

St Mary's Hare Park School

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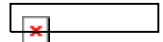
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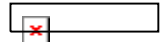
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Introduction and summary

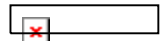


Purpose and scope of the inspection



This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 163 of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

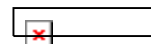
Information about the school



St. Mary's Hare Park is a Roman Catholic independent primary school for girls and boys, situated in Gidea Park, a suburb of Romford in Essex. It has its origins in Hare Park School which was established in smaller premises in the local area in 1926. The school moved to Hare Cottage, its present premises, in 1935. The school was bought by the Roman Catholic Order of the Sisters of Mercy in 1964. Upon the withdrawal of the order in 1988, the school became a non-profit making charitable trust, overseen by a board of trustees.

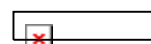
There are 146 full-time pupils on roll between the ages of four and eleven years and six part-time three-year-olds. Three pupils have special educational needs. Twenty eight pupils are funded under the Nursery Education Scheme. At the age of eleven, pupils transfer to various schools within the state or independent sectors. The school aims to 'encourage the children within a happy, friendly working atmosphere to attain the highest personal, academic and social skills'.

Summary of main findings



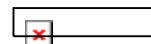
St Mary's Hare Park is a good school with some significant strengths. It provides pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum. The very good relationships between staff and pupils help to create a happy community. Good teaching by a committed staff enables pupils to attain very high standards by the time they leave the school. The school supports pupils in becoming responsible and mature members of the community. The headteacher provides strong and dedicated leadership which ensures that the school meets its aims.

What the school does well



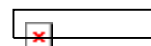
- the quality of teaching is good. This promotes good progress and enables pupils to attain very high standards in English, mathematics and music;
- it makes very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, and social development;
- it provides pupils with a well-resourced, safe and stimulating environment in which they behave very well; and
- it prepares pupils very effectively for secondary school entrance examinations and for the next stage in their education.

What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations



- confirm the medical fitness of staff prior to the confirmation of their appointment;
- ensure a consistent and controlled supply of hot water to all washbasins; and
- provide further information for parents as detailed in section 6.

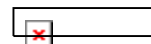
Next steps



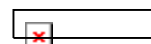
Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- improve the quality of marking and feedback so that pupils know what they could do better;
- increase opportunities for older pupils to write at length and for different purposes; and
- provide more activities that encourage pupils to use and apply their knowledge in mathematics.

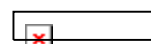
Compliance with the regulations for registration



1. The quality of education provided by the school



The quality of the curriculum



St Mary's Hare Park provides a curriculum which is broad, balanced and supports pupils' intellectual, physical, social and spiritual development effectively.

The school teaches all the subjects of the National Curriculum and French. The school's curriculum and subject policies detail how each subject is taught and schemes of work describe the content for each year group. The school considers National Curriculum guidance in planning its curriculum. Pupils benefit from specialist teaching in Religious Education (RE), information and communication technology (ICT), physical education (PE), music and speech and drama.

In the Foundation Stage the curriculum is based on the national guidance for this age range. It is well-planned and has an appropriate emphasis on the role of play in learning. Learning objectives are identified for each activity. Classes are resourced effectively for a wide range of activities; books, videos and other learning equipment are in ample supply.

In Key Stages 1 and 2 the curriculum is very successful in developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils become proficient readers and writers at a young age and pupils in Key Stage 1 can produce pieces of extended writing in which they use apt vocabulary and show an increasing awareness of the reader. There are fewer opportunities for pupils to write at length and for different purposes towards the end of Key Stage 2 although there is a strong focus on grammar and comprehension. In mathematics there is a very strong emphasis on arithmetic and pupils from Year 2 do regular exercises which involve the four rules of number. While other aspects of mathematics such as shape, space and measure are taught through the scheme of work, there is less emphasis on using and applying mathematics, investigations and problem solving.

