



**Office for Standards
in Education**

Inspection report
Stella Maris Catholic Primary School

Kent Education Authority

Dates of inspection: 7-8 June 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act

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Basic information about the school

Name of school:	Stella Maris Catholic Primary School
Type of school:	Voluntary Aided
Status:	Primary
Age range of pupils:	4 to 11 years
Headteacher:	Mr A Holdsworth
Address of school:	Parkfield Road Folkestone Kent CT19 5BY
Telephone:	01303 252127
Name and address of appropriate authority:	The governing body, address as above
Chair of governors:	Mr J Ciantar
Local education authority area:	Kent
Unique reference number:	118862
Name of reporting inspector:	Mrs L Soden HMI
Dates of inspection:	7-8 June 2004

Introduction

1. Stella Maris Catholic Primary School is situated in Folkestone, Kent. There are 213 pupils on roll, the majority of whom are from white ethnic backgrounds. A small minority of the pupils are from other ethnic groups, including seven with English as an additional language. Nineteen per cent of the pupils are identified as having special educational needs, which is broadly average. Very few pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Need. Seventeen per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is in line with the national average. The pupils' attainment on entry to the school is average.
2. The school was inspected in January 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.
3. The governors drew up an action plan to address the key issues from the inspection of January 2003. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on three occasions to monitor the progress being made.
4. In June 2004 an HMI and an Additional Inspector inspected the school, assessing the standard of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of January 2003.

Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:
 - standards are improving throughout the school, particularly in English and mathematics. Provisional results in the end-of-Key Stage 1 national tests for 2004 indicate a good improvement over the previous year, with the school's challenging targets being exceeded in reading, writing and mathematics. There were particular gains in mathematics and in the proportion of the pupils achieving the higher Level 3 in writing and mathematics;
 - when compared with 2002, results in the end-of-Key Stage 2 national tests for 2003 fell in English, mathematics and science. The results of the 2004 tests are not yet available, but the school's rigorous tracking of the pupils' progress and attainment suggests at least sound improvement in all three subjects;
 - most pupils in the Foundation Stage have sound or better levels of oracy, and they have made good progress in developing early writing skills;
 - the pupils are making faster progress than previously as the quality and consistency of the teaching improve. Their progress, in lessons and over time, has improved in response to consistently higher expectations and increasingly well-judged support and challenge;
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- the pupils who have special educational needs make good progress because they receive effective support, enabling them to reach their individual targets. The co-ordinator for special educational needs ensures that the pupils' progress is monitored consistently and that lessons are suitably adapted to meet their needs;
 - the pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good overall. They were good or very good in over a half of the lessons. The one lesson where the pupils' response was unsatisfactory was due to unfocused teaching and weak management of behaviour. The vast majority of the pupils work hard and are enthusiastic and eager in lessons;
 - the provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. The school places considerable emphasis on the personal development of each pupil, within a framework of Christian values. Assemblies make a very good contribution to developing the pupils' spiritual values;
 - attendance is good and above the national figure;
 - the quality of teaching has improved significantly. It was at least satisfactory in all but one lesson, and good in half of the lessons. A clearer focus on the pupils' learning has been a key factor in raising the quality of teaching overall. A small proportion of the teaching failed to provide sufficient opportunity for active involvement, limiting the possibilities for the pupils to develop independence and confidence;
 - the school has implemented efficient procedures for assessing the pupils' attainment and progress, particularly in English and mathematics. Assessment information is being used systematically to set focused targets for the pupils and to ensure that lesson-planning caters for a wide range of needs. The provision for the higher attaining pupils has improved;
 - the curriculum has improved and is satisfactory. Teaching time has been sensibly extended and the time allocation for each subject has been reviewed, providing the opportunity for longer teaching periods when required. Cross-curricular planning has improved, identifying links between subjects and promoting greater coherence;
 - the provision for the pupils in the Foundation Stage is good. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning for the youngest pupils;
 - the headteacher's vision for the school's improvement is clearly understood by the staff and governors. He has addressed the weaknesses identified in the last inspection honestly and successfully, bringing about significant improvement. He is ambitious for the school's success and his good leadership has created a climate where the teachers are keen to reflect on their practice and to identify areas for further development. The headteacher has built the school's capacity to gauge its performance. The priorities for the next stage of the school's development have been formulated in a new school improvement plan, following thorough consultation;
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- a comprehensive programme for monitoring lessons has provided the teachers with detailed, developmental feedback, and given the headteacher an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and learning. He has become increasingly determined and confident in tackling unsatisfactory teaching;
- the deputy headteacher is continuing to develop his leadership role, undertaking responsibilities which are appropriate to his position. The senior management team has begun to operate more strategically, providing the headteacher with a better balance of support and challenge;
- the governing body was re-constituted in September 2003 with a new chair and vice-chair and four new governors. The headteacher and the chair of governors meet weekly, as part of the governors' growing involvement in the school. The governors' performance and strategy committee operates effectively, scrutinising evidence on the school's progress. The governors have wisely decided to continue the close monitoring role of this committee. The governors are making a good contribution to the school's progress;
- the local education authority (LEA) has provided well-focused support and challenge. The programme of intervention has been consistently reviewed and appropriately tailored to recognise the growing strength of the school's leadership and management. The LEA rightly intends to provide a level of enhanced support over the coming year. The impact of the LEA's work in the school has been good.

