

INSPECTION REPORT

ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC INFANT SCHOOL

Newton-Le-Willows

LEA area: St. Helen's

Unique reference number: 104817

Headteacher: Mrs C Ryding

Reporting inspector: Mrs E LaBrum
13207

Dates of inspection: 13 – 16 November 2000

Inspection number: 225210

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Infant and Nursery
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	3 to 7
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Victoria Road Newton-Le-Willows Merseyside
Postcode:	WA12 9RX
Telephone number:	01925 224927
Fax number:	01925 224927
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Rev. Canon T Naughton
Date of previous inspection:	18 November 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	
Mrs E LaBrum	Registered inspector
Mr D Blanchflower	Lay inspector
Mrs V McGrath	Team inspector

The inspection contractor was:

Staffordshire and Midlands Consortium

Mr I H Jones
Kingston Centre
Fairway
Stafford
ST16 3TW

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The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Mary's School has 212 boys and girls in the age range three to seven years. This includes a Nursery for 50 part-time pupils in the morning and afternoon. This is about the same size as most infant schools. The admission policy requires that all pupils have been baptised in the Catholic faith. At the time of the inspection there were 84 pupils under six years of age. The school is organized into seven classes, two classes in each year group and one class of mixed Year 1 and Year 2 pupils. The school is situated in a suburban area of Newton-Le-Willows. 11% of pupils are eligible for free school meals which is close to the national average. There are 10 pupils on the school's register for special educational needs which is close to the average. One pupil has a statement of special educational need this is close to the national figure. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds but overall their social background is typical of that seen nationally. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is above that usually seen in pupils of this age after attending the school nursery.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school with some significant strengths. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are very high, whilst standards in other subjects are typical or above what is usually seen by the age of seven. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good overall in response to effective teaching. The curriculum is satisfactory overall and the school is soundly led and managed. Attainment on entry to the school is above what is usually seen; and pupils make very good progress in English and mathematics and scientific knowledge to attain very high standards. Overall pupils achieve well. Despite the high costs of educating pupils at the school, it gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards in English are exceptionally high.
- Standards in mathematics are exceptionally high.
- English and mathematics are well taught.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning and behaviour are good.

What could be improved

- Providing increased opportunities for pupils to learn actively and exercise initiative and choice.
- Providing additional information about what pupils will be learning at school and suggesting activities so that parents can support their children at home more extensively.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The teachers have worked very hard and successfully in the absence of a permanent headteacher and have successfully maintained the very high standards identified in the last inspection. The quality of teaching has been maintained. Almost all the key issues have been tackled successfully including improving curriculum plans for history and music and completing schemes of work. There is now a consistent approach to marking and target setting for pupils and the school has developed portfolios

of pupils' work further. However, although there has been some increase in opportunities for investigative work and problem solving, especially in mathematics, too many activities are still very strongly teacher directed. As a result pupils have limited opportunities to exercise initiative and choice in their learning.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 7 year olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
Reading	A	A	A	A*
Writing	A	A	A*	A*
Mathematics	A	A	A*	A*

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

Pupils enter the school with attainment that is generally above what is usually seen. By the end of the Reception Year a small minority are attaining well above what is usually expected. They build very well on this good start in Years 1 and 2, making very good progress in English, mathematics and scientific knowledge, and achieve very well. The results of the statutory tests at the age of seven have remained consistently well above those attained nationally in reading, writing and mathematics over the last three years. Standards are in the top five per cent of schools nationally in writing and mathematics, and when compared with similar schools. In reading they are in the highest five per cent of schools of a similar type and are very high when compared nationally. Standards in science, as demonstrated in the statutory assessments by their teachers, are very high when compared with the national average. Pupils' current work confirms these high standards and reflects very high achievement by all pupils. Standards in information technology are above what is usually seen. However, much of the work in science, geography and history is heavily directed by the teacher and recorded by pupils on undemanding worksheets. Therefore pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to demonstrate their full capacity to carry out and record their own investigations or express their ideas creatively, even though they have a good level of subject knowledge and understanding. Standards in art and in design and technology are typical of those seen by the age of seven.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good overall. Pupils always begin lessons with very positive attitudes and maintain these when they are actively engaged in interesting tasks. However, they lose concentration and interest when they are kept sitting and listening for overlong periods.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good overall. Behaviour around school is usually very good. Pupils are friendly and courteous and are quickly obedient to instructions. However, when lesson introductions are too long pupils begin to get restless and teachers have to work hard to achieve the standards of behaviour they expect.
Personal development and relationships	Good overall. Pupils' ability to work independently and to find, use and put away equipment is well developed. They make good use of the limited opportunities offered to make decisions. They are quick to build good relationships with adults and other pupils.
Attendance	Attendance is satisfactory although it is slightly below the national average. Pupils enjoy coming to school.

