



St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 106930
Local Authority Rotherham
Inspection number 287653
Inspection date 9 January 2007
Reporting inspector Elizabeth Charlesworth

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Herringthorpe Valley Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Rotherham
Age range of pupils	5-11		South Yorkshire S65 2NU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01709 361502
Number on roll (school)	209	Fax number	01709 360506
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Josie Sanigar
		Headteacher	Mrs Helen McLaughlin
Date of previous school inspection	11 June 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is an average sized primary school in an urban location, taking children from a variety of pre-school settings. The neighbourhood from which the school mostly draws its pupils is relatively advantaged, though on the edge of some of the most deprived areas in South Yorkshire. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is very low and there are fewer pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or with statements of special educational needs than nationally, though this figure was higher in 2006. Most pupils are of White British heritage and the school is a very popular choice for families. Together with a partner secondary school, St Mary's has the Activemark for sport and has achieved Healthy School status.

The headteacher took up permanent position in September 2006 following a year's temporary headship.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Parents' views about the school can be summed up in comments such as, 'St Mary's is a great school'. Indeed, this is a good school, held in high regard by parents, pupils and in the town of Rotherham. In its own judgement the school regarded itself as satisfactory but the headteacher and governors can now see that they were overcautious and gave rather too much weight to the dip in results in 2006.

Following the headteacher's appointment, staff and governors worked together to define their vision for the school. Their aim to create an ethos wherein 'young people can grow and develop a sense of wonder about themselves and the world in which they live' is realised in the pupils' outstanding personal development. Pupils' level of maturity, reflecting the good care and support given by the school, is quite exceptional. The school council is a powerful influence on the life of the community, for instance introducing better and safer arrangements for lining up and coming into school because they were not happy with things as they were. A group of the oldest pupils meet regularly to play their part in making the world a better and fairer place to live, through and with the support of Amnesty International. They instigate fundraising, write letters to world leaders in protest at injustice and recently replicated the conditions in the sweatshops of the third world to emphasise that some things in life are 'just not fair'. Pupils say they enjoy school and during the day of the inspection, both during lessons and at lunchtime, they were observed relishing the excitement of a 'maths challenge', recreating the story of Rumpelstiltskin and, under the supervision of Year 6 play leaders, doing the 'Big Draw'. Pupils were falling over themselves to explain how whole classes get together to produce one big drawing.

Pupils' views are listened to and acted upon where possible. In a survey many pupils said lessons were not interesting and fun. This is certainly not the case now and pupils are quite clear that for them three things stand out as accountable for enlivening their learning: links with a partner secondary school which lead to exciting art projects; the increase in physical education and sport; and visits to local places of interest. This broadening of curricular opportunities is having a clearly perceptible impact on attitudes to and standards of work. As well as a good standard of artwork on the walls, pupils also write vividly and with great enthusiasm about the local environment, historic places of interest such as Conisborough Castle and about books they are studying in literature. Moreover, they say they 'don't mind having to do work' after a visit because it makes the work more interesting. Every day each class can be seen to 'take 10'. These ten minutes of daily physical exercise are part of the school's drive to adopt a healthier lifestyle, as well as providing a breath of fresh air to invigorate learning if the weather allows.

Results at the end of Key Stage 2 have been above average over a number of years. In 2006 results dipped and this was both a disappointment and a concern to the school. The drop seemed more drastic compared to the 2005 results when the school was amongst the best in the country for the progress pupils made across Key Stage 2. Since her appointment the headteacher has introduced a system for tracking pupils' progress across the school: this demonstrates that due to a higher number of pupils with learning

difficulties and/or disabilities within the year group in 2006, results were as could be expected based on pupils' starting point on entry to school. Challenging targets had been set and were met. In the present Year 6, standards are above average and it is clearly demonstrated that pupils are on track to meet their equally challenging targets in forthcoming tests and a few are already at the level expected of them.

Overall pupils make good progress from when they start in Reception to reach above average standards by Year 6. Children get off to a good start in Foundation Stage because of the vision and zeal of staff in providing them with stimulating learning experiences. Investment in new equipment, some based on children's own requests and interests, particularly in the outdoor area, is bringing about rapid improvement to the environment and children's learning. Throughout school pupils are confident in the care and support from adults that enables them to live, work and learn together and provides the basis for their subsequent development.

There is a burgeoning enthusiasm among staff about using the tracking system that supports the process of setting targets. However, this does not yet fully feed into the planning process to ensure learning opportunities are sufficiently challenging. The school identified the work done with pupils with special needs as a particular strength and the evidence presented shows that these pupils make good progress and, often against the odds, are well supported to reach the expected level for their age.

The previous inspection report referred to a weakness in the monitoring of teaching and learning. This aspect of management is still undertaken mostly by the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team and others with responsibilities do not yet play a full part in keeping track of standards and achievement in their subjects. Lesson observations are frequent and thorough but lack some clarity in giving a clear enough overview of the strengths and areas for development.

