



St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Axminster

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113423
LEA Devon
Inspection number 279168
Inspection dates 25 May 2006 to 25 May 2006
Reporting inspector Helen Barter AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Lyme Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Axminster
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Devon EX13 5BE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01297 32785
Number on roll	128	Fax number	01297 32785
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	
Date of previous inspection	18 September 2000	Headteacher	Miss Anne-Marie McIntosh

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This small primary school draws its pupils from a wide area around Axminster. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is slightly higher than the national average. The school roll is increasing with a number of pupils joining the school at different times. The school has undergone significant staffing changes since the last inspection. The headteacher joined the school in September 2003.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that provides good value for money. This confirms the view held by the school. It is a welcoming and happy community in which pupils' personal development and care are given high priority. Parents are very supportive of the school and it is becoming increasingly popular. Pupils enjoy coming to school and say so. Their behaviour and attitudes to learning are very positive. They are developing into responsible and happy young people. The good quality education and care provided contribute to the good achievement and progress of the majority of pupils. Teaching is good and pupils are very keen learners. Standards in the Foundation Stage are satisfactory. Children settle quickly into school routines and begin to develop their independence. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2 and then pick up speed in Years 3 to 6 as they develop confidence and improve their writing, speaking and listening skills. By the time they leave the school, most pupils consistently reach above average standards. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education. The school recognises that it now needs to strengthen its use of information about pupils' progress to make sure that all pupils, particularly those with learning difficulties, achieve consistently well across the school. The school is well led by a caring and effective headteacher who, with staff and governors, is dedicated to the continuing improvement of the school. The school is developing its systems for checking how effective it is. It is accurate in its evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses. However, while it knows what it needs to do to improve and to raise standards further, this is not sufficiently well reflected in the school development plan. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory and has gathered pace since the arrival of the headteacher. It now has the capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use assessment information more effectively to plan work for all pupils, particularly those with learning difficulties, and to help pupils understand better how to improve their own work.
- Improve the quality of the school development plan so that it focuses on the most important and current educational priorities for the school and is clearly aimed at raising standards.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Most pupils achieve well and make good progress from the point at which they start school. Children starting school in Reception have skills and abilities that are in line with those expected for their age although a few have relatively weak language skills. They settle well into school life and most achieve the goals expected of them. Well established routines encourage children to become independent and to develop good social skills. Pupils continue to make satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2 and achieve standards that are broadly average. A focus on improving boys' achievement, particularly in writing, resulted in standards that were just above the national average

in 2005. Pupils make good progress from Years 3 to 6. The school's actions to give pupils more opportunities to develop their writing skills have resulted in particularly good improvement in their achievement and standards in English since the last inspection. By the time they leave the school in Year 6, pupils reach standards that are consistently above average and they meet the challenging targets set for them. In 2005 standards were exceptionally high and pupils exceeded the challenging targets set for them. Pupils with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress overall although not all reach the targets set for them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good. Attendance is good because pupils enjoy school and are eager to learn. They say that 'our teachers are fun and we like them very much.' Pupils behave well in lessons and at playtimes. They are considerate towards others and friendly with other pupils and with adults. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are confident to express their views and reflect on ideas and problems in a mature way. They have a strongly developed moral sense and an appreciation of the needs of others. Pupils' cultural awareness is satisfactory. The school recognises that it is mostly limited to within their own rural environment and requires further development. Pupils make a good contribution to the community through their links with the parish and other schools. The prefects are good, sensible role models for younger pupils to follow. The school council makes well considered decisions to improve the school environment. Pupils know they should eat healthily and appreciate the improved quality of their school dinners. They know that exercise keeps them fit and are keen to undertake training to be safer cyclists. They are becoming well rounded young people and are well prepared for life ahead.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good and enables pupils to achieve well. There is good practice in teaching methods in all classes. Teachers use questioning well to extend pupils' thinking skills. Pupils' language skills improve because adults set good examples for them to follow in discussions. Relationships between adults and pupils are very good. Teachers set clear expectations for work and behaviour in the classroom. As a result, pupils develop confidence and are eager to work even when they find work difficult. Teaching assistants are an effective part of the teaching team. They are well deployed to give good support to groups and individual pupils. In the Foundation Stage, assessment of children's learning leads to well planned activities which are matched to their needs and abilities. New systems for gathering information about pupils' performance and tracking their progress are proving effective in helping teachers to understand where pupils could improve further. However, teachers do not always make enough use of