Generally pupils develop well as individuals. Their ability to work independently makes a significant contribution to the effective conduct of lessons and allows teachers to work uninterrupted with small groups and individuals. Pupils are friendly, courteous and are show thoughtfulness to other pupils. Their well-developed skills in listening and speaking help them to co-operate well together.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

The quality of teaching is good overall. In all the lessons observed teaching was at least satisfactory. In 60 per cent of lessons it was good or better with 15 per cent of the teaching judged to be very good. The teaching of English, literacy, mathematics and numeracy is a strength of the school and accounts for all the very good teaching seen during the inspection. It has a major and positive impact on pupils' very high levels of attainment and reflects a close match to pupils' needs. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported in lessons. The teaching seen in the Foundation Stage was good overall. In Key Stage 1 teaching was good overall and included all the instances where teaching was very good. In the good and very good lessons teachers were careful to ensure a balance between teacher direction and opportunities for pupils to be actively engaged in interesting

tasks. What distinguished the satisfactory teaching from that which was judged good was that pupils were kept sitting for too long and the tasks given them were very highly structured with little opportunity for pupils to exercise choice or initiative.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Sound. The curriculum is broad and meets the statutory requirements. Teachers plan most conscientiously and in great detail. The curriculum lacks balance with too much time allocated to direct teaching methods and too little time given for pupils to develop initiative and to make decisions for themselves. There are no extra-curricular activities offered to pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. The special educational needs co-ordinator works very closely with teachers to write effective individual education plans so that pupils are fully involved in all class activities and make good progress against the targets set for them.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The provision for all these aspects of pupils' development is good. There are good opportunities for pupils to discuss moral issues in story time. Adults provide very good models of the kind of behaviour they expect of pupils and promote good relationships. The curriculum is enhanced by a sound range of visits and visitors.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school takes good care of its pupils. The school provides a high level of careful supervision of pupils at all times. Relationships are good and the school encourages pupils to work hard and achieve well.

Overall, the curriculum is satisfactory. There are significant strengths in the provision for English and literacy and for mathematics and number and these have a positive impact on the very high standards that pupils attain at the age of seven. In other subjects the opportunities for pupils to develop the skills of designing and carrying out their investigations are limited. Although there are very good examples of pupils recording their own factual reports, too often they record their learning on undemanding task sheets. The procedures for assessment and tracking pupils' progress are good but are limited to those areas assessed by the national tests at the end of Year 2.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The school is soundly led and managed and is improving steadily. The headteacher, key staff and governors are working together well to ensure that the school continues to maintain its high standards and to improve the quality of educational provision further.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. The recently established governing body is effective in carrying out its responsibilities. Governors are well informed about all aspects of the school beginning to act as effective critical friends.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has begun to implement procedures to monitor its work in a systematic way, but these are not yet fully implemented.
The strategic use of resources	The school uses its resources efficiently to provide a good education for its pupils. Funding from grants is used appropriately for specific needs or initiatives.

The school has a recently appointed headteacher who has already identified several focused areas to improve provision, including extending the partnership with parents and improving the balance of time between teacher-directed activities and opportunities for pupils to explore, experiment, investigate and express themselves creatively. The school has only recently had its own governing body. The governors work well together and are very supportive of the school. The school has anticipated changes in the number of pupils on roll and has taken effective action to manage its funds accordingly. The school applies the principles of best value to the acquisition of resources. The daily financial and general administration are very effective and this allows the headteacher to concentrate on the educational issues.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils like coming to school. • Pupils' attain high standards and make very good progress. • Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are good. • The high quality of teaching. • The school expects high standards of attainment, effort and behaviour from pupils. • It is easy to approach the school with suggestions and concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More information about their children's progress. • Parents' involvement in the school and their own children's learning. • The range of extra-curricular activities.