Key issues

6. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers and staff need to:

- continue to raise standards;
- raise the quality of all the teaching to the level of the most successful;
- ensure a rigorous and consistent focus on the pupils' learning.

Inspection findings

Standards achieved by the pupils

7. Standards are improving throughout the school, particularly in English and mathematics. Provisional results in the end-of-Key Stage 1 national tests for 2004, indicate a good improvement over the previous year, with the school's challenging targets being exceeded in reading, writing and mathematics. There were particular gains in mathematics and in the proportion of the pupils achieving the higher Level 3 in writing and mathematics.

8. Compared with 2002, results in the end-of-Key Stage 2 national tests for 2003 fell in English, mathematics and science. The results of the 2004 tests are not yet available, but the

school's rigorous tracking of the pupils' progress and attainment suggests at least sound improvement in all three subjects.

9. Good planning for the Foundation Stage ensures that the pupils have consistent opportunities to develop language, literacy and mathematical skills, within the framework of a topic which links activities together coherently. Most pupils have sound or better levels of oracy, and they have made good progress in developing early writing skills. The pupils use computers confidently. There is an appropriate balance between teacher-led tasks and activities which the pupils choose themselves, supporting the development of independent learning.

10. In English, standards in speaking and listening are at least satisfactory overall. The pupils enter Key Stage 2 with well-developed oral skills, raising standards across the curriculum. Most pupils use a varied and appropriate vocabulary to discuss their work; they talk confidently to the whole class and respond to questions in detail. Guided reading is well planned and regularly reviewed, and standards of reading are generally in line with the age-related expectations. A useful approach to assessing writing has improved the teachers' understanding of National Curriculum levels, making them more ambitious for what the pupils can achieve. Despite this, there is a dip in standards of writing in Year 3 and Year 4. However, standards improve throughout Key Stage 2 and, by Year 6, most pupils write fluently and mainly accurately. The higher attaining pupils produce writing which demonstrates sophistication and confidence.

11. In mathematics, the standards are improving in both key stages and particularly in Year 2, where the pupils are developing sound number skills. The pupils in Year 6 achieve standards which are in line with the expected levels overall. Their number work is accurate and the higher attaining pupils use equations confidently to solve problems. The pupils have developed their understanding of the language of mathematical tasks. The pupils' ability to apply numeracy skills in other subjects is improving.

12. Standards in science are rising, and are broadly average by the end of each key stage. In Year 2, the pupils are developing a good understanding of the characteristics of animals. The pupils' drawings in Year 1 show a sound knowledge of the parts of a plant and use the appropriate scientific terms. In Year 6, the pupils have sound knowledge and understanding of plant forms and the food chain. Their practical work is recorded clearly, showing a satisfactory understanding of methodology such as fair testing.

13. The standard of most of the pupils' work in information and communication technology (ICT) has improved. The school has created a new classroom, equipped with a wireless network, improving the provision for teaching ICT and building the pupils' skills. The teachers' planning routinely identifies opportunities to use ICT to support and extend the pupils' learning.

14. The pupils are making faster progress than previously, as the quality and consistency of the teaching improve. Their progress, in lessons and over time, has improved in response to consistently higher expectations and increasingly well-judged support and challenge. Thorough analysis of test results is used well, providing information about gaps in the pupils' knowledge and understanding. Appropriate booster work has been designed to overcome these gaps for identified groups of pupils.

