



Inspection report

# St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Better  
education  
and care

Unique Reference Number 124356  
LEA Staffordshire

Inspection number 274051  
Inspection dates 7 and 8 March 2005  
Reporting inspector Mr A Pugh HMI

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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Type of School	Primary	School address	Cruso Street
School category	Voluntary Aided <i>Diocese of Birmingham</i>		Leek Staffordshire ST13 8BW
Age range of pupils	3 to 11 years	Telephone number	01538 483190
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Fax number	01538 483190
Number on roll	160	Chair of governors	Mr J Healey
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Headteacher	Mr E Maddox
Date of previous inspection	May 2004		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Published</b>	<b>Reference no.</b>
3 to 11 years	20 April 2005	274051

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## Introduction

When St Mary's Catholic Primary School was inspected in May 2004, the school was judged to have serious weaknesses. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) visited the school in December 2004 to monitor its progress and the school was reinspected by that inspector and an Additional Inspector in March 2005.

### **Description of the school**

St Mary's Catholic Primary School is situated in Leek, Staffordshire. It is smaller than average, with 160 pupils on roll including those in the nursery. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, 22.6 per cent, is broadly in line with the national average. The proportion whose first language is not English is slightly higher than most schools. Eleven per cent of the pupils have special educational needs, a below-average figure. The percentage of pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Need is also below the national average.

Until very recently, the younger pupils were accommodated on a separate site. After a prolonged period of major disruption, caused by extensive building works, all the pupils are now taught on one site. This move was completed only a very short time before the inspection and there is still further building work in progress.

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## Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The strategic leadership and management of the school are unsatisfactory, and ineffective in moving the school forward with sufficient urgency. Standards overall are average but declining. This is partly indicated by national test results but mainly by the work seen in lessons and by the school's own assessments. Pupils are well behaved, keen to learn and rise to challenges when they are presented with them. However, this does not happen consistently. There is too much variability in the quality of teaching, with not enough teaching that is good or better, and the pace of pupils' progress is too slow.

### **Improvement since the last inspection**

The inspection of May 2004 required the school to address priority areas concerned with shortcomings in: monitoring, evaluation and strategic planning; assessment; curriculum balance and enrichment; attendance; and history and music. There has been reasonable progress in relation to curriculum balance and attendance but limited progress elsewhere.

### **Capacity to improve**

The school lacks effective leadership. Management systems are not secure. Many staff work very hard but their efforts are ill co-ordinated. There is considerable instability in the staffing structure, which is exacerbated by a longstanding budget deficit. The outcomes of monitoring are not analysed with sufficient sharpness to bring about rapid improvement.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

The school's development plan recognises the areas where improvement is needed. However the key priorities are to:

- ensure the role of headteacher includes effective leadership of the school's priorities for improvement, including providing accurate reports on progress to the governing body;
- establish a senior management structure that enables staff to fulfil their responsibilities, within a team approach;
- use the school's assessment information and data effectively to improve the pace of pupils' progress and ensure that all pupils achieve suitably high standards;

- establish a clear management responsibility for pupils' progress through the school.

## Achievement and standards

The school's 2004 results in national tests for seven-year-olds were around the average in writing, but below in reading and well below in mathematics. Compared to similar schools, based on the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals, results in writing were above average, in reading they were about average, but in mathematics they were below average. Mathematics has been the weakest subject for some years, and results have often been below average. Reading and writing results, although varying from year to year, tend to be at least average. Results in reading and mathematics were lower in 2004 than in the previous year.

Almost a quarter of the pupils did not achieve the Level 2 expected for their age in reading and writing. In science, 15 per cent did not achieve Level 2. In writing, the results at the higher Level 3 were very good, but they were below average in reading and mathematics. Compared with similar schools, the results at Level 3 were average in reading and mathematics, and well above in writing. The results for boys and girls were similar in reading and writing, but lower for girls in mathematics. The school's trend in all subjects is below the national trend.

The school's results in the 2004 national tests for 11-year-olds in English, mathematics and science were average. Compared with similar schools, results in English and mathematics were well above average and above average in science. When set against the pupils' national test results when they were seven-years-old, their improvement was well below average. Results in mathematics and science were higher than the previous year and almost all pupils achieved the expected level for their age in all three subjects. These standards were not reflected in the work seen in books and in lessons, where standards were lower.

The proportion of pupils attaining the higher Level 5 was average in English and science but below in mathematics. The overall trend for the school is below that found nationally at Key Stage 2.