The findings of the inspectors confirm all the positive views expressed by parents. They also support their views that the opportunities for them to be involved in the children's learning and in the school could be extended. The school does not offer any extra-curricular activities and in this respect provides much less than other schools of the same type. Some parents are concerned that the amount of work given to pupils at home is too little. However, inspection findings are that homework is neither too little nor too much. It is more than most infant schools provide. It has a positive impact on learning in the classroom that is reflected in the high standards pupils attain.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards in English particularly in writing are exceptionally high.

- 1 When pupils begin school, their attainment in English is above that usually seen in children of that age after attending the school nursery. By the age of seven standards as shown by statutory tests and teachers' assessments are well above the national average and when compared with schools of a similar type. In writing the results are in the highest five per cent both nationally and in comparison with similar schools. Many more pupils than usual attain the higher Level 3 in the tests. These very high standards have been successfully maintained since the last inspection. Pupils make consistently very good progress and achieve very well. These very high standards are the result of effective teaching and curriculum plans that provide teachers with good guidance on how to move pupils from one level of skills to the next. The co-ordinator for English has provided good leadership in establishing high quality curriculum plans and guidance to colleagues.
- 2 Pupils are surrounded with an environment rich in language and make great strides in acquiring a correct technical vocabulary in a variety of subjects. By the end of the Foundation Stage, which is the end of the Reception Year, almost all pupils have reached standards that are above what is typically seen. By the age of seven, 85 per cent of pupils have attained standards that are above the expected Level 2; and many more pupils than usual have attained the higher Level 3.
- 3 Standards in speaking and listening are very high. Pupils are courteous and patient listeners. They show by the relevance and clarity of their answers that they have paid great attention to what the speaker has said. They are confident speakers, often able to marshal their ideas and express them articulately. They readily initiate conversation with adults and other pupils. They make good use of their speaking and listening skills when they are engaged in role-play. A good example of this was seen in the Reception class where a group of pupils were preparing an imaginary meal for four. Their capacity for co-operation was good and they were able to allocate tasks and maintain themselves in role. Adults do not always join pupils in role-play, but pupils' gains in commanding language and acquiring social skills are greatest when these role-play activities are supported by an adult.
- 4 Pupils attain very high standards in reading. Parents and teachers work well together to promote a love of reading. Pupils talk about the books they have read with enthusiasm, discussing their favourite characters and summarising the story lines very clearly. They write book reviews as an element of the range of work they do at home. These show that pupils have likes and dislikes that they can share confidently with adults and other pupils.
- 5 Scrutiny of pupils' work shows that the school often provides high quality activities to develop writing skills in much of their work in English and other subjects; and standards of writing are very high by the age of seven. Pupils are able to write brief but well sequenced accounts of what they have learned in lessons. For instance, Year 1 pupils composed very

succinct reports on what they had studied in a geography lesson on the migration of birds in winter. They build well on this good start. A particularly good example of Year 2 pupils' high level of skills in writing factual reports were seen in *The Diary Of a Frog* where pupils demonstrated a very good understanding of the life cycle of a frog through imaginative writing. Similarly, their work on writing on an insect or mini-beast of their choice showed that pupils can combine research skills with the ability to communicate information clearly. In their story writing such as *Katy and the Sheep* and *The Magic Carpet* pupils show a rich vocabulary and the ability to write extended pieces with clear sequencing, complex sentence structure, correct use of punctuation and high levels of accuracy in their spelling. Nevertheless, there are occasions when pupils record what they have learned on worksheets that are too easy for them. On these occasions standards are not so high because pupils are not able to demonstrate their real capabilities.

Standards in mathematics are exceptionally high.