15. The pupils who have special educational needs make good progress because they receive effective support, enabling them to reach their individual targets. The special educational needs co-ordinator ensures that the pupils' progress is monitored consistently and that lessons are suitably adapted to meet their needs. The teaching assistants support the pupils well in lessons.

The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

16. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good overall. They were good or very good in over a half of the lessons. The pupils' response was unsatisfactory in one lesson, as a result of unfocused teaching and the weak management of behaviour. The vast majority of the pupils work hard and are enthusiastic and eager in lessons. A good feature of the school's attention to the pupils' personal development is the relationships which have been fostered between the pupils. The older pupils care for the youngest pupils, creating a positive ethos during break and lunch times. Relationships between the pupils and the adults are very good. There have been no exclusions over the last year.

17. The pupils in the Foundation Stage have developed good levels of independence and responsibility; they are able to initiate and sustain activities and behave sensibly. The pupils have benefited from teaching which has focused on developing social skills, building a supportive and harmonious climate.

18. The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. The school places considerable emphasis on the personal development of each pupil, within a framework of Christian values. Assemblies make a very good contribution to developing the pupils' spiritual awareness; they are marked out as special times with music, candles and visual materials. The pupils' response to the daily act of worship is very good; their behaviour is respectful and they willingly take part in assemblies when invited to do so. The careful preparation of assemblies is a strength of the school's provision for the spiritual and moral dimensions of the curriculum. Assembly themes are reflected in classroom displays and discussed by the teachers.

19. The school's multicultural weeks celebrate the religions and tradition of different cultures, which are also reflected in the variety of high-quality displays of artwork and artefacts throughout the school. The pupils participate enthusiastically in varied fundraising activities and have a well-developed understanding of their responsibility towards other people.

20. Attendance is good and above the national figure. However, the school rightly continues to prioritise the importance of regular attendance and reminds parents that it is damaging to the pupils' progress to arrange holidays during term-time.

The quality of education

21. The quality of teaching has improved significantly. It was at least satisfactory in all but one lesson, and good in half of the lessons. A clearer focus on the pupils' learning has been a key factor in raising the quality of teaching overall. A small proportion of the teaching failed to provide sufficient opportunity for active involvement, limiting the possibilities for the pupils to develop independence and confidence.

22. The school's sharper use of assessment information has clearly informed lesson-planning and raised expectations. The provision for the higher attaining pupils has improved. An aspect of the school's monitoring has helpfully considered whether activities in lessons are sufficiently well matched to the pupils' levels of attainment. The co-ordinator for special educational needs has provided good support with matching materials to the pupils' different levels of attainment.

23. Learning objectives are clear and routinely shared with the pupils during lessons. Many teachers used the concluding plenary session well, allowing the pupils to reflect on their learning. The best practice planned questions of varied challenge for these sessions, which were directed at groups of pupils with different levels of prior attainment. The most successful teaching challenged the pupils to think and make connections with their previous learning. This was equally true for the pupils in the reception class as for those in Year 6. A focus on building literacy skills permeated the majority of teaching, with the pupils being reminded about new vocabulary or practising skills such as note-taking.

24. The pupils' learning was generally managed very purposefully. Most teachers had established a climate which ensured that lesson time was used productively; for example, pupils of all ages read independently when they were waiting for a new activity. The teachers' enthusiasm and subject knowledge were important in promoting successful learning. A teacher's obvious pleasure in the pupils' imaginative writing promoted their confidence, as well as their self-esteem. Another teacher's wide subject knowledge helped to bring a history topic alive for the pupils.

25. The school has implemented efficient procedures for assessing the pupils' attainment and progress, particularly in English and mathematics. A computerised system for collating and analysing test scores is providing valuable information for tracking the pupils' progress. This information is used systematically to set appropriately challenging targets. The pupils are aware of their personal targets and know what they have to do to meet them. Parents have been properly involved in their children's targets at a consultation evening. The range of assessment information has been broadened to include the outcomes of the regular monitoring of the pupils' written work and the teachers' planning.

26. Marking is usually carefully completed but does not consistently provide the pupils with sufficient feedback to improve the quality of their work. The developing practice, of marking against the learning objective for the lesson, is helping the pupils in Key Stage 1 to make good progress.

