

# St Mary's Roman Catholic First School, Swanage

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113829
<b>Local Authority</b>	Dorset
<b>Inspection number</b>	289738
<b>Inspection date</b>	24 May 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Michael Burghart

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	114
School	
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Nigel Wills
<b>Headteacher</b>	Maeve Baker
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 October 2001
<b>School address</b>	Manor Road Swanage BH19 2BH
<b>Telephone number</b>	01929 424909
<b>Fax number</b>	01929 422784

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<b>Age group</b>	4–9
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

This is an average-sized first school. It is oversubscribed. Pupils are drawn from a wide area, many choosing St Mary's because of its Roman Catholic nature. Children's attainment when they first join Reception is broadly average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is similar to that found in most schools. During this academic year, several pupils for whom English is an additional language have joined Year 2. Most of these are in the very early stages of learning the language. The school holds the Healthy School award and is a centre for initial teacher training. It is in the final phase of accreditation for the Artsmark award.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

St Mary's is an outstanding school. Its caring ethos truly shows that every child matters. As a result, pupils' personal development is outstanding. Pupils feel safe and get on extremely well together. Their behaviour is excellent and they show that they are prepared to contribute to the school as a community. Pupils, parents, governors and staff all say this is a happy, friendly school. Pupils are very keen to talk about how much they enjoy not only the wealth of extra-curricular activities but lessons as well. They value being listened to by staff. Such a high level of care is an achievement in itself but it does not stop there. High quality provision, in terms of the curriculum and how it is taught, very successfully ensures that pupils make exceptional progress and so achieve their potential. Standards are well above average in reading, writing and mathematics and have been so for the past five years. All pupils do well, aspiring to the challenging targets the school sets for them. These are arrived at through outstanding use of assessment information. Higher attainers, those in the first stages of learning English, and pupils with learning difficulties do especially well because teaching, and care, support and guidance are outstanding. Pupils are well prepared for future study and life in general. As a result of the very successful personal, social and health education programme, pupils understand how to keep themselves safe and stay healthy. Outstanding relationships mean pupils have the confidence to learn from their mistakes. The substantial value the school adds to pupils' performance is built on the successful start children get in Reception. The only reason provision for the Foundation Stage is judged as good rather than outstanding is because outdoor accommodation, including children's access to it, is inadequate. Despite this, children are helped to make good progress and all reach at least expected levels before they join Year 1, with the majority exceeding these. It is not surprising that parents have such confidence in the school. Comments like, 'A lovely school where the expectations for the children are not limited by the expectations for the age group. I can't praise it enough!' and 'My child has made such progress, I wish he could stay at St Mary's until he is sixteen!' capture the feelings of the vast majority of parents. The school's success is securely founded on extremely effective leadership and management. The headteacher sets very clear direction and is very effectively supported by the staff and a good body of governors. There is regular and rigorous monitoring of the impact decisions have on pupils' achievement. Consequently, the school has an accurate view of its own performance. The track record of developments made since the last inspection is impressive. The combination of vision, experience and procedures already in place shows the capacity for still further improvement is outstanding.

### What the school should do to improve further

Improve outdoor accommodation for the Foundation Stage, and children's access to it.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 1

Results of national assessments for Year 2 pupils and the school's own assessments for those in Year 4 show that standards have been significantly above average in reading, writing and mathematics for the last five years. The school has successfully targeted writing, where, although results were well above national averages, slightly fewer Year 2 pupils reached higher levels than in reading and mathematics last year. This year, standards are likely to be well above average in each subject by the time pupils leave the school. The overall profile of standards in Year 2 is set to be below that of previous years but this is because pupils have joined the year

group from abroad with limited knowledge of English. When considering those pupils who have been in the school since Reception, records show high standards have been maintained. Pupils achieve very well. For example, all pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities regularly reach at least the average levels for their age groups. Pupils new to English make rapid progress in learning the language. In a trend which does not match the national picture, and is particularly noteworthy, boys reach the same high standards as girls. Higher-attaining pupils frequently reach levels expected in Year 6 before they leave Year 4. Such outstanding achievement is very securely rooted in the strong progress children make in Reception.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Outstanding personal development is an undoubted strength of the school. It shows that the school's commitment to the whole child is extremely effective. This commitment balances high expectations for academic development with pupils' growth as individuals. Pupils' response to school is excellent. Throughout the school pupils are keen, enthusiastic and clearly enjoy what is on offer. It is no wonder attendance is above average. Pupils demonstrate the kind of consideration for each other that shows how effectively their personal, social and emotional development is encouraged in Reception. Turn taking, sharing, being polite, and behaving particularly well are the orders of the day. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with outstanding features in pupils' moral and social development. Progress has been good since the last report in raising pupils' awareness of multicultural issues, and more initiatives are in hand.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 1**

A fundamental reason why standards are so high is that the quality of teaching throughout the school is outstanding. This has a dramatic effect on pupils' learning and achievement. By pitching work and support at pupils' own levels, staff ensure that pupils enjoy their work. Because assessment is extremely well used, pupils of all abilities and experience are especially well challenged to do their best. Meaningful praise and very good marking give pupils the incentive and direction to improve their work. Teaching assistants make a substantial contribution and very effectively mirror the excellent questioning and listening skills that teachers use so successfully. There are obvious strengths in how work is planned, how time is managed, and in teachers' high expectations. The staff set a fine example to teachers in training and are continually looking for ways to be even better. This is evident, for instance, in the way they have worked to extend the use of information and communication technology to support all aspects of learning.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 1**

The curriculum is outstanding. It not only covers all required elements but also is extremely well enhanced by the way subjects are taught in a cross-curricular fashion. Consequently, pupils are able to see the relevance of basic skills work in literacy and numeracy because they are given opportunities to use them across a range of subjects. The wealth of extra-curricular activities, visits and visitors and strong links with the church really make learning interesting.

Pupils were very keen to tell the inspector how much they enjoyed subjects such as design and technology, physical education, music and art. They relish success, for example, in tennis and football, and are very proud of the school's inclusion in an exhibition at the National Gallery. Because staff know pupils and their potential so well, they are able to tailor provision to support any special or additional needs and to extend more-able pupils. This is another reason for the school's success and supports pupils' personal as well as academic development. The convoluted building and site are well used to promote learning, with good features, for example, in the use of the woodland walk area. The lack of designated space for Reception children to learn through outdoor play is a disadvantage which the school continually seeks to overcome. For example, the playgrounds and hall are used very effectively for physical activities.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

Procedures to see that pupils are safe and well cared for are robust and extremely effective; no mean feat on a complex site. All statutory checks and safeguards are diligently carried out with the effect that the school is a safe and stimulating learning environment. Parents and pupils are adamant that the school is extremely successful in pastoral and physical care of pupils. Pupils respond especially well to the exceptional level of care and this has an outstanding impact in terms of personal development. Academic care is equally good. Staff make excellent use of assessment to catalogue and track pupils' progress and make predictions. This gives rise to meaningful personal targets which very successfully lead pupils to even higher achievement. That staff and pupils see this process as being quite natural rather than feeling over burdened is a measure of how well assessment procedures are embedded as tools for learning.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils' outstanding standards, achievement and personal development and the high quality provision on offer are the result of outstanding leadership and management. Staff and governors make a first-rate team, extremely well directed by the headteacher, whose vision and perceptive monitoring continue to drive this particularly successful school onward and upward. The capacity to make even more improvement is outstanding. Subject leaders play a very successful part in the school's management, producing action plans which not only steer their own subject but also feed the priorities of the school development plan. The school's selfevaluation is spot on. It accurately predicted all the outcomes of this inspection. A real strength is that initiatives, for example, to develop the way literacy is taught, are very carefully scrutinised in terms of the impact they have on pupils' performance. Such analysis invariably leads to improvement and most certainly ensures that pupils of all backgrounds and abilities have equal opportunity in work and play. The governing body is well led by a chairman who is well informed and has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and relative weaknesses. Governors are very supportive and their governance is good. They are acutely aware of the restrictions of accommodation, especially for the Foundation Stage, and, with the headteacher, have taken the lead in trying to bring about improvements.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	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

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	1
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

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	1
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	1
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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

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**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

29 May 2007 Dear Children Inspection of St Mary's RC VA First School, Swanage, Dorset BH19 2BH It was an absolute treat to come to your school. It is outstanding. This means that it not only takes excellent care of you but also very successfully helps you to do your very best and reach high standards. I was extremely impressed by your behaviour and the way you obviously enjoy all that the school has to offer. I can see how well you are being helped to grow up as reliable people who really care about their world. You showed me that you believe that working hard and being considerate and friendly really matter. The school council and the children who showed me what to do at lunch time are fantastic ambassadors for your school. One of the secrets of the school's success is in the outstanding way teachers and their assistants plan interesting things for you to do. They are very good at finding ways of showing you how to make your work even better. Staff and governors at St Mary's make a super team and are especially well led by your headteacher. Take it from me, you are extremely well taught and cared for. I am sure you all know that the school does its best to make good use of the building and the grounds. The adventure trail and pirate ship are smashing examples. I have asked the school to try even harder to improve space outdoors for Reception children as it is not yet as good as it should be. This is very important and needs to be dealt with soon. You will not be surprised that plans are already in hand to do something about it! You are very fortunate to go to such a good school. I am sure you will make the most of it. Best wishes for the future. Yours sincerely Mike Burghart Lead inspector