- 6 When pupils begin school their attainment in mathematics is above that usually seen in children of that age. By the age of seven standards as shown by statutory tests and teachers' assessments are very high and are in the top five per cent when compared both nationally and with schools of a similar type. In the use of number and algebra, standards are in the top five per cent. Standards are well above the national average and well above those attained by pupils in similar schools. Pupils have particular strengths in using and applying mathematics and in their understanding of space, shape and measuring. Many more pupils than usual attain the higher Level 3 in the tests and in teachers' statutory assessments. Both girls and boys have consistently performed very highly over the last four years. These very high standards have been successfully maintained since the last inspection. Pupils make consistently very good progress and achieve very well. The very high standards attained in mathematics reflect effective teaching and the successful implementation of the numeracy framework. The co-ordinator for mathematics has provided strong and effective leadership. This has resulted in high quality curriculum planning that ensures a very good basis for teaching.
- 7 In the Nursery and Reception pupils have good opportunities to learn colours, shapes and numbers through practical activities. Pupils in the Reception class recognize and count numbers to ten and can match one-to-one, as they demonstrated when setting a table for a meal for four people. They know and can name shapes like squares, circles, triangles and rectangles and are beginning to develop an understanding of three-dimensional shapes like cylinders, cubes and spheres. They can combine their knowledge of colours and shapes to maintain and continue patterns. They know a good range of number songs and rhymes.
- 8 In Key Stage 1 pupils build well on the good start they have made in the Nursery and Reception classes. Standards in Year 1 in number are already high at this early stage in the academic year. Many more pupils than usual can count backwards and forwards to 100 and above in fives and tens and the most able can count in hundreds above a thousand. Almost all can identify missing numbers when the teacher counts either forwards or back in hundreds. All recognise odd and even numbers and recite them. They have a good vocabulary for estimating, understanding and using terms like estimate, approximate, about,

nearly and a sensible guess. They can order a set of shapes according to size and interpret the displays that they have created. The pupils of lower prior attainment in Year 2 can match these standards. In all numeracy lessons where the 'warm-up session' was observed, teachers expected pupils to be alert and ready to learn. Pupils responded with enthusiasm and high levels of concentration to exciting input from the teacher delivered at a brisk speed. They clearly enjoy mathematics lessons and this has a positive impact on their learning but particularly in mental mathematics.

- 9 Pupils in Year 2 continue the very good progress they have made in Year 1. They respond with eager interest and enjoy their mathematics lessons whilst maintaining a sense of purpose and confidence about their work. These very positive attitudes have a strong impact on the standards they achieve. In number work, most pupils are already exceeding the expected outcomes for the end of Year 2 and many are working on outcomes expected of Year 3 pupils. For instance, they respond rapidly to oral questions such as 'share 18 between 2' and 'if half of 4 is 2 what is half of 40?' Their skills in handling number are very well developed and they have a very good understanding of place value. They handled numbers to 1,100 accurately and with confidence. For instance, they can all use 'near-doubles' to calculate the addition and subtraction of 9 and 11. Most of them can extend this strategy to include 21, 32, 19 and 29. When calculating these examples and halving and doubling numbers to 800, they can explain how they found their answers with great clarity. The most able are able to describe more than one way of answering questions. Pupils are very secure in the basic skills and have little difficulty in moving on to solving problems involving centimetres, metres, grams and money. This is a direct result of the very effective way teachers make problem solving and number sentence work a natural extension of acquiring basic number skills. Pupils have a good body of knowledge about two and three-dimensional shapes and can describe their properties with precision.
- 10 The standards in pupils' current mathematical work indicate that results in the national tests are likely to match the very standards the school has been attaining for the last four years.

English and mathematics are well taught.

- 11 Overall the teaching of English and mathematics seen during the inspection was good. This indicates that the quality has been maintained since the last inspection. It ranged from satisfactory and accounted for all the very good teaching observed during the inspection. Teachers have very effective strategies for teaching English and mathematics. These are strengths of the educational provision and have a very positive impact on the standards pupils achieve and the progress they make.
- 12 Teachers plan most conscientiously and their plans provide a very sound basis for teaching. They know exactly what they want pupils to learn and share the targets for learning with their pupils. This gives pupils a sense of purpose and they work with a will. In the best lessons teachers give lively introductions, well-timed to move pupils onto to active tasks and to move them on in their learning as they master each step. A very good example was seen in the lesson on doubling and halving numbers to Year 2 pupils. Here, the teacher built steadily on pupils' earlier knowledge of their two-times tables and their ability to count in

tens and hundred, so that by the end of the warm-up session pupils were quickly and confidently doubling and halving numbers to 800.