## Personal development

Despite the disruptions caused by the building work, staff have worked hard to provide pupils with a stimulating environment. Classrooms are well organised with attractive displays of pupils' work, books and other supporting materials.

The pupils are well behaved, polite and patient. They are kind to each other and have confidence and self-esteem. They have a desire to learn which, in the best lessons, leads to good achievement but which, in weaker lessons, is not built on sufficiently. They work co-operatively with their peers and their teachers and are not disruptive, even when the pace

of lessons is slow. There have been no exclusions since the monitoring inspection in December 2004, few reported incidents of bullying in school, and one reported incident of racism over the last two years. Opportunities for pupils to exercise leadership are limited but improving. Older pupils contribute to the day-to-day organisation of the school and a school's council has recently been established to involve the pupils in decision-making.

The pupils are well supported by the faith community, and spiritual and moral development is strong. The school has made sound efforts to extend the pupils' cultural development through an increasing range of activities, including music, theatre and sport. Pupils in the early years are well on target to meet, and in some cases to exceed, the nationally set goals for their age by the end of the reception year.

Punctuality to school and to class is good. Attendance has improved since the inspection in May 2004 and is now above average, although there has been some decline in recent months. Good support has been provided by the education welfare officer and the school has suitable plans to work with the local education authority (LEA) to resolve the increasing problem of absences caused by holidays taken in term time.

## Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. However, there is too much variability and not enough good or better teaching to accelerate the pupils' learning. A third of lessons were unsatisfactory and only 13 per cent were very good. The pupils' attitudes in lessons were positive, even when the teaching was unsatisfactory. Teachers are committed to improvement and are hard-working. They present lessons well and are good at managing the pupils' behaviour. However, their expectations for pupils at different levels of attainment in the same year group are not consistently accurate, sometimes being too ambitious and sometimes not being high enough. This is partly the result of having insufficient evidence of pupils' prior attainment and also because some teachers are working with year groups with which they are unfamiliar.

Since May 2004, the curriculum has been reviewed. Pupils' learning is now linked to the systematic teaching of subjects, guided by national schemes of work, such as the numeracy and literacy strategies. This is helping to ensure that the pupils move forward, but their progress is too slow. In only a fifth of lessons was it good. Teaching and learning are not matched frequently enough to the pupils' needs. The pupils show an interest in learning, but many, particularly in the older year groups, have too many gaps in their knowledge and skills.

The school has revised its assessment system so that it now includes a suitable range of strategies, including testing and teacher assessment. Useful data is being collected but this is not being used effectively; it is rarely evaluated so that priorities for improvement can be established and action taken. Where it is analysed, action is rarely planned systematically through the school to improve achievement. There is the potential for these systems to be successful, but they are not firmly enough embedded in the teachers' planning of lessons.

The school has extended the range of curricular and extracurricular activities and there is a better balance between the time given to different subjects. The provision for history and music was criticised when the school was inspected in 2004; clear improvements have been made in music, but there is no co-ordinator for history to consolidate the developments that have taken place.

## Leadership and management

Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. There are significant weaknesses in leadership. The headteacher has failed to establish a clear, shared vision for the development of the school. There is a lack of a relentless focus on improving the pupils' achievement. There has been too little urgency in tackling the weaknesses in the school and no coherent strategy for sustaining progress. There has been little innovative leadership of teaching and the curriculum.

Many individual teachers have worked very hard but their efforts have been dissipated because of a lack of a clear structure for developing teamwork. Support from the LEA has been good and has included the provision of a temporary replacement to fill the role of deputy headteacher. Now that the school is on one site, there is considerable potential for the sharing of good practice but it is not yet being led in that direction.

Staffing is unstable and recruitment is proving difficult; more changes in staffing are anticipated in the near future. The budget has a deficit, agreed with the LEA, so future appointments will be subject to these constraints. In the present management structure, key responsibilities are being undertaken by staff who are part-time or on temporary assignment to the school.

## Appendix – Information about the inspection

St. Mary's Catholic Primary School was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in May 2004. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in leadership and management, the curriculum and assessment.

The school was visited by HMI in December 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of May 2004.

In March 2005, 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.

Sixteen lessons or parts of lessons and one assembly were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the co-ordinators for assessment, numeracy, literacy and music, the chair and vice-chair of governors, the advisory headteacher and representatives from the LEA. There were also informal discussions with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised.

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 May 2004 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

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