



# St Mark's Catholic Primary School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 104469  
**LEA** Knowsley  
**Inspection number** 277166  
**Inspection dates** 12 December 2005 to 13 December 2005  
**Reporting inspector** Mr Colin Smith CfBT Lead Inspector

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary	<b>School address</b>	Fir Avenue
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided		Halewood
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 11		Liverpool, Merseyside L26 0XR
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 288 8910
<b>Number on roll</b>	154	<b>Fax number</b>	0151 288 8912
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr F Wyatt
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	6 December 1999	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs M Gilbertson

<b>Age group</b> 3 to 11	<b>Inspection dates</b> 12 December 2005 - 13 December 2005	<b>Inspection number</b> 277166
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## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

## **Description of the school**

The school is average in size. Although children's backgrounds are very mixed, many are from socially disadvantaged families and the proportion entitled to free school meals is well above the national average. The percentage of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average and the majority of children enter school with low levels of attainment. Almost all of the children are white British heritage and two are in public care. Pupil numbers are falling and the school is currently recovering from long-term staff absence. The school has gained Investors in People Status, three successive achievement awards and the Healthy Schools Award.

## **Key for inspection grades**

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

St Mark's is a good school that provides good value for money. The school has an accurate picture of its strengths and weaknesses and evaluates teaching and learning, achievement, the curriculum and leadership and management to be good, which they are. The school judges the level of care and support provided to be outstanding. Very effective links with external agencies ensure that it is. The school also considers children's personal development and well-being to be outstanding. This area is good with many outstanding features but attendance is only satisfactory.

Children make a bright start in the Nursery and Reception class in response to good teaching. Successful teaching also enables junior children to achieve well and reach standards that are, more often than not, higher than average by the end of Year 6.

Falling rolls and reduced budgets have seriously tested the school's resolve over the last two years. Standards in the infant classes have suffered as a result of prolonged staff absence. Staffing is now stable but the school recognises that an injection of more rigorous monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning will be required to raise the achievement of the more able children and restore standards in Year 2 to their former levels. That said, significant improvements have been made in most other aspects of the school's work since the previous inspection. This indicates the school's good capacity to move forward, even in difficult circumstances.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Increase achievement in Years 1 and 2, particularly of the more able children.
- Rigorously monitor teaching and learning to ensure that standards improve by the end of Year 2.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Children achieve well overall. They make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes. However, because of their low starting points, they do not reach the learning goals nationally expected. By the end of Year 2 standards are significantly below average in reading, writing and mathematics and results have declined over recent years. Prolonged staff absence has hindered children's progress. Now that staffing is stable, children's achievement is improving.

Good teaching enables junior children to make good progress. The 2005 national test results were just above the national average in English and science and average standards in mathematics. However, significantly higher than average standards in the preceding three years earned the school achievement awards.

Children, who find learning difficult make consistently good progress, and often achieve the standards expected nationally. The more able children's achievement is better in junior than in infant classes.

Former weaknesses in writing have been rectified and the gap between reading and writing has narrowed. Improved provision in information and communication technology (ICT) has raised standards to the levels expected. The strong emphasis placed on reading, writing, mathematical and ICT skills provide a strong foundation for the future.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Children's personal development and well-being are good and in some aspects outstanding. Their attitudes and behaviour are usually good and in many lessons, exemplary. Children's feeling of safety and security in school arises from sharing any anxieties with trusted adults. Having a 'worry box' to register concerns makes a very valuable contribution to the school's calm and very supportive ethos. Children's attendance is broadly average.