- 13 Teachers have briefed the classroom assistants well and they in turn work very well on focused activities with their groups of pupils. Teachers have good relationships with their pupils and most often their discipline is very effective and low key.
- 14 Although the school had decided not to adopt the literacy hour in its entirety, teachers have been trained in several elements and use these to very good effect in the daily English lessons. They make particularly good use of shared and guided reading and work at both word and sentence level is very well planned and delivered. The school has implemented a system for grouping pupils of similar ability together for word-level work. This work very well for the initial activity but does slow the pace when pupils regroup with their teachers for the remainder of the lesson. Nevertheless, the work offered matches very closely the needs of all pupils. Teachers use a range of exciting, short games to develop pupils' skills; and pupils respond with high levels of interest and concentration. A very good example of this was seen in the English lesson for Year 1 pupils where pupils played *Full Circle* and *Silly Questions*. They made very good gains in learning and behaved very well.
- 15 Adults do not always join pupils in role-play but pupils' gains in commanding language and social skills are greatest when these role-play activities are supported by an adult. A good example was seen in the Nursery when the teacher joined in an imaginary situation involving the fire service. Pupils quickly picked up the convention of ringing the emergency services and organising what they wanted to say. Another example was seen in the role-play situation for the mixed age Year 1 and Year 2 pupils. The teacher had carefully equipped the 'Travel Agency' with brochures and a range of forms for booking holidays and recording payment. The pupils thoroughly enjoyed the visit made by the headteacher to book her holiday and were able to relate the whole process very clearly afterwards.
- 16 Teachers are often very successful in promoting pupils' literacy skills and a correct technical vocabulary in other subjects. During the inspection instances of very effective use of shared reading were seen, particularly in story time when the content was often related to other subjects. Two notable examples were observed. One was observed in a Year 1 lesson to teach pupils about the migration of birds to Great Britain for the winter and about the migration of swallows to Africa at the end of summer. Similarly, the teacher in a Year 2 class made very good use of the 'big book' *Teddy Bears from Long Ago* to help pupils learn about the past and identify similarities and differences between old and new. Teachers value what pupils have to say and this gives pupils the confidence to contribute in class discussions.
- 17 Teachers have a very secure command of their subjects. In both English and mathematics this allows them to make very good use of direct teaching through clear explanations and demonstrations. For instance, when pupils in Year 2 were seen to be repeating simple connectives like 'then' and 'after' they were taught directly to use other more sophisticated ways to sequence their writing such as *in the meantime*, *luckily*, *it wasn't long before* and *shortly afterwards*. Teachers make very good use of skilled questioning to promote high

levels of reading skills. As a result pupils can understand much more than is made explicit in the text. In creative writing pupils have good opportunities to exercise their imagination as in their stories on *The Magic Carpet* and recording the life-cycle of a frog through story telling. Displays in the classrooms with a good level of language help pupils with their learning. These are linked to topics and help pupils to build subject specific vocabulary. Good examples were seen in displays on two and three-dimensional shapes in maths, on the migration of birds in winter. Another display in the class for mixed Year 1 and 2 pupils supported their learning very well in their study on Africa. Pupils' independent written work is valued and used for making teaching points.

- 18 Where the quality of teaching in English was less than good a disproportionate amount of time was given to pupils listening to the teacher with insufficient opportunities to contribute ideas and news that they were obviously very keen to share. Often this was because teachers were anxious to cover all the content that they had prepared. Nevertheless this left pupils disappointed. They lost some of their eagerness to learn and teachers' discipline had to become overt to maintain good behaviour.
- 19 All daily mathematics lessons include the suggested elements from the National Numeracy Strategy, of a mental warm-up, main learning activities and a plenary when pupils gather together to report what they have done and learned. A consistently good feature of the warm-up sessions was the way in which groups of pupils with differing learning needs were given equal opportunities to contribute. Where teaching was very good the warm-up session and teacher's explanation were of high quality. Expectations were high and the lesson moved along at a brisk but realistic pace. Sufficient time was given to consolidate earlier learning and for pupils to master each step before moving on to more challenging work. In the best lessons pupils were told what they were expected to report back on, and were able to focus their efforts and concentrate very well. In the lessons observed during the inspection these three elements combined into a coherent whole with opportunities for new learning, consolidation of what had been learned before and application of basic skills to solving problems. The Year 2 lessons on doubling and halving numbers gave very good examples of pupils moving from simple questions based on the two-times table to solving problems using the same strategies involving large numbers and including, units of measure. Where teaching was satisfactory rather than good or very good, the gains in learning during the main activities were not as great as during the introductory session when direct teaching methods were used very successfully. This was usually because the worksheets and extension activities were not sufficiently demanding.
- 20 Pupils have more work to do at home than most pupils of a similar age. It includes reading practice, learning spellings, tables and number bonds. In addition pupils regularly write book reviews and from time to time carry out surveys at home to furnish the raw data from work in the classroom. Parents say that their children are keen to do their homework and the parents themselves provide high levels of support at home. Parents are particularly successful in helping their children to read many books of different kinds. This gives pupils a strong familiarity with the conventions of story telling and scope for their imagination. Pupils are able to draw on this wide experience when they are writing their own stories. The homework pupils do has a positive impact on the very high standards they attain in English