This is a school at the heart of its community, something parents are very keen to stress. Parents and grandparents, many former pupils themselves, join in various events as well as helping around school. They especially value 'Blue Sky Week', more so as their suggestions for improvements to toilets and accommodation in the Foundation Stage are being implemented.

Leadership and management are good overall. Governors, staff, parents and pupils are united in their praise of the headteacher and fully supportive of her drive for increasingly higher standards in all aspects of school life. Despite being over cautious in the grading in its self-evaluation the headteacher does know the school well and has pinpointed accurately its strengths and where it needs to improve in order to fulfil its vision that pupils 'leave us confident, fulfilled and excited to embrace their future'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure all leaders take responsibility in monitoring pupils' learning and contribute to raising achievement further.
- Make use of all assessment information to set challenging targets and to plan teaching and learning to ensure pupils achieve their potential.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good. Children start the Foundation Stage with standards that are broadly in line with those expected for their age. They make good progress, building well on these skills and are well prepared for the more rigorous demands of Key Stage 1. Pupils gain in confidence and self-esteem as they get older, qualities that influence their attitude to learning so that they continue to progress well, reaching above average standards by the time they leave at the end of Year 6. The ability to handle the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) stands them in good stead for the next stage of learning and ultimately future employment. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress because of the good support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development arises out of their deep concern for others. Pupils understand how important it is for everyone in the world, including in their own school, to be treated fairly. They say there is very little bullying because of their very good relationships with one another but also if they have a concern they can tell an adult in the confidence that it will be dealt with. There is a palpable sense of enjoyment in school, born out by the fact that the small amount of absence is accounted for. The art and music promoted in school, through secondary school links and visits to theatres and museums, stimulate an appreciation of culture and the arts. World culture is not forgotten and links with Amnesty International and the promoting of Fair Trade goods is raising greater awareness of how other people live. One of the school's aims is to prepare its pupils to cope with the demands of life, preparation for which begins in Reception where children learn to be responsible for their actions. Pupils have embraced the drive for healthy living by instigating a 'Healthy Schools Day', where everyone had to make healthy choices for school lunch or bring a healthy packed lunch. Together with physical education lessons, 'take 10', and lots of after school sport pupils are well on the road to healthy living.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. There is a lively buzz to learning throughout the school and this is in part due to a strategy to reduce teacher talk and increase the pupils' participation in their learning. Energies are directed at learning and pupils themselves report that because everyone is so engrossed there is no time for misbehaving. Pupils are involved in the marking of their work through 'buddy readers' in Year 6. This is just one example of how pupils look out for each other and

support each other's learning. Marking is effective and teachers point out where improvements can be made. However, the information gleaned from tracking pupils' progress is not yet linked to day-to-day marking or embedded in the planning of lessons to help pupils reach their individual targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The emphasis on providing well for literacy and numeracy, together with recent investment to improve ICT, means that the school has provided the means for pupils to reach above average standards. For this ambitious school, striving always for improvement, this was not enough. Pupils told staff they were not happy and so, building on links with secondary schools and harnessing the resources of the local community the school is now providing a good and more exciting curriculum. It is early days to judge the impact on standards but early indications are that writing and art show signs of improving further. There are many opportunities for learning out of school time, frequently with families, and members of a local professional sports club play an important part in making extra-curricular provision almost as good as it gets.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's ethos is one that fosters very good care and support. Pupils with special educational needs are particularly well cared for and parents speak warmly of the way their children's needs are met and how they are kept well informed of progress. The school fulfils its responsibilities for ensuring the health, safety and welfare of children.

Guidance given to pupils on how well they are doing and how they can improve is satisfactory and staff are becoming more confident with the tools of tracking progress to ensure all pupils are making equally good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher is managing a period of change in the life of this effective school very well. She has earned the respect of the school and wider community, who especially value the way she consults and listens to them. The roles within the senior leadership team are developing well as the headteacher grooms and coaches the individual members to accept greater accountability. The governing body is equally committed to the success of the school and is fully behind the headteacher in striving for excellence. Governors are very appreciative of the high quality reports they receive, enabling them to be even more effective in challenging and holding the school to account. Although some of the recommendations following the previous inspection have been slow to start, nevertheless progress since then has been good. The school has always known of its success, but initiatives recently introduced are helping it to

know the reasons why and how precisely to improve; as such St Mary's is well placed to continue to improve and give good value for money.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your good school recently. I had a very enjoyable day and would like to thank you all, especially those who gave up their lunchtime, for taking time to talk to me.

Here are some of the good things I found:

- you all get on with each other and older pupils look after young ones very well
- you are very confident and enjoy speaking out in lessons
- you said you have lots of exciting things to do such as going on visits, and I agree with you
- you are very intolerant of what you see as wrongdoings in the world and are prepared to speak out
- the school council gets things done.

I have asked your headteacher and governors to:

- make sure all the staff play their part in checking on your learning so that you are always able to do your best
- make sure the targets they set are the right ones for you and that they give you opportunities to help you achieve as well as you can.

You can help your school to be an even better one by enjoying your lessons and activities, always behaving excellently, as you do now, and always doing your best work.