

St Mary's Catholic School, Penzance

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 111999 |
| Local Authority | Cornwall |
| Inspection number | 289141 |
| Inspection dates | 11–12 July 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | John Carnaghan |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 236 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Viv Stuckey |
| Headteacher | Helen Giblett |
| Date of previous school inspection | 1 May 2001 |
| School address | Peverell Road Penzance TR18 2AT |
| Telephone number | 01736 364385 |
| Fax number | 01736 331802 |

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|--------------------------|-----------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's School serves the Catholic community of Penzance. It is of average size and has an average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are far fewer pupils from minority ethnic groups than is usual. There are below-average numbers of pupils who are at an early stage of learning English but recently a small number of Polish children who do not speak English have joined the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Mary's School provides an outstanding education. Meeting pupils' needs lies at the heart of everything the school does and it is a very happy and vibrant place in which to learn. One good example of this is the school's extremely positive reaction to its new Polish pupils and the outstanding support it has given to these pupils and their families to help them settle in. As one new parent wrote, 'Our daughter likes her school very much, she likes learning there and first of all she likes her teachers.'

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher is a powerhouse who has transformed the school in recent years. In partnership with the staff, she promotes very good provision for the pupils. The school staff and governors monitor the school thoroughly and act decisively to address any areas of concern. The school has used this most effective self-evaluation to ensure that standards have remained above average and that the achievement of all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is outstanding.

Teaching is outstanding. Teachers maintain a strong emphasis on achievement, both when planning and delivering lessons. Very good behaviour and co-operation from pupils ensures that learning is also outstanding. The curriculum is excellent and pupils find it very stimulating because teachers take every opportunity to provide interesting learning experiences. The family learning project has produced work of exceptional quality from parents and children learning together. The Foundation Stage is good and children start with below- expected standards and when they leave they are average. They achieve well, but limitations in accommodation place some restrictions on the curriculum for the under-fives.

All aspects of care and academic support are outstanding. Pupils rightly feel safe and very well cared for. They get very good advice how they can improve their work and this makes a significant contribution to their outstanding achievement. Parents think highly of the school, praising the care it gives to each individual. Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very strong because the school is deeply committed to these areas. Pupils enjoy school life very much, listing many pleasures in daily life such as 'doing science is interesting' and 'marking tells us how to improve'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Explore ways of improving indoor and outdoor accommodation for pupils in the Foundation Stage.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Children enter the Foundation Stage with skills that are below the levels usually seen. They leave school with standards that are above average. Their achievement during their time in school is outstanding.

Foundation Stage children enjoy a very good start to their education and reach the expected standards by the time they enter Year 1. They benefit greatly from the outstanding care they receive and achieve well. Limitations in accommodation limit opportunities for children's physical development and independence.

The very high quality provision in Years 1 to 6 promotes outstanding achievement in the rest of the school. Rigorous assessment and monitoring enables the school to react vigorously to any areas of concern. For example, achievement in mathematics in Key Stage 1 and of boys overall fell below expectations in 2006. The school applied careful thought and much energy to correcting these issues, so that preliminary results for 2007 tests show these variations have been almost completely eliminated.

Standards at the end of Year 6 are above average, with no significant variations between subjects. Outstanding teaching focuses ruthlessly on improving standards, ensuring that all pupils receive the correct degree of support and challenge. Thus, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are gifted and talented progress as well as their peers. The superb support given to newly arrived Polish pupils ensures that they too make outstanding progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils enjoy school very much. Exemplary behaviour and excellent attitudes ensure most pupils make exceptional progress. Attendance has improved recently and is satisfactory, but in this tourist area and despite the school's best efforts, parents often take holidays in term time. Pupils enjoy their playtimes, particularly when they have access to the 'huff and puff' club, which provides a variety of sporting activities. Pupils know exercise and healthy diets are good for them. Older pupils enjoy being playground buddies and 'friendship stop' benches ensure they feel safe and included. Older pupils often offer effective support to younger pupils with their learning.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is a great strength of the school. High quality work based on global cultural diversity is evident throughout the school and exists alongside an excellent awareness of local culture and world religions. Pupils support several charities and have very strong links with a Ugandan school.

Pupils contribute well to their school and the local community. The work of the enthusiastic school council members has resulted in many improvements in the school and a prestigious award from the local authority. Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education and their continuing economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is so good because it maintains such a clear focus on how well all pupils learn. Teachers are determined that every pupil should make the optimum progress in each lesson. In practical terms, the school strives to meet this objective by intelligent use of assessment information. Each pupil's progress, both in the short and long term, is subject to very regular analysis. Where there are concerns, extra support or increased challenge are incorporated into lessons. Teaching assistants are involved in all parts of lessons and provide very strong support to individuals or groups of pupils.

Using assessment information, teachers plan thoroughly. Lessons are organised so that learning is built step by step. Pupils are closely involved in this process; they know their targets and, because most teachers mark very carefully, they know how near they are to meeting them.

Typically, teachers display high expectations of pupils in all phases of lessons and this ensures that the pace of learning is relentless. Pupils are enthusiastic partners in their learning and keenly accept the increasing responsibility for their education that they are offered. They are mature, behave extremely well and relate well to their peers and their teachers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is exciting and innovative with excellent links between subjects, and this promotes achievement very well. In an outstanding literacy lesson, the content was linked to geography, design and technology, science, health and safety as well as a forthcoming visit. High quality information and communication technology (ICT) work can be seen throughout the school, evidence that the school has thoroughly addressed an area identified as needing improvement in the previous inspection. 'Focus weeks' guarantee breadth and balance, making the curriculum even more interesting for learners. Personal, social and health education is excellent in all years and epitomizes the caring ethos of the school. Equally, the philosophy that every child matters is strongly threaded through the curriculum.

The good Foundation Stage curriculum ensures children get off to a flying start and enjoy their lessons. Nevertheless, the Nursery classroom is cramped and parts of it are unsuitable for young children. The Reception and Nursery classrooms lack easy access to the poor outside areas, making outdoor curriculum opportunities difficult. This lack of access limits children's freedom and independence in outside activities.

Curriculum enrichment is excellent. Many opportunities are offered through visits and visitors and there is a very wide, varied range of well-attended clubs, including sports and the arts. Stimulating displays of work greatly enliven the school's rooms and corridors.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The Catholic ethos at the heart of the school ensures all pupils receive outstanding pastoral support. Rigorous checks and effective procedures ensure that the safeguarding of pupils is very effective, and pupils correctly report that they feel safe at school. Different groups of pupils receive outstanding support from well-qualified and experienced classroom assistants during lessons.

Pupils' academic progress is carefully tracked and regular assessment results in effective lesson planning and intervention support. Pupils regularly evaluate their own learning and they are aware of their own learning targets and often refer to them. They know that if they read and act upon the comments made by their teachers, their work will improve. Exceptionally talented pupils have enrichment opportunities in studying mathematics, music and ICT at the local secondary school. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well supported and make exceptional progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher shows great vitality and enormous commitment, inspiring the staff and pupils to give of their best. The leadership and management of the school are shared amongst the

staff and all of them, particularly senior managers, play an important role in driving the school forward and maintaining high achievement.

High quality monitoring and continual self-evaluation lie at the core of school improvements. The information gleaned from this regular analysis is used to assist staff and governors in prioritising and formulating plans for the future. Plans are regularly checked to see how well they are progressing and are adjusted where required. The quality of monitoring information enables the school to react quickly to any perceived weaknesses in achievement or elsewhere. For example, boy's underachievement has ceased to be significant in the last twelve months, since it was identified as a focus area.

Governance is outstanding. Governors play a very significant part in monitoring the school and holding it to account. They are a constant presence around school, are knowledgeable and very supportive but do not hesitate to challenge the school when necessary. The school spends its money wisely and provides outstanding value for money. However, learning opportunities for the youngest children are somewhat restricted by their accommodation.

The numerous issues raised in the previous inspection have all been thoroughly addressed and standards and achievement have shot up. Both improvement since the previous inspection and the school's capacity for future improvement are outstanding.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| <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

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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 1 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| 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 | 3 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 |
| 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? | 1 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 1 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 1 |

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

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 1 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 1 |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 1 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 1 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 1 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 1 |
| 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

14 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic School, Penzance, Cornwall TR18 2AT

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave to the inspectors during the recent inspection of your school. It was a real pleasure talking to you and hearing your views. These made a very important contribution to the inspection.

We think that St Mary's is an outstanding school and this word, which means better than good, is used a lot in the inspection report. You told us that you feel safe and happy at school and the way you are cared for and your personal development are both outstanding. Teaching is outstanding and you help to make sure your learning is also excellent by your excellent behaviour. The range and mixture of subjects and topics you study is also outstanding.

The school could not be so very good without the superb lead set by your headteacher and she is fully supported by the staff. Leadership and management are excellent.

Almost all schools have improvements they could make. St Mary's is such a good school that there is only one area which needs attention:

- The Nursery classroom is too small and neither the Nursery or Reception class have easy access to their outside play areas.

Once again, many thanks for all your help.

With all good wishes for the future

John Carnaghan

Lead inspector