and mathematics.

Pupils' attitudes to learning and behaviour are good.

- 21 Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons seen varied from satisfactory to very good, but are good overall.
- 22 Parents believe attitudes are very good. They say that their children are very enthusiastic about coming to school and note that they do their homework willingly. Inspectors found that almost always pupils started lessons with very high levels of interest. They settled quickly on the carpet and were ready, alert and eager to learn. They listen attentively and are confident in sharing their ideas and answers. They have a well developed capacity to work independently and teachers have given them good strategies for helping themselves. For instance, in many lessons pupils find, use and return the materials they need. They turn naturally to word-books and displays around the classroom to find spellings that they need. Their positive attitudes have a positive impact on their learning.
- 23 Behaviour around school and at break and lunchtimes is good. There was no evidence of oppressive behaviour or bullying seen during the inspection. The school is an orderly community with few rules where adults give pupils very good models of the behaviour they expect pupils to follow. Pupils are taught to think of others and about the impact their behaviour has on those around them. They are quick to help when friends return to school after an illness or need to find materials or spellings. In lessons they know and maintain rules and routines without undue intervention from adults. Pupils are naturally friendly, confident in initiating conversation and build good relationships with adults and each other. Their skills in listening and speaking help them to co-operate effectively with each other when opportunities are offered. Example of this were seen where pupils engaged in role-play in the home corner in reception classes and in the 'Travel Agency' set up in the mixed Year 1 and Year 2 class.
- 24 When lesson seen were conducted at a good pace and teachers ensured that pupils were not kept listening in class discussion for overlong periods, pupils' attitudes and behaviour were never less than good and were sometimes very good. For example, very good behaviour was seen in the warm up session of mathematics lessons given to Year 2 pupils and to pupils in the mixed age class for Year 1 and Year 2 pupils. Similarly, in the geography lesson on the migration of swallows to Year 1 pupils, the teacher used shared reading as a very effective way of involving pupils actively in the introductory part of the lesson before sending them to a range of tasks. In these lessons teachers' delivery was brisk, the question and answer sessions involved every pupil at their own level before pupils moved on to their own tasks. There was a good balance between the time allocated for pupils to sit and listen and that given to pupils to be active on their own tasks. Pupils responded with rapt attention and maintained concentration throughout these lessons.
- 25 However, in the seven lessons where pupils' behaviour was judged to be only satisfactory, pupils spent too long sitting and listening to the teacher. Often there were only limited opportunities for them to contribute their own ideas because the teacher had planned to