Provision for music is very good. From Year 2, all pupils have the opportunity to learn to play an instrument and many sit external examinations up to grade 4 of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. The school choir and orchestra perform to a very high degree of proficiency. Pupils in Year 6 can compose their own melodies and improve their songs by using instruments to add rhythms.

The school has planned systematically to improve provision in ICT and it is good. Carefully devised cross-curricular links enable pupils to develop ICT skills which they use in a variety of contexts. For example, pupils in the nursery select items and drag and drop them, while those in Year 5 confidently search for and retrieve information from databases they have helped to set up within their history topic.

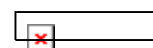
The school follows the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs (SEN) and makes good provision for pupils who require additional support. Such pupils work to an individual education plan and are set realistic but challenging targets. Where appropriate, external agencies are used to provide additional support and detailed records are kept on each pupil and their progress towards

their targets. Parents are involved in review meetings and are encouraged to support their children at home. The school has a written policy for supporting pupils for whom English is an additional language although most start school with a high degree of proficiency in English and therefore require little additional support.

Pupils study personal, social and health education through RE, science and a successful programme of activities which address specific aspects. Sex education is taught through RE and science and the school intends to pilot a new diocesan sex education programme in January 2005. The police community liaison team for the area visits the school three times a year to present a range of topics including safety, personal protection, bullying, peer pressure and rights and responsibilities. Parents with relevant professional expertise contribute to the programme by teaching pupils about, for example, dental hygiene and the dangers of smoking.

The school provides an extensive and enriching range of extra-curricular activities during lunchtime or after school. Around half of these activities are run by external agencies and parents are charged for these. The curriculum is also enhanced by visits to educational venues, and by visitors who bring road shows and workshops into the school.

The quality of the teaching and assessment



Overall, teaching is good and some is very good. Such teaching ensures that all pupils, including those with SEN, make good progress as they move through the school. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed during this inspection.

A strong feature of the teaching is the positive relationships which exist between teachers and pupils. Teachers use praise and rewards judiciously to encourage high levels of application and interest from pupils. Pupils are taught at a good pace and teachers use their subject knowledge effectively to build on prior learning and to clarify misconceptions. Teachers use effective questioning techniques to check that pupils understand the work and give them a good level of individual support. In this, teachers are well supported by a skilled group of teaching assistants. Tasks are appropriately challenging for most pupils but occasionally more could be expected of the most able.

All teachers succeed in creating attractive learning environments in their classrooms. They plan their lessons systematically. The most effective contain learning objectives to help the whole ability range in a class to make progress, and teachers evaluate pupils' performance against these objectives. Such attention to detail underpins the good teaching.

Teaching ensures that pupils' reading and mathematical skills are well developed by the end of the Foundation Stage and are higher than one would expect for their age. Pupils are taught phonics systematically and they make very good progress. For example, with the exception of the word 'wiggly' one five year old could read 'And the very first thing he felt was his mother's long wiggly trunk'. Standardised test results reflect the good progress pupils make so that, by the time they leave, they are attaining standards in reading, writing and mathematics which are well above national expectations.

Specialist teaching enables pupils to achieve highly. For example, in a very good drama lesson, pupils displayed powerful concentration as they performed a complex sequence of actions according to instructions. As the lesson progressed, the teacher skilfully used various exercises to build the pupils' poise and confidence.

As well as preparing pupils very effectively for the next stage in their education, a major component of the teaching at the school is concerned with preparing pupils for the 'eleven plus' examination.

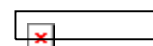
Parents value this element of the school's work. One parent commented to an inspector 'they (the pupils) are well prepared academically and emotionally for external examinations'.

Assessment procedures in the Foundation Stage are very good. Pupils are assessed against the 'stepping stones' towards the early learning goals and teachers are clear about what children have to do next to make progress. In the rest of the school, assessment procedures are satisfactory. Although marking is undertaken very regularly, it does not always ensure that pupils receive clear feedback to help them improve.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils



Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is very good. The school's strong Christian ethos emphasises consideration for others and the environment, and fosters a deep sense of community and belonging. School assemblies give pupils an opportunity to celebrate their uniqueness, diversity and achievements, and to reflect on the world around them. Pupils also pray together on other occasions during the day.

