



St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 112353
LEA Cumbria
Inspection number 278913
Inspection dates 24 January 2006 to 25 January 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Eric Jackson

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	High Road
School category	Community		Kells
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Whitehaven, Cumbria
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01946 852685
Number on roll	151	Fax number	01946 852686
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Robert Goulding
Date of previous inspection	1 June 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Susan Starkie

Age group 4 to 11	Inspection dates 24 January 2006 - 25 January 2006	Inspection number 278913
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's is a small Catholic primary school. It has 151 children on roll and 29 attend the nursery part time. The proportion of children eligible for free school meals is high. Children's attainment on entry is below average, particularly in speech and language. There are few children from minority ethnic groups, and none learning English as an additional language. The number of children with learning difficulties or disabilities is below average, but the number with a Statement of Special Educational Need is above average. The school has the Active Mark for physical education. There are two staff temporarily covering maternity leave. Four other teaching staff are newly appointed. The new headteacher was appointed permanently in January 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The inspection confirms the school's view that it is a satisfactory school with some good features. In partnership with the local authority, it has improved well in the last 12 months after two years of major instability. Satisfactory improvement has been made since the last inspection. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses and its capacity to improve is good. It gives satisfactory value for money.

Standards rose in 2005 in Year 6 to be average in English and mathematics, and above average in science. This represents satisfactory achievement and a good improvement on the 2003 and 2004 test results. The new headteacher has brought stability and purpose to the school and this has been welcomed by parents. She uses her knowledge of the school well in setting a clear direction. She has inspired high morale in the enthusiastic and hardworking staff, and this has had a positive impact on standards and achievement. Two other experienced leaders make a good contribution, but some recently appointed staff need to develop their leadership skills further. Achievement and standards are satisfactory in the nursery and reception classes, but planning for learning is not linked closely enough across these classes. Children's personal development is good: they behave well and have good attitudes to learning. Spiritual and cultural development has improved and is good. The assessment of children's learning is satisfactory, with strengths in literacy, but this good practice does not extend across all subjects.

What the school should do to improve further

- Train new staff in leadership skills to help them take increasing responsibility for raising standards and quality.
- Spread the good assessment practice to other subjects so that children know how to improve their work more clearly.
- Link Foundation Stage planning for learning more effectively across the two classes to raise children's achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are broadly average in English and mathematics, and above average in science. Achievement is satisfactory across the school overall. Progress in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory, but there is some room for improvement because of weaknesses in planning. Children in reception are on track to achieve just below expected levels. Standards are broadly average in Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics, maintaining the levels generally achieved. Year 6 children achieved challenging targets in 2005, and the current Year 6 are on track to do the same this year. This represents good improvement on the Year 6 results in 2003 and 2004, continuing an improving trend. In English, mathematics and science lessons, progress seen in Years 2, 5 and 6 was good.

There is no significant underachievement by any group. Children with learning difficulties or disabilities make satisfactory progress towards the targets set in their individual education plans. In 2005, boys and children with learning difficulties made above average progress from Year 2 to Year 6. Improvements have been made in information and communications technology (ICT) so that achievement is satisfactory and standards are broadly average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Children enjoy coming to school. They have positive attitudes to their work and are proud of their achievements. There are good systems to promote attendance, which is above average. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. The school has a caring Christian ethos in which all are valued and children feel secure and safe. They understand the difference between right and wrong and often take the initiative in raising funds for the less fortunate. Children help with the smooth running of the school through the school council, and they help to care for others in the 'play leader' system. The school ensures that they understand how to keep safe and healthy. There are good opportunities for sport and exercise, leading to the award of the Active Mark, and children are encouraged to eat wisely. The emphasis placed on increasing children's skills in literacy and numeracy, and showing respect and consideration for others, helps to develop the skills, understanding and attitudes needed in later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory with some good features. The staff are keen and enthusiastic, and there are clear signs of improvement in children's learning. They make the progress expected of them, enjoy their work and try hard. One parent wrote, 'My children can't wait to tell me about their school day.' Teachers have secure subject knowledge in core subjects, but are occasionally unsure in foundation subjects. Planning for learning is thorough, including in the Foundation Stage, although it is not closely enough linked between nursery and reception. This results in inconsistencies in the organisation of lessons and how children are expected to learn. More generally, teaching meets the differing groups of children's needs satisfactorily, and there is often good challenge for higher attainers. Core subjects are taught effectively in separate Year 3 to 6 age groups in the morning. An excellent English lesson in a Year 1 and 2 class led to rapid progress in children's understanding and use of non-fiction texts. ICT is used effectively to support independent study.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. Teachers plan carefully to cover all curricular requirements. They are careful to avoid omissions or repetitions in the mixed age classes. The school focuses on planning for learning, evident in many classrooms where displays show that there is an interesting variety of guidance across the full range of subjects. The weakness in planning for the Foundation Stage remains, however. Literacy and numeracy skills are used well across the curriculum and the use of ICT is developing effectively to support learning across other subjects. The good range of extra-curricular activities in the school has been maintained despite staff changes. Visits and visitors enrich the curriculum effectively.

