



Accrington St Mary Magdalen's Church of England Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 119446
LEA Lancashire
Inspection number 280559
Inspection dates 10 January 2006 to 11 January 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Mark Williams

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Devonshire Street
School category	Voluntary aided		Accrington
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Lancashire, BB5 1DW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01254 232329
Number on roll	143	Fax number	01254 398502
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Miss L Kenyon
Date of previous inspection	1 October 2003	Headteacher	Mrs Jill R Strong

Age group 4 to 11	Inspection dates 10 January 2006 - 11 January 2006	Inspection number 280559
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one member of Her Majesty's Inspectorate and one additional inspector. The school was also subject to a Child Care Inspection and a Denominational Inspection at the same time.

Description of the school

Saint Mary Magdalen is a smaller than average primary school having 143 pupils on roll. Since being identified as having serious weaknesses in October 2003, the school has suffered from tremendous turbulence and undergone significant change. Previous issues hindering the school's progress are now being successfully resolved. From April to December 2005, the school was led by an associate headteacher. At the time of this inspection, the new headteacher had been in post for one week although she had already, in the term prior to her appointment, made some important contributions. Pupils enter the school with attainment levels well below national averages. Thirty three per cent of pupils receive free school meals, which is above the national average. About one third of pupils have joined or left the school at times other than usual starting and leaving dates. This again is above the national average. Twenty one per cent of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and 5% have a statement of special educational need.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school's previous designation as having serious weaknesses no longer applies.

After a period of severe disruption and difficulty, Saint Mary Magdalen school now provides an acceptable education for all pupils and gives satisfactory value for money. Improvements in leadership and management have made a significant difference to parents' perceptions of the school which is now seen 'as an oasis of calm for pupils'. Weaknesses in leadership and management have been rectified and issues such as poor behaviour dealt with successfully.

Standards in mathematics and writing in Key Stage 2 are still low but pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning. Standards in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are satisfactory as is teaching. Pupils' personal development is a strength as is their well-being. Increasingly, pupils are proud of their school as the changes made by senior managers influence pupils' attitudes, behaviour and attainment. The quality of provision for teaching, learning and the curriculum is satisfactory with some key strengths. Similarly, additional curricular opportunities, care and guidance are satisfactory. Work undertaken to improve assessment and target setting requires further work to ensure that more able pupils achieve the levels they are capable of. Leadership and management, although satisfactory overall, has been strengthened by the strong influence of the associate headteacher and the impressive governing body. The school has begun to develop the competences and confidence of subject leaders who require a clearer understanding of standards and achievement across the school. Through improved self-evaluation and targeted action, policies, practices and procedures are now embedding and supporting pupils' progress. Inspectors strongly believe the school has the capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards of attainment of mathematics and writing in Key Stage 2.
- Ensure assessment systems provide teachers with information to target and challenge all pupils, especially the more able.
- Develop the role of subject leader to ensure a thorough understanding of achievement and standards, and what needs to be done further, across the school.
- Improve progress in the Foundation Stage by making experiences more relevant to their needs and providing an outdoor environment that is accessible to extend learning in all areas of the curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement from a very low starting point is satisfactory, although standards in Year 6, especially in mathematics and writing, remain stubbornly below average. Following the appointment of the associate headteacher in April 2005, significant and necessary improvements to eradicate a legacy of underachievement have seen pupils begin to

make satisfactory progress in English, mathematics and science. The recently introduced assessment systems provide convincing evidence that the pace of learning for pupils is increasing and that progress is being made. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are now making satisfactory progress due to clear individual education plans. Unfortunately, these measures came too late for the 2005 Key Stage 2 tests where results in mathematics were well below the national average. The school failed to meet its targets but current information based on assessment, and strong teaching in Year 6, points to the school exceeding its challenging targets this year. Inspectors have found that more able pupils across the school are not as robustly targeted or challenged as other children and their progress, therefore, is slower. From a very low starting point, standards and progress in the Foundation Stage are satisfactory, although pupils do not reach the level expected at the end of this year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school that provision in this area is good. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is reflected in the school's strong community spirit. The school is currently developing opportunities to celebrate multicultural diversity; for example, through themed weeks. The introduction of a clear behaviour policy has made a positive impact resulting in significant improvements to pupils' attitudes and behaviour and, as a result, the school is a calmer, well ordered learning environment. Parents in particular appreciate the improvements in these areas. Pupils enjoy school and this is reflected by their improved attendance which is now satisfactory. The school has successfully combated poor attendance through regular and rigorous monitoring. It has made good progress in this area from the last inspection. Pupils feel safe and secure in school and are encouraged to adopt healthy and safe lifestyles. The developing School Council is appreciated by the school community. Pupils take and share responsibility and develop teamwork. Good partnerships exist with the parish church and the local community through sharing worship and charitable fund raising. The school, through effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) and a more focused approach in raising literacy and numeracy standards, is beginning to develop skills that will contribute to the pupils' future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