this information to plan work for all ability levels, particularly those with learning difficulties.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum for all pupils is good. It is well planned to ensure that all pupils develop the skills they need within the mixed age classes. Teachers plan the curriculum together effectively to ensure that links between subjects are established. As a result, pupils find learning interesting and use their literacy and numeracy skills well in other subjects. The provision for the development of key skills in information and communication technology (ICT) has developed well since the last inspection. It continues to be a focus for school improvement with the renewal of some out-of-date equipment and planned acquisition of new resources, including interactive whiteboards to help teachers bring learning to life even more for pupils. The curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage is developing well. It provides good opportunities for them to improve their speaking and listening skills through play. A good range of visits, visitors and after-school activities, including sports and a residential visit for Year 6 pupils, significantly enriches the curriculum for pupils and increases their enjoyment of school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. The school's ethos of care and concern helps pupils to feel confident and learn well. Parents praise highly the way that staff and 'buddies' help new pupils to settle in at school. Pupils are very clear that they are well cared for and that adults always listen to them. They know that the worry box is a safe way to communicate their concerns. Arrangements for child protection are very good. There are effective systems to ensure pupils' health and safety. All staff give good informal guidance to pupils. Teachers help them to know what to do to improve their work through regular discussions with them. However, marking, while done regularly, does not always indicate to pupils how to improve their work. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties is satisfactory. However, some pupils do not achieve as well as they might because their individual education plans do not have precise enough targets for them to work towards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides strong leadership and works with energy and dedication to the school. Since her appointment, she has managed a period of significant staffing changes very well. She has built a competent staff team committed to improving the school and to making learning enjoyable and worthwhile. The governing body is supportive and provides challenge based on information from regular visits and discussions with staff. It has a clear long-term strategy for the school's growth based on improving resources and increasing the

school population. However, the school development plan is not sufficiently focused on setting the current key educational priorities. Nor does it provide clear criteria against which staff and governors can evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken in the drive to raise standards further. The school is making increasingly effective use of information, including the views of parents, pupils and governors, to evaluate its own effectiveness and to build an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. Recent initiatives to improve boys' achievement, pupils' writing across the school and the provision for ICT have already resulted in improved standards. This successful track record is a clear indication of the school's capacity to make further improvements in the future.

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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?	2	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	2	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?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	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	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	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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?	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	3	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

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

26 May 2006 Dear Pupils Thank you for making the inspectors welcome when we came to visit your school this week. You were very polite and friendly when I had lunch with you and when we talked to you about your work and your school. You think your school is good and we agree with you. These are some of the things which we found are good about it:

- You enjoy learning and all of you try very hard to do your best with your work.
- You know how to behave well and you make the school a happy place.
- You know how important it is to keep fit and healthy. It is good that you are enjoying your healthy school dinners more now.
- You are very kind to new children who start at the school. The parents say how much the 'buddies' help them to settle in. Thank you for doing this.
- Your teachers care very much about you. They make sure that you are well looked after and have someone to talk to if you are worried.
- You enjoy all the extra activities that adults organise for you during and after school. The mosaic in the hall of 'The Sower' that you did with the help of a parent is really beautiful. You must be very proud of it. We know that Miss McIntosh and all the other teachers know how to improve your school even more. We have especially asked them to work on these things:

- Keep on checking how well you are all doing. Then, give you work that makes you think hard and tell you what you need to do to make your work even better.
- Make sure that the school knows exactly what the most important things are to help you learn even better and then keep checking that what it is doing is working.

With very best wishes for the future Yours sincerely Mrs Helen Barter
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