

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Woodside Way, Northampton, NN5 7HX

Inspection dates

5–6 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Given their individual starting points when they join the school, pupils achieve well. This is because teaching is good and sometimes outstanding.
- Pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. They are friendly and welcoming and keen to share their experiences and achievements.
- Pupils feel safe, secure and valued within the school community.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good because of the way this is promoted and developed in lessons and in activities and visits beyond the school.
- The pace of improvement since the school's previous inspection has been rapid. School leaders, and especially the headteacher, are relentless in their drive to improve teaching and raise standards.
- Parents and pupils speak highly of the school.
- Highly skilled governors know the school well. They provide a good level of challenge and support.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding. The most-able pupils are not always given work that is challenging enough and, at times, marking does not give pupils clear advice on how to improve.
- Standards in writing, whilst improving, are not yet high enough.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 17 lessons, two of which were seen together with the headteacher. Seven teachers and their teaching assistants were seen working with pupils.
- Inspectors attended a whole school assembly.
- Inspectors looked at the work in pupils' books and on classroom displays. They listened to children from Years 1 to 6 reading, and attended daily registration time.
- Inspectors met with pupils from Years 1 to 6, and talked to pupils during lessons, in the playground and as they moved around the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, subject or phase leaders and governors. Inspectors also gathered views from representatives of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 19 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and spoke informally with parents and carers at the start of the school day.
- Questionnaires completed by 18 members of staff were taken into account.
- A wide range of school documents were reviewed. These included development plans, policies, the school's own judgement of its strengths and weaknesses, various monitoring, safeguarding and planning records, information provided for families and governing body documents.

Inspection team

Ruth Dollner, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Michael Lavelle

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mary's Catholic Primary School is a smaller-than-average primary school in the north-west of Northampton.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is higher than average and is rising. An above-average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium, which in this school provides funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is above average and has risen over the past year.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is much higher than average and the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- A higher-than-average proportion of pupils join and leave the school at times other than the start of the Reception Year.
- There have been significant changes to the leadership of the school since the previous inspection. The headteacher joined the school in September 2012 when the acting headteacher returned to her post as deputy headteacher. New subject and phase leaders have been appointed.
- The school is part of a hard federation that formed in June 2013, comprising four local Catholic schools. The federation shares a governing body but St Mary's retains its own governing body committee.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that more of it is outstanding by:
 - making sure that work planned for the most able is always challenging enough
 - ensuring that marking and feedback offer pupils clear advice on what they need to do better to improve.
- Further improve standards in writing by making sure that planning provides regular opportunities for writing at length in a range of forms for a range of purposes.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children join Reception with skills that are lower than is typical for their age. They come from a range of settings with varying pre-school experience. At St Mary's they make good progress in all areas of learning due to good teaching and high quality provision developed by the dedicated staff team. By the end of Reception the proportion of pupils making good progress or better is much higher than average.
- Standards in reading, writing and mathematics in Key Stage 1 were low at the time of the previous inspection but have since improved with many more pupils achieving expected skills and knowledge. It is clear from pupils' work in Key Stage 1 and from the good teaching they are receiving that they are progressing at a fast rate and standards are set to improve again this year.
- In 2013 the number of pupils who met the expected standard in the Year 1 check on phonics (the sounds that letters make) improved greatly and exceeded national averages. This is due to the high quality teaching of phonics in the Reception Year and in Key Stage 1. It is also due to the support the school has provided for parents to involve them in their children's learning.
- Pupils with special educational needs make good progress which is similar to or better than their peers. This is due to the good teaching and support they receive in lessons as well as the specific support programmes the school has in place.
- Pupils eligible for pupil premium funding make progress which is at least as good as their peers and often better. This is a result of good careful planning and support to meet their needs. In 2012 these pupils were about one and a half terms ahead of their classmates in English and half a term ahead of them in mathematics.
- Pupils who left school in 2012 made expected progress across Key Stage 2 and good progress from their starting points. School data show that pupils made good progress following the previous inspection and this was true for the final year of those who left in 2012. The improvement resulted in good progress for those who left in 2013. Work in children's books shows that this trend of improvement is continuing.
- Progress in all year groups is good and some of it is outstanding. The school has good capacity to strengthen this progress further.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have improved since 2011 and are now broadly average. Predictions for 2014 based on accurate understanding of how well pupils are doing show that the outcomes are set to improve again this year with more pupils reaching the higher levels.
- Pupils who join the school part way through their primary education make similar progress to others because of the support provided.
- Reading is well promoted in the school and pupils spoken to during the inspection enjoy reading both fiction and non-fiction. Standards in writing across the school have risen but need to improve further to make sure the more-able pupils achieve the higher levels they are capable of.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good with some outstanding. It is consistent throughout the school. Pupils are keen to learn because teachers and teaching assistants are skilled in using a range of ways to motivate and engage them. Role play, technology, games and other practical activities are all used to good effect. For example, in a dance lesson, Reception children were in role as dinosaurs in order to explore different kinds of movements.
- Lessons are well planned and there is a good balance of pupils working on their own, with partners and in groups. This helps them to talk about and improve their learning. For example, in a Year 6 lesson on 'The Egyptians', pupils worked in pairs and groups to compare different views on Queen Cleopatra. Pupils challenged each other's opinions sensitively and skilfully and made excellent progress within the lesson.
- Teachers ensure that pupils work hard in lessons. The positive climate for learning is supported by effective deployment of teaching assistants who make a strong contribution to learning across the schools. Pupils eligible for pupil premium funding, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are particularly well supported and make good progress. During small-group sessions, led by teaching assistants, on the sounds letters make in Key Stage 1, children of all abilities were making visible and rapid progress in reading and writing skills.
- Teachers have high expectations and plan enjoyable and stimulating activities but sometimes the more-able pupils are not challenged enough in lessons. In a Key Stage 1 mathematics lesson, mixed-ability group work led to more-able pupils revisiting number work that was too easy for them and they did not make the progress they were capable of. In a Key Stage 2 literacy lesson the shared reading session provided little challenge for more-able readers.
- The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are taught systematically across the school. The teaching of mathematics has improved significantly since the previous inspection and teachers have worked hard to apply mathematics work in other subjects. The 'maths across the curriculum' books displayed by every year group show how pupils are enjoying learning and achieving well. In lessons, pupils say that maths is 'fun'.
- Initiatives such as 'Drama for writing' are leading to improvements. However, in some year groups there are not enough opportunities for pupils to write at length for a range of purposes and in a range of forms in other subjects. Too much time is spent on isolated writing tasks designed to see how well pupils are doing rather than to write for meaningful purposes. When teaching is outstanding, pupils write at length about interesting themes related to their connected curriculum work.
- During lessons, teachers make pupils aware of what they are about to learn and make the steps to success clear for pupils in interesting ways such as 'the magic list' in Key Stage 1. When teaching is outstanding lessons are re-shaped based on children's responses.
- All teachers mark and respond to pupils' work regularly. They give feedback about the work and generally encourage learners. However, marking does not always give pupils clear enough directions about what they need to do next to move to the next level in their learning and pupils do not always have the opportunity to respond to teacher's comments.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- School records and the inspectors' observations confirm that behaviour in lessons and around

