

St Monica's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110482
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	288688
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Steven Hill

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	469
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs F Clarkson
Headteacher	Mr P Kennedy
Date of previous school inspection	30 April 2001
School address	Currier Drive Neath Hill Milton Keynes MK14 6HB
Telephone number	01908 606966
Fax number	01908 608486

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large primary school where pupils' social and economic circumstances are broadly average. Just over half the pupils are of White British origin, with others coming from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. About a quarter of pupils have a mother tongue other than English, with over 40 different home languages spoken. The number of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is average. Overall, attainment on entry to the Foundation Stage is average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Monica's provides a satisfactory education and is improving significantly. Strong pastoral care results in pupils' good personal development and well-being. The school is a thriving and harmonious community where boys and girls from different ethnic backgrounds get on very well with each other and with staff. Behaviour is good and pupils thoroughly enjoy school. They take a pride in their achievements, and are confident that staff will help them when problems arise. There are good systems in place to ensure that pupils are safe and happy in school, and to support any who have difficulties or particular needs.

Achievement in the school is satisfactory. Standards are above average. Achievement has been good in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 for several years, with pupils consistently attaining standards above the national average by the end of Year 2. Achievement fell at Key Stage 2 several years ago and pupils who left Year 6 in 2005 and 2006 did not make the progress they should have done. The school improved pupils' achievement in English in 2006, but achievement in mathematics was still inadequate. There has been considerable improvement in the last year, particularly in mathematics, due to concerted work by all staff. Standards at the end of Year 6 are now above average overall, with English the strongest subject. Achievement at Key Stage 2 is satisfactory, and pupils currently in Year 6 have made the expected progress since Year 2.

The improvements have been boosted by a thorough system to track the progress of individuals, and to provide extra help to those who fall behind. Teaching and learning have also improved. They are now satisfactory overall, with an increasing amount of good teaching, although inconsistencies remain. Positive relationships and clear expectations ensure that lessons are orderly, and pupils work hard and cooperate well with each other. Teachers often use assessment information well to match work to the individual needs of pupils in lessons. However, groups of pupils are sometimes given work that is too hard for them or too easy. Teachers use assessment data to set individual targets that they want pupils to achieve, but these are not always sufficiently individual and many pupils are not very clear about what their targets are. Better lessons are characterised by a lively presentation, and a good pace, although in a few lessons the pace is too slow.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving. Clear leadership from the headteacher, deputy and governors and effective teamwork from all staff have helped raise achievement at Key Stage 2. This shows the school is well placed to improve further. Teaching is monitored regularly, but too often the written feedback to teachers does not show clearly enough how practice could be improved. The school's records of pupils' progress, in their current form, do not give managers a clear overview of how particular groups of pupils are getting on. The focus of managers on pupils' personal development, within the strong Catholic ethos of the school is a major strength that underpins the high levels of care and pupils' consistently good personal development. The Foundation Stage is well-managed, so that good teaching and an exciting curriculum ensure children's good start to their school career.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of teaching in matching work to all pupils' needs, ensuring they have and understand individual targets for what they need to learn next, and by ensuring lessons have a consistently good pace.

- Develop the analysis of assessment data to give managers a clearer view of the progress of different groups of pupils.
- Ensure that monitoring of teaching gives staff much clearer feedback about how they can improve their practice.

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

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are above average. Pupils start in Nursery with broadly average standards. By the end of the Foundation Stage, good progress means that standards in most years are better than those usually found. Good progress continues across Years 1 and 2, ensuring that standards are consistently above average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 1.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have varied considerably in recent years, to some extent a result of the different starting points of different year groups. However, this also represents unacceptable variations in progress in some years. Standards overall were broadly average in 2006. Within that year they were above average in English and below in mathematics. Although progress within Key Stage 2 was broadly satisfactory in English, results showed unsatisfactory progress overall from pupils' starting points, particularly in mathematics, where progress was in the bottom 1% nationally. This year, the school has consolidated progress in English, and significantly improved progress in mathematics. Achievement is now satisfactory overall.

Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities make the same progress as other pupils because of the good support they receive. Pupils who have a mother tongue other than English quickly learn the language, so they are able to join in all aspects of school life. They make the same progress as their classmates.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' good spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is well supported by the positive ethos of the school as a Catholic community. Pupils speak enthusiastically of their enjoyment of school and all that it offers them. They participate well in lessons and extra-curricular activities, and their attitudes to learning are highly positive. There are very good relationships throughout the school, and bullying and racism are extremely rare. Pupils are polite, helpful, assured and well behaved. They feel safe in school and are very confident to approach an adult if they have a problem. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and what makes a healthy lifestyle. Pupils say they are very proud of their school. They talk confidently about how they help to take care of one another and those less fortunate than themselves. They feel that their views are listened to and acted upon, and the school council is active and valued. Pupils all share an understanding that the core purpose of the school is learning and their positive attitudes and good skills prepare them well for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The increasing amount of good teaching has supported the improvements made in achievement over the last year. The positive ethos for learning in most lessons rests on a firm foundation of high expectations of pupils' attitudes and behaviour. Positive relationships mean pupils like and trust their teachers and are keen to please them by working hard and behaving well. There are still some inconsistencies in lessons that prevent teaching from being good overall. Good use is made of interactive whiteboards to help teachers explain things clearly. Teachers have clear targets that they want pupils to achieve, but pupils themselves are often unsure what these are. Teaching assistants make a very positive contribution to pupils' learning, particularly for those who have learning difficulties or disabilities. Some good opportunities are given for pupils to discuss their work in pairs, but in other lessons, such chances are missed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and is relevant to all groups of pupils. For example, good use is made of the local environment in history and geography. In the Foundation Stage, children benefit from practical learning opportunities within the indoor and outdoor environments, although there is a lack of variety in outside equipment. Pupils develop confidence through opportunities to become involved in investigations and research that involve teamwork. Transition arrangements and links with other schools are good. This enables pupils to transfer smoothly across stages of learning. There is a wide range of clubs that are well attended, particularly in sports and the arts. Educational visits and visitors to the school broaden and enrich the curriculum, promoting cultural awareness and racial harmony. Links between subjects and good use of resources enable pupils to understand how to use and apply their learning. Opportunities to set up workshops, for example to investigate a period in history, promote personal, social and health education, the use of information and communication technology and basic skills to record their findings.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support provided for pupils are good and have a positive impact on their good personal development. Provision for pupils with learning disabilities or difficulties is good, and the school makes good use of positive partnerships with parents and external agencies to support this work. Learners at risk or with practical or emotional difficulties are clearly identified. Effective arrangements are put in place to support and engage these pupils in learning and positive behaviour. Staff and pupils have worked together to 'show racism the red card'. The school is now using an effective tracking system to identify the academic needs of individual pupils and to provide them with good support. Teachers' day-to-day marking of pupils' work is thorough and includes positive comments, but often does not show pupils how they can improve or what they need to learn next. Secure systems are in place to assist pupils in the early stages of learning to speak English. High expectations of behaviour are shared by all staff and pupils. Arrangements for ensuring health and safety and minimising risks are good, and child protection systems are firmly in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Following a decline in standards, recent actions to raise achievement have reversed the trend. The leadership team knows the school's strengths and has established sensible priorities. Actions to address these are leading to improvement. Subject leaders provide clear direction and are fully involved in monitoring teaching and learning. However, feedback often does not tell staff clearly enough how to improve their practice. Good tracking procedures give a clear view of the progress of individual pupils. However, the analysis of data is not clear enough to show the progress of different groups, for example pupils who join the school during the course of the year. This makes it harder to plan for their needs at school level. The leadership of provision in the Foundation Stage and for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is good. Provision for information and communication technology has improved considerably since the previous inspection. The leadership team's strong pastoral guidance promotes the warm Christian ethos and effective teamwork. Governors are very supportive of the drive to raise standards, and have a good understanding of the school's work.

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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	2
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	2
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	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
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	2

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?	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.

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	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	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	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

29 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Monica's Catholic Primary School, Milton Keynes, MK14 6HB

Thank you for your warm welcome and all your help during the inspection. Your inspectors decided that the school provides a satisfactory education and has lots of good things about it. We could see why you enjoy life at St Monica's.

The staff are very good at making sure everyone is safe and happy in school. We were particularly impressed by your good behaviour, and by how well you all get on together. You work hard in lessons and are right to be proud of what you do. Pupils make good progress in the younger classes. In the older classes, in the last few years, pupils didn't always make enough progress. This improved last year and you are now doing much better, and making the progress you should. By Year 6, the standards of your work are better than in most schools, especially in English.

Your teachers work hard to help you learn and to give you interesting things to do. A boy in Year 4 told us, 'It would be really good if all lessons were just right, and not sometimes too easy or too hard'. We have agreed with the teachers that they are going to try to do this in all their lessons in future. The teachers have clear targets for what they want you to learn next, but some of you are a bit vague about these, and it would be helpful if you were more certain about them. We are sure your teachers will help you with this.

The school has good systems to see how each one of you is doing, and makes sure that anyone who is struggling gets the right help. We have asked the headteacher to organise this information so teachers can tell how different groups are getting on. Some teachers spend a lot of time checking on how each other's lessons are going. We have asked them that, after these lessons, they should write down their tips for each other about how to improve things, so that lessons can get better and better.

We hope that your SATs went well, and that you enjoy the rest of term. Keep working hard and taking care of each other.

Best wishes,

Steven Hill
Lead inspector