deliver too much content through direct teaching. Pupils' initial high standard of behaviour wavered as they became restless and impatient to move on to other tasks. Teachers' discipline became more overt as they tried to complete the planned direct teaching component of the lesson. A greater balance between the time given to direct teaching and that allocated for pupils to be actively involved in their learning would raise the good standards of behaviour seen in the school even higher.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- 26 Providing increased opportunities for pupils to learn actively and exercise initiative and choice.
- 27 The school offers a sound curriculum with strengths in the provision for English, mathematics and for pupils with special educational needs. The provision for pupils in the Nursery and the Reception class broadly meets the requirements of Early Learning Goals set out in the National Foundation Stage Curriculum. In Key Stage 1 the curriculum covers all the subjects of the National Curriculum and is particularly sound in covering the content of the National programmes of study. It includes very detailed plans for teaching literacy skills, and the national Numeracy Framework is fully implemented. There are schemes of work in place for all subjects and in this respect the school has made good progress since the last inspection. The school also provides for religious education, but as it is an aided Catholic school, a separate inspection is required for this aspect of provision and a separate report will be published.
- 28 Teachers plan most conscientiously in year teams and this ensures that all pupils in the same year group have access to the same learning opportunities. Activities and targets for learning are appropriately tailored to match the needs of all pupils. An enthusiastic and knowledgeable co-ordinator for special educational needs works with class teachers, writing good quality individual educational plans and annual reviews. Special educational needs provision takes account of pupils at both ends of the ability spectrum. Where the curriculum is of good quality, it provides a good basis for teaching and pupils make very good progress and attain very high standards. These high standards are seen in all aspects of English, mathematics and information technology and in the pupils' knowledge in science, geography and history.
- 29 However, whilst achievement is good overall, there are areas where pupils' standards of work are typical of those achieved by the age of seven nationally. This does not reflect the pupils' true capacities and capabilities, as demonstrated in their English and mathematics. For instance, in twelve of the 31 lessons observed during the inspection standards were recorded as being in line with those seen nationally for pupils of similar age. Similar standards were noted on displays around the school. There is a direct link between these lower levels of achievement and weaknesses in the quality of curriculum plans. Often activities are every closely structured by the teacher and pupils have very little opportunity to exercise initiative, to make choices or to express themselves creatively. For instance, the display on swallows by Year 1 pupils is based on templates prepared by the teacher. Although each piece of work is completed to a high standard, pupils have produced very

similar pieces of work, all the same size and using identical materials. Similarly, the jointed figures produced by pupils in Year 2 are based on a template with use of a paper fastener as the only technique for joining the different pieces. The crayoned decorations provide the only element that makes the finished model unique to the pupil who made it.

- 30 Although there are examples of pupils producing very high quality pieces of work in all subjects on their own, the use of unchallenging worksheets and extension activities sometimes prevents pupils demonstrating their skills and understanding. For instance, in science lessons for pupils in Year 2, pupils showed in class discussion that they had a secure grasp of the links between natural resources, raw materials and how they result in man-made products. Pupils also had the skills to sort materials practically according to the raw materials from which they were made, such as metal, wood and plastics. However, they carried out a sorting task using this knowledge and recorded their findings by means of colouring a prepared worksheet. Neither the task nor its recording fully used their knowledge and skills, nor challenged them to achieve further. Although there has been some increase in opportunities for pupils to design, carry out and record their investigations independently as called for in the last inspection report, progress has not been sufficient. Therefore, whilst pupils have high levels of knowledge and understanding in science their skills in conducting investigations are much less well developed. The curriculum also lacks balance in that too much time is allocated to direct teaching methods when pupils sit and listen to the teacher and too little time given for pupils to be active learners. Although pupils are attentive listeners, they often lose interest when they have been sitting for too long and become impatient to settle down to a task. In the Nursery and Reception classes, the teachers' plans do not yet fully embrace the principles that underpin the Early Learning Goals outlined in the National Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage. Pupils lack sufficient opportunities to explore, experiment, investigate and express themselves creatively.
- 31 There are no extra-curricular activities provided in the school. The headteacher is aware that the curriculum is sound but is in need of further development so that the standards pupils achieve in all subjects can match the very high standards they attain in areas where the curriculum is already strong.
- 32 Providing additional information about what pupils will be learning at school and suggesting activities so that parents can support their children at home more extensively.
- 33 Parents have positive views of the school. They are particularly pleased with standards of attainment and the progress their children are making. They think standards of behaviour and pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. Parents find the staff easy to talk to and say their ideas and comments and complaints are treated seriously, explored thoroughly and where necessary action is taken. Teachers and the headteacher are readily available to talk to parents at the beginning and end of the day. A few parents and grandparents work in the classroom or help in others ways in the school.
- 34 The school's links with parents are satisfactory with some established strengths, particularly in the efforts made by the English and mathematics co-ordinators to involve parents in their childrens' learning. For instance the English co-ordinator has given parents useful guidance

on helping their children at home with reading, speaking and listening and there is a home/school reading record. The mathematics co-ordinator has sought and used funding to set up a parent' room and to provide mathematics workshops to help parents understand how mathematics is taught in the classroom and to give them opportunities to work alongside their children. Evaluations by parents showed how enjoyable and helpful they found these workshops. The programme is to be extended this year and include opportunities to create number games and materials.