the school are good.

- Pupils are eager to learn and the foundations for pupils' good attitude to learning are laid securely in Reception. Instances of low level disruptions in lessons are rare.
- Pupils are welcoming and friendly and keen to share their experiences and achievements. They are kind and supportive to each other and to the staff. Pupils are proud of the school mission statement which is underpinned by a strong Catholic ethos. In assemblies they 'perform' it with pride and enthusiasm.
- In an outstanding assembly led by the headteacher, all pupils were patient, kind and supportive when there were problems with the taped music. The sense of a caring community is strong.
- Parents and carers are extremely positive about the school and believe their children are happy and safe. This is clear from discussions with parents and in their responses to Parent View and the school's own recent questionnaire. All minor issues are dealt with swiftly, fairly and effectively.
- There is an effective behaviour policy which is used consistently across the school. Instances of exclusion have become rare and though attendance has been low in the past, it is improving rapidly and is now securely average. The school makes a sustained effort to prevent pupils from being away from school for long periods and leaders are relentless in seeking local authority support with this.
- Pupils feel safe and cared for at school. They are aware of bullying in all its forms but say that they are not aware of any bullying at St Mary's.

The leadership and management are good

- The highly respected head teacher provides inspirational leadership for staff and pupils. He is ably supported by the leadership team who share his high expectations and vision to make St Mary's an outstanding school. They have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and development planning is sharply focussed on raising standards and improving the quality of teaching. As a result, there have been rapid and sustainable improvements since the previous inspection.
- Leaders have developed good systems for monitoring staff performance and this has led to improved teaching. These are securely linked to pay awards and to planning for further training and support for teachers.
- Subject leaders are becoming increasingly involved in the monitoring of progress made by individual and groups of pupils and they have supported teachers well in making judgements about how well pupils are doing.
- Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and children benefit from good provision both indoors and out supported by good teaching.
- The 'connected curriculum' inspires pupils and provides good opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Visits and visitors provide good enrichment opportunities. Year 1 pupils working in their 'castle' role play area talked animatedly about their forthcoming trip to a 'real' castle next week.

- Provision for pupils with special needs is managed well and pupil progress is carefully tracked. The school is vigilant in supporting lower-achieving pupils and their 'spotlight' system for focussing on individuals is working well and leading to good or better progress. There is no discrimination within the school and there is a strong focus on ensuring equality of opportunity.
- Careful planning and high quality teaching to support pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium has resulted in pupils making good or better progress and often achieving outcomes which are better than those for pupils who are not eligible for the support. Leaders are now rightly focussed on the more-able pupils within and beyond this group to ensure they meet the higher levels they are capable of.
- The local authority supports the good work of the leadership team and has offered appropriate guidance and advice.
- The school has good relationships with parents. All those who completed the Parent View survey said they would recommend the school to another parent.
- All staff questionnaires were very positive about the school and particularly the leadership of the headteacher. A typical comment was 'The school has gone from strength to strength'.
- The new school sports fund has been spent on exciting projects to develop specialist P.E. skills including partnerships with Northampton Town football club and Northampton Saints Study Support Centre.
- Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet all statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body committee consists of highly experienced governors and is well led by the committee chair, who has good first-hand knowledge of the school. They are well-trained and provide good support and challenge to the school leaders.
 - Governors are well informed about the work of the school and have a secure understanding of the school's performance in comparison to that of other schools. They are clear on the use of the pupil premium grant and on the impact this has had on pupils' achievement. They understand the need to reward staff when pupils make good progress and monitor pay awards to ensure that they reflect pupil performance.

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	122036
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	425020

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	184
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Hugh Williams
Headteacher	Mark Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2011
Telephone number	01604 581011
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