



Inspection report

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 123556
LEA Telford and Wrekin

Inspection number 275489
Inspection dates 8 and 9 June 2005
Reporting inspector Mrs S Øyen 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.

Type of School	Infant and Junior	School address	Coronation Crescent
School category	Voluntary Aided <i>Diocese of Shrewsbury</i>		Madeley
Age range of pupils	4 to 11 years		Telford
			Shropshire
			TF7 5EJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01952 580954
Number on roll	145	Fax number	01952 580954
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs C Anderson
Date of previous inspection	March 2003	Headteacher	Mrs M Young

Age group	Published	Reference no.
4 to 11 years	11 July 2005	275489

Introduction

When St Mary's Catholic Primary School was inspected in March 2003, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on five occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in June 2005.

Description of the school

St Mary's is a voluntary aided Catholic primary school in Madeley to the south of Telford. The pupils come from a wide area and a few travel a considerable distance to attend the school. Fourteen per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals which is similar to the national average. In recent years the number on roll has fallen to 145 and 6 of the 7 classes have fewer than 25 pupils. A small proportion of pupils are from ethnic minorities. Although six pupils speak English as an additional language, none need specialist support in learning to speak it. Twenty four pupils have been identified as having special educational needs. Two pupils have physical disabilities and have a Statement of Special Educational Need. On entry to the reception year, the pupils' attainment varies but is generally as expected for their age.

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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 no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils.

St Mary's Catholic School is warm and welcoming. The staff and pupils are part of a big family. All know and support each other well and every pupil participates fully in school life. The pupils attend regularly and enjoy school; they rise to a challenge, are interested in meeting their targets and generally behave sensibly. Although the overall quality of teaching is satisfactory there are pockets of good practice throughout the school. However, the teachers do not consistently exact the best from the pupils academically and personally. Improving standards are more evident in the classes of younger pupils. In all year groups, many pupils make good progress in science because of the strong focus on investigation. The quality of governance, leadership and management is satisfactory with some good aspects, especially the effective teamwork. The headteacher has kept the school on an even keel despite several setbacks and changes in teaching staff which have disrupted the pupils' learning and affected the programme of improvement. She has been successful in encouraging and supporting others to accept responsibility and accountability for change. Nonetheless, there is still much to do to iron out inconsistencies in the teaching and learning so that the pupils achieve well and standards rise across the school.

Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection of March 2003 required the school to address key issues concerned with raising standards in writing and science, improving the teachers' effectiveness in setting work at the right level of challenge, strengthening the quality of leadership and management, and using systems to check the quality of teaching and the curriculum. The rate and impact of improvement has varied but has been satisfactory overall. There has been a sea-change in the culture of the school. Staff and pupils are keen to do well.

Capacity to improve

There is good capacity for further improvement. With the continued assistance of the diocese and the local education authority (LEA), the school is in a strong position to quicken the pace and to improve the quality and range of what it provides. It has robust systems to check on what it does and the governors and headteacher are making reasoned decisions about how to use the school's resources. Although there are still gaps in management expertise, subject and key stage leaders have a sound understanding of where they need to influence change. However, the systems to track the pupils' progress are new and the school is in the early stages of collating and analysing all the available evidence to pinpoint what will be most effective in raising standards.

What the school should do to improve further

The key priorities for the school's development plan are to:

- accelerate the pupils' progress in order to raise standards throughout the school especially in English and mathematics;
- improve further the quality of teaching and learning;
- strengthen the effectiveness of school and subject leadership and management;
- sharpen the quality of school development planning and ensure that the school's priorities are clear for the short and longer term.

Achievement and standards

Standards are rising slowly but are still too low. The school is unlikely to meet its targets in this year's national tests. In 2004, the school's results compared badly with those of similar schools in English and mathematics, but in science the Year 6 pupils did particularly well. The beneficial impact of the strong focus on scientific investigation continues to show in the good progress of most pupils in all year groups. The pupils rise to the challenge of practical work especially when they are encouraged to pose their own questions and to use their initiative. The school has had recent sporting success. Nevertheless, the teaching does not consistently challenge the pupils. The higher attaining pupils often work within their potential.

Overall, the pupils are making satisfactory progress but there are inconsistencies across year groups and subjects. The pupils who have special educational needs make steady, satisfactory progress in meeting their personal targets. The pupils in Year 6 have made significant progress after an unsettled few years. Nearly all are at or close to the level expected for their age and a small proportion has done better. The pupils in the reception year have made satisfactory progress overall and good progress in personal, social and emotional development. Even so, they could have achieved more. In all year groups, the pupils have good listening skills and their confident, fluent use of language stands them in good stead when reading and writing. However, the quality and consistency of the pupils' work varies too much especially in spelling and the use of punctuation. Many pupils write neatly but slowly. The pupils have a sound knowledge of number and ways to solve number problems. They are confident in using a range of computer software but do not have enough opportunities to apply their knowledge and refine their skills.

Personal development

Purposeful lessons, clear rules and firm, positive management by the adults have led to improvements in the pupils' behaviour and in their attitudes to learning. The older pupils

appreciate the positive changes; they commented that the school is much more settled and a better place in which to learn. Attendance has risen and is close to the national average. The pupils are keen to meet their targets, easily motivated, willing to apply themselves and sensible when working with a partner or in a group. Pupils in Year 1 discussed maturely when looking at photographs and the pupils in the reception class were totally absorbed in making sandwiches for a picnic later in the day. The 'sticky fingers' art and craft club after school was very popular. The pupils value the different rewards and appreciate the need for sanctions. On the whole, they behave well in and around the school. A growing strength is the pupils' concern about, and intolerance of, the poor conduct of a few. Three pupils have been excluded from school for short periods this year because of their behaviour.