Pupils are diligent, polite and behave very well. They know the difference between right and wrong and respond positively to adults. They show pride in their work and in their school. Pupils in Key Stage 2 are divided into four houses. Pupils receive house points for good behaviour or good work and these are tallied up termly for each house so that each individual's achievements are translated into group effort. Pupils are taught to care for others through a range of community oriented activities such as fundraising for charities and visiting homes for the elderly. The school keeps an incubator where ducklings, quails and turkeys are hatched. This enables pupils to develop an appreciation of and respect for nature.

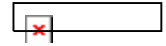
Pupils of all ages are confident, self-motivated and work collaboratively on tasks. Older pupils handle school responsibilities with maturity. All Year 6 pupils act as prefects in one of three groups, each responsible for music and drama, administration and sport. Pupils rotate through each group to enable them to develop skills in different areas. Year 5 pupils undertake duties at lunchtimes and often deputise for Year 6 pupils when they are leading school assemblies by, for instance, carrying out their monitoring duties. Year 6 pupils make annual presentations to other pupils about their own religion to develop their public speaking skills. Pupils' knowledge of public services and institutions is developed successfully through the links the school has with the police, other emergency services and local businesses such as a local pizza restaurant.

Provision for pupils' cultural development is good. The RE syllabus celebrates other cultures and faiths. The school is multicultural in nature and this enables pupils to develop an understanding of each others' cultures. Pupils are given opportunities to celebrate festivals from other cultures such as the Chinese New Year.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils



The school gives the welfare, health and safety of its pupils a high priority and provides them with a safe and secure environment. There is a comprehensive set of effective policies which safeguard pupils' well-being. These include policies on behaviour, anti-bullying, child protection, fire safety, health and safety, educational visits and special educational needs.

The behaviour policy clearly lists rewards, sanctions and what the school expects from the members of its community; is very effective. Consequently, pupils behave very well. The anti-bullying policy is detailed and pupils report that, on the rare occasions when it occurs, bullying is dealt with effectively by teachers.

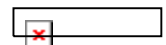
There are written child protection and health and safety policies. The latter includes the school's policy on First Aid. The number of trained First Aiders is more than adequate and the school keeps a thorough record of incidents, accidents and any First Aid applied. The school is particularly good at looking after the well-being of pupils with medical conditions and has sensible procedures to ensure that their needs are met. Staff follow clear guidelines and carry out risk assessments when organising educational trips and visits. Fire safety precautions are satisfactory and hazardous materials are kept safely. Pupils are well supervised in and out of the buildings.

The school admission register and attendance registers are kept in line with the regulations, and the school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff



Careful checks have been carried out on everyone who works at the school. Longer-serving staff have all been checked against List 99 and all staff who have been appointed since the establishment of the Criminal Records Bureau have been checked with that agency. The school is careful to request references from former employers which encompass both the professional competence and the personal suitability of candidates. At present, no checks are made on the medical fitness of staff before they are appointed. However, the school has plans to use the occupational health department of the local education authority to carry out this check.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

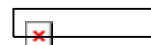
No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- check the medical fitness of staff prior to the confirmation of their appointment (paragraph 4(c)).

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation



The school's premises and accommodation are of satisfactory quality. The school occupies a large house built just before the First World War, to which a purpose-built teaching block was added in 1971. A new building is under construction in the school grounds which will be used to teach ICT and music and has the potential to enhance curriculum provision further. The school grounds are well maintained.

The nursery is housed in a light and airy room which is separate from the main building. It has its own area for outdoor play. The nursery is thoughtfully laid out to stimulate learning. Displays are attractive and interactive. Furniture and fittings are of good quality. Although washroom and toilet facilities are very clean and suitable in number, there is no hot water supply to the nursery washbasins.

Pupils from four to six years of age are taught in classrooms in the main house. Two classrooms are on the first floor. Although these classrooms are accessed via a long staircase, staff are very vigilant when pupils use this. Classrooms for older pupils are in the purpose-built teaching block. There are separate toilet facilities for boys and girls on both floors, although there was no hot water supply to the ground floor boys' toilets at the time of the inspection. Classrooms in all parts of the school are enhanced by attractively displayed pupils' work of good quality. Furniture and fittings are appropriate for the age range of the pupils. Overall, classrooms are suitable in size for the numbers of pupils on roll.

The specialist teaching accommodation enhances teaching and learning and contributes to the high standards pupils achieve. Specialist rooms for RE, music, science, art and ICT are well equipped and two libraries are well stocked with a wide range of books. A large hall provides accommodation for assemblies, concerts, PE and choir and orchestra practices.

The school is immaculately clean. Decorative standards are good. Fire evacuation procedures are clearly displayed throughout the school. Facilities for pupils who are ill are satisfactory.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

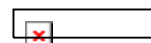
The school complies with all but one of the regulations.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply fully with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- ensure that hot water of a temperature not exceeding 43°C is available at all washbasins (paragraph 5(a)).

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners



The school prospectus for parents and prospective parents contains most of the required information about school admissions, the school's ethos and aims, the curriculum and organisation. Particulars of the educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements and for pupils for

whom English is an additional language are not given to parents as a matter of course, nor does the school provide particulars of its policy for discipline and exclusions, although all these documents are available in school. The school makes clear that all other information required by the regulations is available to parents on request.

The headteacher produces regular and useful newsletters which keep parents effectively informed about events in the life of the school. These are used to celebrate the academic, social and sporting successes of both individual pupils and classes. Using this medium, the school's successes in the eleven plus examination are published and parents are made aware of the names of those secondary schools to which Year 6 pupils transfer.

Nearly all parents believe they are kept well informed about their children's progress. The school provides an annual report for pupils. The quality of these is variable. Reports generally summarise the range of work pupils have undertaken and their attitudes towards a subject. Too often they omit clear information about pupils' attainment in each subject so parents are not aware of what their children need to do to improve. The reports contain standardised tests scores attained by each pupil in Year 2 to Year 6 so parents are able to compare these scores with the national average.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

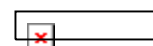
The school meets most but not all of the requirements

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply fully with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should provide parent and prospective parents with:

- the name of the headteacher (paragraph 6(2)(a));
- particulars of the school's policy on discipline and exclusion (paragraph 6(2)(e));
and
- particulars of the educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements and for pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(f)).

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints

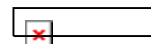


Twenty five percent of parents who returned questionnaires are unclear about this aspect of school policy and a very small number of parents are concerned that their views are not listened to by the school. The school has recently updated its complaints policy which now meets the regulations in full. The policy provides for complaints to be handled informally at both classteacher and headteacher level. The formal procedures are fully detailed and allow complaints to be considered by a panel of trustees who have not been involved in the complaint. They are joined by a headteacher of another independent school who has no connection with the running or management of St Mary's Hare Park. The school intends to reissue its complaints policy in order to clarify any confusion in this area.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

School details



Name of school:	St Mary's Hare Park School		
DfES ref number:	311/6054		
Type of school:	Roman Catholic Primary with nursery		
Status:	Independent		
Age range of pupils:	2½ - 11 years		
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys 62,	Girls 84,	Total 146
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys 4,	Girls 2,	Total 6
Annual fees (day pupils):	£1,375 - £1,570		
Address of school:	South Drive Gidea Park Essex RM2 6HH		
E-mail address:	harepark@btconnect.com		
Telephone number:	01708 761220		
Fax number:	01708 380255		
Headteacher:	Mrs Katrina Karwacinski		
Proprietor:	The Board of Trustees		
Lead Inspector:	Bradley Simmons HMI		
Dates of inspection:	29 November - 2 December 2004		

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