Children respond very enthusiastically to the wide range of opportunities to take responsibility within the school and the wider community. Apart from the well-established school council, some children conducted a speed traffic survey using radar guns and others constructed bird boxes to conserve local wildlife. Two children represent the school in the local Children's Parliament. The good range of out of school activities is a major influence on their very good personal development.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They relish encouragement to accept responsibility and to work together. Their beautiful singing and instrumental work clearly illustrates their wonder and enjoyment of learning. Healthy eating, regular exercise, increasing independence in learning and making informed choices, provides a strong foundation for their future development.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning are good overall. Children's successful learning in the Nursery and Reception class is attributable to the meticulous planning of a wide range of purposeful activities and good levels of adult support. Children's learning is regularly and accurately assessed throughout the school. In the junior classes, teachers use this information very effectively in planning work that closely matches children's different levels of understanding. Consequently, the level of challenge is consistently high and all children learn at a good rate. Teaching in Years 1 and 2 is satisfactory but not enough is expected of the more able children to ensure that their learning is fully extended. Tightly focused teaching of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensures that they meet their targets.

The management of children's behaviour is consistently good. Consequently, children concentrate on their work and give of their best. The use of ICT projection screens is particularly effective in illustrating new ideas. Staff training on understanding children's different styles of learning is leading to more imaginative teaching. For example, in

an excellent Year 4/5 lesson, the richness and variety of tasks provided significantly enhanced children's understanding of the use of verbs.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The good curriculum provided meets statutory requirements. Nursery and Reception children benefit from stimulating experiences that stir their curiosity and help them to learn independently. Careful planning ensures that infant and junior children's learning builds securely from one year to the next.

For the most part, the curriculum is adapted well to cater for children's different learning and personal needs. Children with learning difficulties are particularly well provided for. The needs of the more able children are well catered for in junior classes, although not sufficiently in infant classes. Very able children are increasingly developing their gifts and talents through projects with neighbouring schools.

Children's education is enriched successfully through many additional activities in sport, ICT, modern languages and the performing arts. These activities, along with interesting lessons, significantly enhance their enjoyment of learning. The school's very successful personal, social and health education programme ensures that children become aware of dangers and the importance of healthy lifestyles.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

The level of care and support provided is outstanding. This is particularly evident in the excellent pastoral support offered to individual children, which successfully removes any barriers to learning. Very secure child protection and health and safety procedures have been established. Not surprisingly, children say that they feel very safe and extremely well supported in school.

The school provides equally strong support and guidance to any vulnerable children and those identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The excellent working partnership between school staff and external agencies makes a major contribution to their care and very strong personal development. With the exception of a small number of more able infant children, accurate assessment of children's learning enables challenging targets for improvement to be agreed. Teachers ensure that children understand what they need to do to improve and this leads to good progress for the vast majority.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management of the school are good overall. The headteacher's positive leadership is guiding the school safely through a difficult period. Despite concerns about falling pupil numbers and staff absence, standards in Year 6 have continued to rise. Significant improvements in teaching, learning and standards in the key subjects

and ICT have been made since the previous inspection. Children's very good personal development and the outstanding levels of care and support have gone from strength to strength. These developments illustrate the school's good capacity to improve. Parents and children are proud of the school. They appreciate their views being taken seriously and value the school's commitment to including all children in all that it provides.

The school has satisfactory systems for monitoring school performance and identifying weaknesses. The analysis of assessment data is good. Samples of children's work in several subjects are examined and assessments made of their learning are carefully analysed. This enables any weaknesses in progress to be detected and targets set for improvement. This process has worked well in the Foundation Stage and in junior classes where staffing has remained stable. However, prolonged staffing absences in the infants have disrupted children's learning. The time and energy devoted to checking the effectiveness of planning and teaching has not been sufficient to prevent the subsequent fall in standards. This is an issue that the school must put right now that the staffing issues have been resolved. Governors provide good levels of support and ensure that statutory requirements are met. Their role in holding the school to account is satisfactory.

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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	NA
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2	NA
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	NA
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1	NA

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for helping us to carry out the inspection.

You are correct in believing that your school is successful. There are many good features. The main ones are:

- your very good behaviour and good personal development
- the outstanding level of care provided for all children
- the good start made by children when they begin school
- the effective teaching that enables most children to achieve well
- the way the school is led and managed.

There are only a small number of areas for improvement. Standards have slipped in the infants. Now the school must:

- raise achievement in Years 1 and 2, particularly for the more able children
- check teaching and learning carefully to ensure that standards improve by the end of Year 2 and return to where they were a few years ago.