Procedures for assessing children's academic progress are satisfactory overall, with particular strengths in literacy. These procedures are relatively new and not yet developed across all subjects. A good start has been made to include children in self-assessment by giving them individual targets, but this practice is not common across subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The headteacher has developed successfully a friendly, welcoming community where children feel valued. There is a strong partnership with parents. The school makes children's welfare a priority. The learning mentor and teaching assistants play a major part in this, especially for vulnerable children who know help is always at hand. Parents appreciate this and value the opportunity to communicate with staff when they have concerns. Child protection procedures are well established and all staff are trained in them. Health and safety checks are carried out regularly and the school makes very good use of external agencies.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory, as at the last inspection. The headteacher, appointed following a year as acting head, provides good leadership, and has set clear direction to raise standards and the quality of provision. She has brought the staff team together well, supporting the four newly qualified teachers strongly. Staff, children, parents and governors recognise how much the school has improved recently. One parent said, 'The school has come on in leaps and bounds since she was appointed.' As most staff are new to the school, leadership and management duties are mainly shared with two other key staff. This is effective currently, but duties are not yet shared widely enough amongst the staff who could play a stronger role in raising standards across the school. Nevertheless, the school is well-placed to continue to

improve. The decline in standards in the recent past has been halted, and standards and achievement are now rising well. This is because:

- improvement planning is good
- the headteacher has high expectations that staff and children follow
- the staff work hard to ensure that children learn effectively
- good, friendly relationships promote good behaviour and motivate the children to work hard
- all children have access to the learning opportunities provided.

School self-evaluation is honest and accurate. It makes good use of the views of governors, parents and children. The school is orderly and runs well. Links with parents and outside agencies make a useful contribution to children's learning. Governance is satisfactory and the school gives satisfactory value for money.

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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>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	3	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	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

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	NA

¹ 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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	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	3	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

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
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
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
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
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
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
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
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

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24 January 2006

Dear children,

Thank you for welcoming Mr Alston and I when we visited your school. The wonderful views you have of the mountains, the sea and the sky really surprised us. We enjoyed seeing your work and talking to you about what you do. In fact, we feel that you behave well and really try hard in your work, so that you are developing good personal skills.

You know that our job is to write a report about how well your school helps you to learn. Well, what did we think after these two days? We always ask children their views of the school and one boy said, 'All the teachers and pupils get on really well'. He was right: your school is a very caring school where everybody counts. You have a good staff team led by a hard-working head teacher and deputy and everyone wants you to do as well as you can. Your teachers make learning interesting, ask you to work hard and as a result you make satisfactory progress in lessons. We were pleased to see how well you respond and how well everyone got on. We saw lots of you who had responsibilities and jobs to do, and you did them well. We were also very pleased to see you take regular exercise to keep healthy.

I'm sure your teachers always say, 'this is good but you could make it even better if you...'
Well, this is what we are telling your school – to get even better it needs to set you challenging targets in all subjects. We also feel that the nursery and reception need to plan their work together more, and that all teachers need to develop their own areas of responsibility as well as they do in literacy and numeracy.

We would like to wish you well, and hope that you carry on enjoying your school.

Yours sincerely

Eric Jackson (Lead Inspector) Gordon Alston (Team Inspector).