While the school judges teaching and learning to be good, inspectors have found it to be satisfactory. However, the inspection does identify strengths in Key Stage 2. This is an improvement since the last inspection. A positive feature in most lessons is good management based on praise and encouragement. As a result, pupils confidently try out new ideas and behave well. Teachers include a stimulating variety of activities including the use of interactive whiteboards. Consequently, lessons are fun and learning

is assured. Planning is good and teachers tell pupils what they are to learn in lessons so they understand the purpose of their tasks. In an outstanding problem solving session with Year 6, the teacher inspired the pupils. They were very enthusiastic to share their skills and much is achieved in the last year in school. However, when teaching is less effective tasks fail to sustain interest and assessment is not used successfully to match work correctly to pupils' ability and this does not lead to effective learning. Marking is not always used consistently and is sometimes over positive, ignoring key features such as spelling. It does not always enable pupils to take the next step of their learning. This is an area the school is aware of. In the Foundation Stage, staff provide a caring environment and children settle well. An imaginative array of practical activities is planned but the delivery and challenge are lacking and the pace of learning could be faster. Opportunities to select and work independently are not always available. Support staff make a positive contribution to learning especially for the pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. Teachers plan thoroughly to avoid omission or repetition of topics in the mixed age classes. The numeracy and literacy strategies are firmly embedded. Teachers are flexible in their use of time, opting for additional mental mathematic sessions, additional reading or handwriting time. This is raising standards. However, the next step to improve standards is to insist that pupils use their joined up writing in all activities. The curriculum for the Foundation Stage is also satisfactory but the organisation of the classroom and opportunities for structured play on a regular basis are not sufficiently developed. Activities seen were too directed by staff with limited independent learning. The lack of a suitable area restricts the use of outdoors to extend not only physical development but other areas of learning. Extra-curricular activities are good and include fencing and drama. Parents and pupils appreciate these activities. A highlight for pupils are visits including trying out adventurous activities. As well as enriching the curriculum, visitors offer advice on health and safety.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

As correctly identified by parents and staff this is a caring and friendly school. The required checks are carried out to keep the environment safe. Child protection procedures are rigorous and all staff are trained. External agencies are contacted promptly when a need arises and the school monitors closely children they regard as vulnerable. Healthy lifestyles are encouraged. Pupils have been consulted about the use of additional time for physical education. This has led to some interesting activities including aerobics, yoga, golf and hockey. Visitors tell pupils about looking after themselves and keeping safe. Pupils say they feel safe because their teachers protect them. These messages about safety are effectively reinforced in lessons devoted to extending personal and social skills. Most teachers give considerable time to telling pupils how they can improve their work. This is effective help. However, it is not

consistent across the school. Some comments are too positive and fail to draw attention to on-going errors. A good start has been made to setting pupils individual targets but teachers are not referring to them sufficiently and their impact on learning is not as effective as they could be. Overall this area is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management, since the last inspection, are satisfactory. Since April 2005, the good, strong leadership and management of the associate headteacher, coupled with the commitment of the governing body, and the new headteacher, provide the school with the capacity to improve even further. For example, more attention is now being given to raising standards, although impact is yet to be seen on results in national tests.

The appointment of the associate headteacher sharpened the school's focus. Her strong leadership, together with the greatly improved, knowledgeable and challenging governing body, has ensured that significant and often difficult decisions have been made to bring about necessary improvements in teaching, learning, staffing and resource management. The school now has a more effective programme of self-evaluation and improvement that is owned and valued by staff and governors alike. Sometimes the targets for improvement and success criteria are not as sharply focused as they might be and some important areas, such as the Foundation Stage, are not clearly defined. More needs to be done to ensure that subject leaders, including leadership of the Foundation Stage, have a full grasp of standards and progress within the school. However, the school now has a better view than was the case in the past on how to raise standards and become even more inclusive. There is now more rigorous management of performance in which, for example, clear feedback to teachers on how the quality of lessons can be improved has been given and acted upon. The school, therefore, is now more effective at tackling under achievement. Parents and pupils feel valued. The school is now providing value for money but, due to the levels of underachievement in Key Stage 2, this has not always been the case.

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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?	3	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	4	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	3	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	3	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	2	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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Mrs Jill R Strong

Accrington St Mary Magdalen's Church of England Primary School

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12 January 2006

Dear Children

As you know Mrs Platt and I visited your school on 10 and 11 January. We would like to say thank you for your very warm welcome and tell you how much we enjoyed ourselves in your company.

We were impressed with your behaviour and politeness and could see how much you enjoy school. We know your parents and you appreciate the efforts of all the adults in school, particularly the work Mrs Bradley has done with you all since April last year.

We have asked your new headteacher, Mrs Strong, to carry on the efforts made to improve standards in your school. We know you are now making progress, but would like to see you do better in mathematics and writing. Your teachers will help you to do this by setting very clear targets. We are confident you will all work hard as a school to do this.

This is an exciting time for your school. We know, because of your strong community spirit, you will all help Mrs Strong and she, with all the adults in school, will help you make even more improvements to your school.

We wish you every blessing for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mr Mark Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector