



The Cathedral School of St Mary

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113489
Local Authority Plymouth
Inspection number 289648
Inspection date 6 February 2007
Reporting inspector Alexander Paul Baxter

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Cecil Street
School category	Voluntary aided		Stone House
Age range of pupils	4-11		Plymouth PL1 5HW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01752 265270
Number on roll (school)	108	Fax number	01752 265270
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Andrew Miller
		Headteacher	Catherine Maltbaek
Date of previous school inspection	5 February 2007		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small voluntary aided Roman Catholic primary school receives pupils from the immediate inner city area. The number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. The proportions of pupils with learning difficulties and with a statement of special educational need are above average. A well-above-average and increasing number of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and many of these are learning English as a second language. Children's attainment on entry is generally below the level expected for their age.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school that provides a high quality of education. It has made good improvement since the last inspection and has a strong capacity to improve into the future. The school has several significant attributes. These include outstanding racial harmony that reflects the pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It also mirrors the dedicated and very caring efforts of staff to value and include all pupils equally in the day-to-day life of the school. Consequently pupils enjoy school, as seen in their good attendance.

Achievement by pupils, including those learning English as a second language and those with learning difficulties, is outstanding. By the time they leave school, standards are now slightly above average in English, mathematics and science. Children make an excellent start in Reception, where they benefit from exemplary teaching and very good support. Independent learning is constrained, on occasion, by the limited equipment and opportunities currently available outdoors for children in Reception.

Teaching and learning are outstanding and ensure that all pupils have their needs identified and addressed. It is the consistent and cumulative effect of good and better teaching that has such a positive influence on pupils' learning. Pupils say, 'We get lots of help and attention and teachers help us when we are down.' The curriculum is good and is enriched by a range of well-attended clubs. The care, support and guidance given to the pupils are of the highest quality. Their impact is illustrated in the pupils' excellent personal development and well-being. The pupils work hard and are kind, considerate and extremely well behaved. Pupils are very knowledgeable about how to follow healthy, safe lifestyles and contribute wholeheartedly to the community.

The school enjoys very close and effective links with parents and a range of outside agencies. These enable teachers to meet pupils' differing needs, including an increasing number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, many of whom are learning English as a second language. Parents are particularly appreciative and one wrote, 'I think St Mary's is a wonderful small, caring school.' Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher, very ably supported by senior managers, fulfils a key role in checking the work of the school and promoting improvement. This self-evaluation is a very effective tool in ensuring that pupils achieve to their full potential. Governors play a full part, especially in their pastoral support of the staff and pupils. This unity in purpose is clearly demonstrated in the caring Catholic ethos that warmly permeates every aspect of life in the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the equipment and learning opportunities provided outdoors for children in the Reception class.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils, including higher attainers, those with English as a second language and pupils with learning difficulties, achieve outstandingly well in relation to their capabilities. Pupils make excellent progress because of consistently good and better teaching that has a cumulative and beneficial impact on their learning. Children make an excellent start in their Reception year, especially in developing their speaking and listening skills and in personal, social and emotional development. Good and often better progress continues through Years 1 and 2. Standards are broadly average in Year 2 and are rising as an increasing number of pupils attain above-average standards in mathematics and writing. Pupils make outstanding progress through Years 3 to 6, where their maturing learning skills enable them to meet the teachers' challenging targets. Standards have risen consistently in recent years and in 2006 were slightly above average in national tests. This year, standards are above average in English, mathematics and science in Year 6.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are excellent, building on the very good start children make in their Reception year. Pupils enjoy coming to school. This is seen in their good attendance and their laughter during 'wake and shake' physical exercise in the playground each morning. Parents welcome the very warm relationships between all members of the school community and are pleased by their children's great enjoyment and happiness at school. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is exceptional and is underpinned by the school's caring Catholic ethos. Pupils from a very wide range of backgrounds all feel part of the school community. Everyone contributes fully to the day-to-day life of the school and feels enriched by the wonderful racial harmony. One pupil commented, 'We always help each other, especially children who are new to our school.' Pupils' attitudes to learning and behaviour are exemplary and reflect the high expectations of the caring adults who work in the school.

Pupils are very aware of how to have healthy and safe lifestyles. Pupils are considerate of others when working in pairs or groups and have a strong sense of community. They make very good contributions to local and wider groups, for example, through charities, attendance at local events and entertaining the elderly. Pupils undertake responsibilities sensibly, for example, as members of the school council, which offers ideas about how to improve their school. Pupils develop good interpersonal skills that will equip them very effectively for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. In response to good and often better teaching, pupils build securely on their previous learning and make excellent progress. This consistent and highly effective teaching is typified by the sharp use of questioning to promote pupils' thinking and speaking and listening skills. The pupils enjoy the challenges presented to them by their teachers. Pupils' responses are valued and discussions are often accompanied by joyful laughter, especially in Reception. As a consequence, pupils are encouraged to play a full part in lessons. Teachers and their assistants plan work that will build on pupils' previous learning. They make it clear to pupils what they are expected to learn in each lesson. Teachers make good links with previous work and share learning objectives with the pupils. Teachers take care to revisit these learning objectives at the end of lessons to reinforce learning. The teachers ensure that work is well matched to the range of pupils' needs. The pupils benefit greatly from sharply focused group and individual support and teachers are aided by well-qualified specialist teachers and assistants. Teachers assess pupils' work very effectively. They are involving pupils with increasing success in checking and evaluating their own efforts. Information gathered is used very precisely and effectively to show pupils what they need to do next to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum, including that for children in the Reception year, is good. It is enriched with a good range of well-attended clubs. Links with outside agencies and with parents are excellent and these help to meet the pupils' diverse range of learning and cultural needs. They have a highly supportive influence on pupils' academic and personal development. There is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' speaking and listening, literacy and numeracy skills in all classes. Teachers' short-term planning is of consistently high quality and is closely designed to meet individual pupils' needs. This includes, for example, adapting work for pupils learning English as a second language and for those with learning difficulties. Teachers develop useful links between subjects, for example, using art and information and communication technology to enrich learning in history. These opportunities are not yet developed with equal consistency in all classes. Major refurbishment of indoor areas has created a stimulating learning environment. Outdoor learning facilities, especially for the youngest children, are not good enough.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. They underpin the school's very successful encouragement of the pupils' academic and personal development. A welcoming

Catholic ethos helps pupils to feel safe and valued. All adults working in the school are vigilant in safeguarding the well-being of the pupils. The school works very closely with parents, who say, 'This is a friendly school where teachers are very supportive.' The school has excellent links with outside agencies and is highly effective in identifying and supporting pupils with individual needs from the moment they enter school. The support provided for pupils in the early stages of learning English, for pupils with learning difficulties and for vulnerable pupils is of the highest quality. Teachers give excellent academic guidance and set clear academic targets that show pupils how to improve. From an early age pupils know their targets well and are also encouraged to evaluate work for themselves. Consequently they make excellent progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher, together with very supportive senior managers, promotes a culture of continuous improvement for the benefit of all pupils and provides very clear educational direction. This is evident in the pupils' excellent achievement, both academically and personally. Governors are extremely supportive and are improving their ability to monitor how well the school is doing. Past uncertainties in leadership and management have resulted in the school being too modest about its effectiveness. It has a proven track record, though, of bringing about improvement and clearly has excellent capacity to improve further. Teaching and learning are now monitored very carefully, often with the assistance of an outside consultant, and information is shared with colleagues to develop high quality teaching practice. Parents are consulted regularly and their views are valued and acted upon. The headteacher and senior colleagues work closely to assess the pupils' performance. Consequently they have an accurate view of pupils' achievements and know where they can improve in the future. The school's success lies in this precise approach to evaluating its performance and knowing how to help pupils reach their full potential.

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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?	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	1
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

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

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	2
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?	1
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?	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.

Leadership and management

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	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

I really enjoyed my visit to your school and would like to thank those of you who took the time to talk to me about the school. I was very interested to hear about all the things that you think are special about your school. St. Mary's is an outstanding school and I am pleased you are so happy to be there. These are the main things I found out about your school.

- Most of you are making excellent progress, and the standards you reach in Year 6 are better than in many schools.
- Teaching is outstanding and the teachers and their assistants are always looking for ways of making it even better.
- The work planned for you is interesting.
- Many of you come from very different backgrounds, but the school makes sure that you are all welcomed and treated equally. The way you mix happily together is wonderful.
- You all behave exceedingly well and try very hard in lessons.
- All the adults working in the school really care about you and look after you extremely well so that you lead healthy and safe lives.
- Your headteacher and her senior colleagues lead and manage the school very effectively.

When we had our meeting, some of you wanted to have better equipment in the playground. The school also wants to improve the outdoor area for the youngest children. I agree with all of you and so I have asked the school to make these improvements.

Thank you once again and good luck in the future.