- 35 However, until very recently there were very few opportunities for parents to join their children in school, for example, in collective worship. Similarly there were no formal procedures for parents share share ideas or opinions with the school staff.
- 36 The recently appointed headteacher is very aware of the need to increase opportunities for parents to be involved in the life of the school and in supporting their children's learning. The existing school/home links are steadily improving in response to her initiatives to build a closer partnership between school and home. For example, parents have now been invited to join their children in assemblies and to meet in the school at coffee mornings when they can exchange information and views with the headteacher. In addition a Parents in Partnership course is planned for this academic year.
- 37 Parents receive good information about the school and its activities through regular newsletters, a sound annual report on the school's progress to all parents and a prospectus that gives helpful information to parents who are thinking of sending the children to the school. Parents receive clear reports about their own children's attainment and progress over the academic year. There is no parents' association at the school.
- 38 Some parents are concerned that the amount of work given to pupils at home is too little. However, inspection findings are that homework is neither too little nor too much. It includes regular reading practice, writing book reviews, tables, number and spelling practice. Also, there are occasional home/school surveys like one on size of feet which provided the raw data for lessons on comparative size. It is more than most infant schools provide. Homework has a positive impact on learning in the classroom and this is reflected in the very high standards pupils attain in English and mathematics.
- 39 Nevertheless, parents are very keen to be more actively involved in their children's learning at home. At present parents have only brief information about what their children are going to study in the coming term or half term. With more information about what their children are going to study in the coming term together with more ideas for how they could support their children's learning, parents could be more involved in their children's education. Additional information about specific skills that the school intends to teach, for instance in information technology, would enable parents to share their own expertise with their children.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- 40 The school is aware of the areas for development within the context of this good school and

steps are already in hand to bring about improvement. To improve standards further the headteacher, staff and governors should:

a) Provide increased opportunities for pupils to learn actively and exercise initiative and choice by:

- Carrying out an audit of the amount of time each day when pupils are learning passively and when they are active learners; and using this information to achieve a balance that better reflects an understanding of how young children learn.
- Monitoring and evaluating the frequency and value of the worksheets used in each class; and where necessary replacing these with tasks that allow pupils to demonstrate their full capacities in recording their work independently.
- Identifying activities in the existing curriculum plans that are strongly but not effectively teacher-directed and take steps to substitute these with opportunities for pupils to design, carry out and record their investigations and express themselves creatively.

b) Increase opportunities for involving parents in their children's learning by:-

- Raising parents' knowledge of what their children are learning by making regular plans for the work to be done by each class easily accessible to parents.
- Highlighting specific targets for learning that will be taught in each term.
- Providing further ideas for activities that parents can do with their children at home to support learning in the classroom.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	33
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	8

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	5	14	14	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Nursery	YR – Y2
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	25	187
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	0	25

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs

	Nursery	YR – Y2
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	0	12

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	4
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	1

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	6.5
National comparative data	5.4

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0
National comparative data	0.5

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	1999	27	28	55

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	24	24	27
	Girls	26	27	27
	Total	50	51	54
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	91 (88)	93 (94)	98 (97)
	National	82 (79)	83 (83)	87 (86)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	25	27	27
	Girls	28	28	28
	Total	53	55	55
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	96 (93)	100 (98)	100 (98)
	National	82 (82)	86 (86)	87 (87)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	212
Any other minority ethnic group	0

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions of pupils of compulsory school age, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y2

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	212
Average class size	26

Education support staff: YR – Y2

Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	75

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	25

Total number of education support staff	1
Total aggregate hours worked per week	32

Number of pupils per FTE adult	12.5
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999
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	£
Total income	375,134
Total expenditure	378,247
Expenditure per pupil	1,845
Balance brought forward from previous year	17,494
Balance carried forward to next year	14,380

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	212
Number of questionnaires returned	81

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	63	35	0	0	2
My child is making good progress in school.	59	32	0	0	9
Behaviour in the school is good.	52	40	1	0	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	32	52	4	4	9
The teaching is good.	67	30	0	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	21	60	12	2	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	53	38	6	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	64	30	0	0	6
The school works closely with parents.	27	56	9	2	6
The school is well led and managed.	47	44	1	0	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	51	41	0	1	7
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	10	37	27	6	20