The overall provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Attractive displays throughout the school celebrate the pupils' achievements and invite reflection on particular themes and key events in the pupils' lives. Good examples were the displays on the meaning of Advent, the residential trip to Arthog and the shared success in winning the shield in football. The pupils particularly like the way the school celebrates their birthdays and welcomes news from life outside school. In assemblies, class prayers and talk with adults, the pupils are encouraged to think about and to care for others. This spills over into the appointment of older pupils as playground leaders and pupils in all years to help with routine tasks. There is much scope to build on the latent initiative of the pupils, and also to develop the involvement of the school council in making decisions about school life. The resurfacing of the playground offers an opportunity for the pupils to consider ways to promote good health and safety. The school organises visits to places of local interest but there are limited opportunities for the pupils to explore different cultures and traditions.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved since the inspection in 2003 and is now satisfactory overall. It was good in 6 of the 17 lessons, mostly in Key Stage 1 and in Year 6. In all but one of the other lessons, the teaching was satisfactory. The lack of consistency in the teaching partly accounts for the limited improvements in the pupils' progress and the slow rise in standards. The teaching is not driving the pupils' learning sufficiently and the teachers' expectations of the pupils are too modest.

The strengths of the teaching lie in the increased confidence of the staff in managing the pupils' behaviour and providing lively, purposeful lessons. The teachers had organised their rooms well to support the pupils' learning, particularly in writing, mathematics and science. The teaching assistants played an active part in leading groups and supporting individuals. Their unobtrusive presence ensured that pupils who have physical and emotional needs participated fully in lessons indoors and out. The teachers' use of the interactive whiteboards enlivened lessons as did the effective use of talk partners to discuss ideas and answers to questions. When the teachers broke the learning into steps and demonstrated just enough for the pupils to see what they had to do, the pupils usually learnt well. In

mathematics, for example, the discussion of errors and strategies ensured that pupils in Years 2 and 6 made good progress in resolving practical problems.

The pupils' learning was limited in several lessons because the pace was too slow; the teachers talked too much and for too long. The teachers did not always do enough to ensure the pupils understood fully how they could use what they already knew, or how they could improve their performance. This was most evident in writing. In marking the pupils' work done in lessons and at home, the teachers are starting to comment on what the pupils need to do to improve. The school has developed systems to assess and track the pupils' progress, including detailed observations of the pupils in the reception year. The information gained has been used to set targets and to identify those pupils who would benefit from additional support but the school is only in the early stages of analysing and interpreting the data to identify trends and implications.

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and is satisfactory overall. The quality has improved and there is a stronger focus in all year groups on practical work to develop skills as well as knowledge. The pupils in Year 3 have been 'history detectives' looking at Egyptian artefacts, and recent work to make torches and use cam shafts gave the pupils in Years 4 and 5 time to experiment and try things out. The provision for the pupils in the reception year now similarly has a wider range of activities especially in number, but infrequent use is made of the outdoors as a place to learn. The school is looking at ways to strengthen the curriculum further for all the pupils, especially in music, art and sport, through linking subjects and providing extra activities.

Through an unsettled period, the school has retained close links with the parents, the church and the local community.

Leadership and management

School governance, leadership and management have improved and are now satisfactory with some good elements. The deputy headteacher was appointed to the position of substantive headteacher from September 2004. She has benefited from the advice and guidance of three experienced headteachers, one of whom was seconded by the diocese to the school for two terms in 2004. As a result, she has gained in confidence and set up key systems to guide the work of the school. She has been particularly successful in fostering a good team spirit and a growing, positive acceptance of the need for change along with shared industry, willingness and enthusiasm to make things better.

The stability of staffing has proved elusive. For differing reasons, there have been many changes of teachers during this and the previous school year which has affected the learning of most year groups but particularly the oldest pupils. The school was rocked by the resignation of the deputy headteacher very shortly after taking up the post and the governors have been unable to recruit someone of the right calibre to replace her. An experienced deputy headteacher, placed at the school for this term by the LEA, has won the respect of the pupils in Year 6, and led the review of the provision for special educational

needs and behaviour management. Her work has helped to place the school in a sound position to consolidate practice and to accelerate the pace of improvement.

Although there have been marked strides in the development of management skills, gaps in expertise remain, especially in the collation and critical interpretation of information about the school's performance. The targets and priorities for the school in the next few years are unclear. The subject leaders have identified areas for development in their action plans, but they have not indicated how the developments are expected to raise standards or to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

The leaders of Key Stages 1 and 2 are playing an increasingly active role in school improvement. They are checking the quality of provision, identifying actions needed and supporting others in carrying them out. They and other staff are also developing their expertise as subject leaders. They are benefiting from the links with teachers in another school and from the training and advice given by consultants and advisors from the LEA.

The governing body, under the firm leadership of the chair, is now better informed about the effectiveness of the school and more critical in questioning what it does. It has rightly given much time to considering the implications of the lower number of pupils and reduced income for the management, staffing and organisation of the school.

The LEA and the diocese have invested considerable funding, time, expertise and support in the school to help resolve personnel issues, plug gaps in management expertise and forestall financial difficulties. The planned support for the next year is crucial to allow the school to strengthen management expertise and to tighten the links between assessment, setting targets and teaching.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

St Mary's Catholic Primary School was inspected in March 2003 under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors. 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 and Additional Inspectors in November 2003, in March, July and December 2004 and in March 2005 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of March 2003.

In June 2005, two HMI 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.

Seventeen 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. Discussions were held with the headteacher, the chair of governors, the acting deputy headteacher, with phase leaders, representatives from the diocese and the LEA and informally with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was 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 March 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

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