27. The curriculum has improved and is satisfactory. Teaching time has been sensibly extended and the time allocation for each subject has been reviewed, providing the opportunity for longer teaching periods when required. Cross-curricular planning has improved, identifying links between subjects and promoting greater coherence. The environment for learning is good. Classrooms are lively and stimulating and celebrate a wide range of the pupils' achievements.

28. The provision for the pupils in the Foundation Stage is good. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning for the youngest pupils. The teaching areas are well organised, and promote all the required areas of learning. The pupils make purposeful use of the outdoor area, playing with a range of toys and large apparatus. These activities are well planned to engage and stimulate the pupils' interests. Meaningful

connections are made between the different areas of learning; for example, mathematical development is linked to the pupils' knowledge and understanding of the world as they investigate the symmetry of butterfly wings. The appropriate emphasis on developing the pupils' social skills is resulting in greater co-operation between the pupils so that the pace of learning is generally good.

29. The quality of provision for the pupils who have special educational needs is good. There are clear procedures for identifying the pupils' needs, which are efficiently addressed through precise targets on their individual education plans. The pupils' records are thorough, providing clear information to parents on the provision for their children. Appropriate training has been provided for the teaching assistants, including the use of ICT to support the pupils.

Leadership and management

30. The headteacher's vision for the school's improvement is clearly understood by the staff and governors. He has addressed the weaknesses identified in the last inspection honestly and successfully, bringing about significant improvement. He is ambitious for the school's success and his good leadership has created a climate where the teachers are keen to reflect on their practice and to identify areas for further development. The headteacher has built the school's capacity to gauge its performance. The priorities for the next stage of the school's development have been formulated in a new school improvement plan, following thorough consultation.

31. The comprehensive programme for monitoring lessons has provided the teachers with detailed, developmental feedback, and given the headteacher an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and learning. He has become increasingly determined and confident in tackling unsatisfactory teaching. The outcomes of monitoring are evaluated systematically to identify areas for improvement, and to guide the programme of professional development.

32. The deputy headteacher is continuing to develop his leadership role, undertaking responsibilities which are appropriate to his position. The senior management team has begun to operate more strategically, providing the headteacher with a better balance of support and challenge. The remodelling of the team for September 2004 is promising, reflecting a growing understanding of the need to deploy the senior managers more judiciously. The subject co-ordinators have regular time away from their class duties to monitor the teachers' planning and to observe lessons.

33. The governing body was re-constituted in September 2003, with a new chair and vice-chair and four new governors. The headteacher and the chair of governors meet weekly, as part of the governors' growing involvement in the school. The governors' performance and strategy committee operates effectively, scrutinising evidence on the school's progress. The governors have wisely decided to continue the close monitoring role of this committee. The governors are making a good contribution to the school's progress; they have provided an appropriate balance of challenge and support. Financial control is efficient; the school has submitted a bid for a special transitional grant to secure additional support for at least the next year.

34. The LEA has provided well-focused support and challenge. The programme of intervention has been consistently reviewed and tailored to recognise the growing strength of

leadership and management. The LEA rightly intends to provide a level of enhanced support over the coming year. The impact of the LEA's work in the school has been good.

Implementation of the action plan

35. The inspection report of 2003 required the school to address six key issues. These related to: improving leadership and management; improving the quality of teaching; raising standards; improving the provision in the reception class; improving the curriculum; and increasing the pace of change. Good and swift progress has been made, meeting the timescale for activities in the action plan.

36. The headteacher responded to the critical inspection report positively, implementing robust systems of monitoring and evaluation which provided sufficient evidence for him to tackle the other areas of improvement. Significant changes in staffing, combined with a successful appointment for the reception class, improved the quality of teaching and established a climate of higher expectations. After a slow start, the remaining concerns about teaching performance were tackled decisively. The use of assessment, to drive improvements in teaching and provision, has been successful and is raising standards. The growing capability of the senior managers is resulting in greater challenge and readiness for change. The pace of improvement has accelerated. The school has built a good capacity for further development.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The school was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in January 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in June and November 2003, and in February and June 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of January 2003.

In June 2004, an HMI and an Additional Inspector returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Fifteen lessons or parts of lessons, two assemblies and two registration sessions were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunch times and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior staff and a representative of the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of January 2002 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.