

St Mark's RC Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108498
Local Authority	Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number	288119
Inspection dates	20–21 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Linda Buller

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	199
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Miss Margaret Hinshelwood
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Miller
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2002
School address	Bardon Close Westerhope Newcastle upon Tyne Tyne and Wear NE5 4BT
Telephone number	0191 286 9349
Fax number	0191 271 5633

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than most primary schools. It is in an area that is socially and economically disadvantaged. The proportion of pupils who claim a free school meal is above average. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. Most pupils are of White British heritage with a very small proportion of minority ethnic pupils.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school. The headteacher and staff have a clear vision to take the school forward after a period of disruptive staff changes over the last three years, including the key posts of headteacher and deputy headteacher. Since February 2007, all positions have been filled and a new senior management team established.

Good provision in the Foundation Stage helps children make good progress from a starting point below that typical for their age, so that by the time they enter Year 1 they reach standards similar to those of most other children of their age. Pupils' progress is satisfactory overall, but is good in Reception and in Year 6 where it is accelerating due to the quality of teaching. The effective way that the teachers plan the support provided by the teaching assistants means that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. Last year the national test results for pupils in Years 2 and 6 were above average. Standards this year, however, are average due partly to disruptions in the continuity of staffing in previous years.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There are some good and outstanding lessons, especially in Reception and Year 6 with satisfactory and occasionally inadequate lessons elsewhere. In the most effective lessons, relationships between teachers and pupils are good, the work is interesting and motivates pupils to learn. There are inconsistencies, however, in the quality of teaching across the school. In the least effective lessons the work set is sometimes undemanding for the more able pupils or too difficult for others. The curriculum is planned satisfactorily to meet the needs of most pupils. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory and pastoral care is good. Procedures for employing staff and safeguarding pupils meet requirements. The headteacher and staff have good relationships with other agencies to support and care for all pupils, especially those who are most vulnerable.

Pupils' personal development is satisfactory. They make a good contribution to their school community with the responsibilities they are given and in the school council. They have a good understanding of a healthy lifestyle and are aware of the importance of a healthy diet. Pupils' good understanding of the needs of others, together with their satisfactory literacy and mathematical skills, prepare them adequately for the next stage of their education and life beyond school. Although most pupils say they enjoy school and feel safe, a small number of pupils and parents remain rightly concerned about behaviour. Behaviour is satisfactory overall but a minority of pupils do not behave as well as they should.

The new headteacher and senior leaders are working hard to improve pupils' progress and recognise there is more to do. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school has an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses and satisfactory capacity to improve provision. Success in some areas is evident, but the full effect of all the actions has yet to be seen. For instance, new systems to track pupils' progress and set them targets are in place but are used inconsistently.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently good enough to help pupils to make the progress they should.
- Use the information from monitoring and evaluation to ensure consistently challenging targets are set for pupils.

- Improve the behaviour of the minority of pupils who find it difficult to conform to the school's high expectations.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and standards are average. Attainment on entry to the school is below the level typical for children of their age. The children get off to a good start in Reception and make good progress. As a result, by the time they enter Year 1, most of them attain the standards expected for their age.

In the 2006 national assessments and tests at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2, the results were above the national averages. In Key Stage 2 pupils achieved well in English owing to improved provision for writing. In mathematics, however, a number of pupils did not achieve as well as expected and the school did not meet its targets. The school's records and inspection evidence show that the standards reached by pupils in the current Year 2 and Year 6 are average, due partly to disruptions in the continuity of staffing in previous years.

Pupils' progress is satisfactory overall, but is good in Year 6 where it is accelerating due to improved provision and quality of teaching. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from the effective support they receive and make good progress. Although girls regularly attain higher standards than boys do they make similar progress given the difference in their starting points.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Personal development and well-being are satisfactory with some strong aspects. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural developments are satisfactory overall though their spiritual development is good. They join in opportunities to reflect upon the benefits of living in this country, are sensitive to issues of poverty, and disadvantage affecting communities around the world. Their response has been to raise money in support of children in a Tanzanian village. Pupils talk positively and with some conviction about the essential aspects of a healthy lifestyle, including the need for balance in their diet. They eat healthy lunches and take regular exercise. They have a good understanding of keeping themselves safe in various situations, including use of the internet and of road safety. Pupils state categorically that racism can never be acceptable and refer to its effects on others. Behaviour and attendance are satisfactory. The school recognises that a small minority of pupils do not always behave well and meet the high standards set for them. This was confirmed during the inspection, especially in a minority of lessons that did not engage and stimulate the pupils. Pupils respond well to the many opportunities to take on responsibility and contribute to their school community. These include membership of the school council and being a 'morning helper'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, but there are inconsistencies between classes. Improvements have been secured through new appointments, closer monitoring of practice and staff training. As a result, some teaching is good and outstanding, particularly for the youngest and oldest pupils in the school, which leads to them making good progress. In the most effective lessons, teachers and pupils have good relationships and this leads to a productive classroom atmosphere where pupils are willing to undertake their tasks. Teachers use a variety of teaching and learning styles in order to motivate and sustain pupils' interest and productivity. As a result, most pupils work hard and enjoy these lessons.

Where teaching is least effective, pupils spend too much time listening to the teacher with insufficient time to practise and develop their skills. Teachers' subject knowledge is not always secure, particularly in mathematics. Some lessons provide a high level of challenge and opportunities for pupils to accelerate progress, but in a few, the pace and expectations are too low, which slows pupils' progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. However, the school has recognised the need to make learning more relevant to pupils and has good strategies in place to introduce a greater range of creative activities and identify links between subjects. This has resulted in better planning so that, for example, pupils in all year groups are learning through the topic of the Egyptians. Teachers have made clear links to the theme as a focus for learning in literacy and mathematics and have provided pupils with good opportunities to work with those from other classes in subjects such as geography, design and technology and drama. This adds to pupils' enjoyment of learning and is having a positive impact on their social skills. The school makes satisfactory use of out-of-school visits and visitors to school, many of whom are specialists in their own field, in order to enrich pupils' experiences.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory with some good features. The support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities given by the teaching assistants is very effective throughout school and makes a positive contribution to the good progress that these pupils make. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust and all requirements are met. The range of visitors to school, in particular by those involved with health and safety, makes a significant contribution to these aspects of care and guidance and has been acknowledged by several national awards. Pupils are provided with satisfactory support to improve their academic progress through the setting of short-term targets. A useful new system is in place to track pupils' progress and support teachers in setting them targets. However, it is not consistently applied so that not all pupils are set challenging targets to help them understand what to do to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has worked well with her staff to develop a vision of what the school needs to do to improve. Self-evaluation is accurate and a number of important recent improvements are bearing fruit, for example, the initiative of 'big writing' has led to better progress and an improvement in standards in English in 2006. The school is now analysing pupils' progress data more closely and this is already leading to better teaching and progress in some classes. However, the leadership team share a strong determination to make sure that for instance, the improvements seen in provision for those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are spread to all aspects of the school's work. Since the last inspection some of the key issues for improvement have been addressed well; for example, the teaching in the Reception class is now good. Governance is satisfactory; the governors are supportive and are developing their role in challenging the school. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

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

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
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	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

25 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's Roman Catholic Primary School, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear, NE5 4BT

Thank you for welcoming us into your school. We enjoyed our two days with you. We enjoyed looking at your work and talking to you about what you enjoyed most about your learning. It was good to see how well you understood the need to keep yourselves safe and healthy. You are clearly enjoying all the work you are doing about the Egyptians and we know you are really looking forward to being involved in many more exciting and creative activities. Your teachers look after you well and most of you understand the school rules and keep to them. You told us that you are unhappy when a few pupils misbehave so we have asked your teachers to try to help these pupils to improve their behaviour.

We judged your school to be satisfactory. So that it can get better, we have asked your teachers to make sure that you all do as well as you can in all lessons. One of the ways they can do this is by making their teaching even better. Your headteacher and the other senior staff now know a lot about how well you have been learning and the progress you have made so we have asked them to make sure that they always set high expectations of what you can achieve.

I am sure you will help with this by continuing to attend regularly and trying your best in lessons. Good luck with the performance of Joseph, I am sure your parents will really enjoy your singing.

Yours sincerely

Linda Buller

Lead inspector