons which are well matched to pupils' abilities. As a result, pupils enjoy learning and are making good progress.
- Behaviour management is consistent and calm. This contributes to a very positive learning environment and ensures that little time is wasted in lessons.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and are very clear about what they intend to teach and why. They use questions effectively to check pupils' understanding and to stimulate thought and discussion. Occasionally, teaching is not adapted to take account of those pupils who already know a lot about a particular topic.
- Basic skills are taught well. Teachers and support assistants in the Early Years Foundation Stage

are skilled in promoting language development by the good use of questions and by arranging activities which encourage children to communicate, think and use the skills they are learning. In the Nursery class, children are keen to write in response to a party invitation and to create their own recipes.

- Blending sounds sessions are taught well by teachers and teaching assistants. Good routines are established and the lessons are active and fun. Pupils make consistently good progress in learning how sounds are represented by letters and use this knowledge when deciphering new words and in their writing.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress because they are well supported in lessons by well-trained teachers and support staff. The school provides additional support for pupils with specific needs and also works closely with other professionals to ensure they get the help they need.
- The pupil premium has provided additional support and resources for the teaching of letters and sounds. This is ensuring that pupils are now making better progress in reading and writing. Older pupils have access to counselling and therapy sessions.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make good progress across the school because the teaching is carefully structured and takes account of pupils' language skills. Teachers model language well and encourage pupils to communicate extensively with each other.
- Marking is detailed and frequent. Teachers provide accurate feedback to pupils about what they have done well and often point out what they could do to improve. Sometimes, pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to respond to what the teacher has said.
- Pupils have their own targets in English and mathematics. However, they are not always sure about how these are set and reviewed or what they need to do to achieve them.
- Teaching assistants are skilled, appropriately trained and support pupils well in lessons. They undertake a vital role alongside teachers in helping pupils learn the basic skills of reading and writing. They manage pupils' behaviour well and enjoy good relationships with them.
- Parents and carers agree that their children are taught well and that they are happy in school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils are eager to learn, unfailingly polite and respectful to each other, the staff and visitors alike. They show great consideration for others. In class, they are very conscientious. They listen carefully to their teachers and to each other and produce work of a high standard.
- Pupils work extremely well in groups and in pairs. They particularly enjoy using drama as a way of learning and their excellent attitude to this way of working ensures that they make the most of these learning opportunities.
- Playtimes and breaks are generally happy, sociable, relaxed and friendly. Pupils make friends easily and organise games in small groups or chat to their friends. Even the heavy rain seems not to dampen their cheerfulness.
- Assemblies are calm and strongly reflect the religious character of the school. Behaviour on these occasions is exemplary. In a Key Stage 2 assembly, pupils listened extremely well and were thoughtful and reflective in their answers to questions posed by the teacher about meals associated with special events in their lives.
- Pupils feel exceptionally safe in school because they know that the adults who work with them are committed to their safety and show a genuine concern for their welfare.
- Pupils are aware of the different types of bullying and how to keep themselves safe. This knowledge is reinforced through activities in lessons and during anti-bullying week, but they say that there is virtually no bullying in the school. They do say that at worst, some pupils can be 'a tiny bit mean to each other'.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their good attendance. There are robust procedures in place for encouraging good attendance and also for following up pupils whose attendance falls below the expected high level.

- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are eager to learn and their behaviour is excellent because teachers have very high expectations and plan activities which are thoroughly engaging and exciting.
- Parents and carers who were spoken to during the inspection and those who responded to the online questionnaire agree that their children are safe in school and behave well.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- There is an exceptionally high level of commitment to the school's vision of raising standards and providing the very best education for all its pupils. This commonly held vision has led to exceptional standards of behaviour and personal development. By the time they leave school, pupils are mature, have highly developed social skills and are very well prepared for the next stage of their education. The headteacher's leadership is the embodiment of the values and aspirations the school seeks to promote.
- The leadership of the headteacher and other senior leaders is outstanding. They know the school and all the pupils well and provide a very strong lead in their areas of responsibility. Subject leaders have played a key role in establishing the new and highly successful approach to the teaching of letters and sounds. This ambition for the pupils is evident among all of the staff. They have maintained their high expectations of behaviour and learning and adapted quickly to rapidly changing circumstances, most notably the increase in the number of pupils for whom English is not their first language.
- The curriculum is carefully planned to provide a range of interesting themes and topics covering a number of subjects, including history, geography and science. The result of this work can be seen in the colourful and interesting displays around the school alongside artwork of a very high standard. The curriculum is extremely successful in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and making sure pupils have equality of opportunity and that no one is discriminated against.
- Subject leaders and other leaders have a very good understanding of their areas of responsibility and take a strong lead in continuing to improve them because they have been given opportunities to lead and attended training to support them in their roles.
- Self-evaluation is robust and accurate and enables the school to pinpoint exactly the right priorities for improvement based on secure evidence. This constant reviewing of progress is part of a well-established procedure designed to ensure continuous improvement.
- This is a truly inclusive school where all members of the school community feel valued and supported. All groups of pupils make good progress relative to their starting points. The school is especially concerned to ensure that those pupils who may become vulnerable are very well supported and has invested in counselling services and therapy sessions to support them. These facilities are held in high regard by parents and carers and pupils alike.
- There is unanimous agreement among the staff that this is a great place to work. One new member of staff says that she has been overwhelmed by the caring nature of the school which supports both pupils and adults extremely well.
- There is an unremitting focus on improving the quality of teaching and leaders have made a significant impact on the quality of teaching and accelerating the progress of pupils. This can be seen in the improved standards of writing in Key Stage 2 and in the rapid improvements that pupils are now making in reading and writing in Key Stage 1. School assessment information indicates that progress is accelerating in many important areas and that pupils are on course to meet challenging targets in 2013 and 2014.
- Newly qualified teachers receive exceptionally good support and are already making a strong contribution to the school. They have highly experienced mentors, but say that everybody is extremely helpful in providing timely support and guidance.
- Although recently introduced, the new approach to teaching sounds and letters is leading to rapid improvements in literacy skills, including for those pupils for whom English is an additional language.

- Performance management procedures are firmly established and ensure that efforts are squarely aimed at improving pupils' progress in the areas identified by the school as needing improvement. Training for all staff is clearly linked to these priorities and this is contributing to improvements in the quality of teaching and in the rates of pupils' progress. Staff are rigorously held to account for their performance and teachers have been awarded pay rises appropriately.
- Safeguarding arrangements are very thorough and ensure that all regular visitors and adults who work in the school have been checked.
- Parents and carers are fully supportive of the school and agree that pupils' behaviour and safety are good. All the parents and carers who responded to Parent View agreed that they would recommend the school to another parent or carer.
- The local authority has confidence in the leadership of the school. Although the school is judged to require only light touch support, a good partnership has been established and it has encouraged the school in its work in supporting local schools.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors are well informed about the work of the school through their visits to the school and through the various reports they receive about the performance of the pupils. As a result of this good information, they are able to make exceptionally good decisions about the deployment of staff and resources.
- They have been closely involved in developing the vision of the school and have taken the lead in adapting the provision to take account of the changing needs of the pupils. The most important example of this has been the establishment of, in partnership with the Local Authority, a highly successful and well-equipped Nursery class in response to the low levels of attainment into the Reception classes. This decision is having a very positive impact on the learning and progress of the very youngest children.
- Governors have recently undertaken a questionnaire for parents and carers and analysed the high number of responses. Parents and carers were overwhelmingly positive, but the governors have considered all the responses carefully and are using the information to further improve the provision.
- They challenge the senior staff about key areas of the school's work and closely monitor the impact of recent initiatives, such as the new approach to teaching letters and sounds and the additional funds to support potentially vulnerable pupils. They have a clear awareness of the quality of teaching and how improvements are to be made building on strengths already in the school.
- They are aware how the pupil premium has been spent and the impact extra teaching assistant hours has on the teaching of basic skills and pupils' progress.
- They understand how well the school is doing compared to other schools and oversee the rigorous procedures used for checking up on teachers' performance.
- They keep up to date with their own training in a number of areas through their attendance at events arranged by the local authority.

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	118782
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	403365

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
Number of pupils on the school roll	473
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Patrick Johnston
Headteacher	Bernadette Long
Date of previous school inspection	4–5 December 2007
Telephone number	01634 855783
Fax number	01634 856459
Email address	stmaryrcp.medway.sch.uk

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