



# St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Blackhill

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 114248  
**Local Authority** Durham  
**Inspection number** 289850  
**Inspection dates** 16–17 January 2007  
**Reporting inspector** Linda Buller

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>                     | Primary            | <b>School address</b>   | Pemberton Road         |
| <b>School category</b>                    | Voluntary aided    |                         | Blackhill, Consett     |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                | 4–11               |                         | County Durham, DH8 8JD |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                   | Mixed              | <b>Telephone number</b> | 01207 502657           |
| <b>Number on roll (school)</b>            | 254                | <b>Fax number</b>       | 01207 503237           |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>              | The governing body | <b>Chair</b>            | Mr Martin Westgarth    |
|                                           |                    | <b>Headteacher</b>      | Mrs Joan Lacey         |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b> | 1 February 2002    |                         |                        |

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|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Age group</b><br>4–11 | <b>Inspection dates</b><br>16–17 January 2007 | <b>Inspection number</b><br>289850 |
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

St Mary's is an average sized primary school. The number of pupils who claim a free school meal is similar to the national average, as is the number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most pupils are of White British heritage and there are very few pupils who speak English as an additional language. Since the time of the last inspection, there have been substantial changes in the leadership of the school and in teaching personnel.

## 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 with good features and a good capacity to improve. Pupils achieve satisfactorily and attain standards in line with national averages. Provision and standards in the Foundation Stage are satisfactory. In 2006, the national test results for Year 6 pupils improved and halted the decline in standards evident in 2005. The school now has an effective system for checking on how well pupils have progressed over the course of the previous year. They have used this information well, particularly in English, to put in place a range of strategies, for example, providing additional help for those pupils who need it. School data indicate that most pupils in Year 6 in 2006 made rapid progress from the time they were in Year 4 and, in the main, made up for previous lost ground. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory overall with good improvement in curriculum provision. Nevertheless, there is still some work to be done. Inspection evidence confirms that pupils' progress is at least satisfactory but the rate of progress is not yet consistent across the school or in all subjects. As a result, there are still a few pupils who do not reach the standards they are capable of by the time they reach the end of Year 6.

There are several reasons why consistency has not yet been achieved. Leadership is strong and results in effective teamwork and a clear drive for raising standards. Management is satisfactory and, whilst self-evaluation is accurate, monitoring has not been varied or frequent enough to recognise quickly when progress slows. As a result, whole-school and individual targets are not always challenging enough. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There are strong features in teaching skills, for example, teachers' subject knowledge is often good, relationships are good and teachers use a variety of teaching styles to hold pupils' interest and to make learning fun. Assessment systems have improved and provide an accurate picture of how well pupils are doing. Use of this information, however, to ensure that pupils are appropriately challenged by taking due account of their capabilities not just their ages, is still developing.

All pupils make good progress in their personal development, despite significant changes in staffing, because the school has successfully maintained the quality of its provision in this area of its work. Consequently, pupils behave well, understand the importance of learning to their future success, enjoy school and attend regularly. They are very keen to contribute to the work of the school and are rightly very proud of their contribution as school councillors, buddies or mediators. Pupils feel safe and secure in school because they receive a high standard of care. The academic guidance they receive is satisfactory overall with good examples of guidance through marking and in the additional support now in place for English.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure that all pupils progress at a fast enough rate.
- Improve the rigour and frequency of monitoring pupils' progress.
- Ensure that there is an appropriate level of challenge in whole-school and individual targets.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Achievement is satisfactory. Children enter the school with the knowledge and skills typical of children of their age. They make steady progress and, by the time they enter Year 1, most pupils have met the goals set for their learning. Pupils in Key Stage 1 make consistently good progress to reach standards that are above the national average. This has not always been the case in Key Stage 2. Consequently, since the time of the last inspection, standards have been variable at the end of Year 6 and, in 2005, were below the national average. The school has made a good start in identifying and overcoming the weaknesses in provision which resulted in the slowing of progress and has taken effective action to raise standards, particularly in English. As a result, school tracking data show rapid progress from Years 4 to 6 and standards at the end of Year 6 in 2006 are broadly in line with the national average. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to other pupils and there is no significant difference in the relative achievements of boys and girls.

Within this improving picture, there remain some areas for development. The actions taken to improve standards in English are not yet consistently effective across the school, which is why progress remains satisfactory overall. The school's clear focus on improving writing standards has not extended as effectively to mathematics. As a result, the school did not meet its target for the number of pupils reaching the higher Level 5 in 2006.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good and are at the heart of the school's work. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils respond well to the many opportunities for spiritual development such as the prayer and reflection areas in classrooms. They know about and discuss other faiths and cultures; for example, through working with visiting artists to paint oriental winter landscapes and studying life in Chembakoli. This, together with the satisfactory development of basic literacy and numeracy skills, means that pupils make good progress towards the skills and knowledge needed to make them responsible and useful citizens.

Attendance is broadly in line with the national average. Pupils enjoy school and say, 'We have good teachers' and 'it is fun to learn'. They behave well and their self-esteem improves significantly through their involvement in the many additional activities available to them. Pupils are knowledgeable about how to keep safe and healthy. They understand the need for regular exercise and have a healthy eating tuck shop. Many readily take part in various physical activities such as football, netball and athletics.

Pupils enjoy the opportunities they have to take responsibility for their own community, for example, as buddies and mediators. Older pupils say they have a real voice in decision making but this is not extended to younger pupils. They also make an excellent

contribution to their wider community by their generous fund raising activities for numerous charities.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teaching and learning are satisfactory with some good features. Lesson planning is good because it shows clearly what pupils are expected to learn by the end of the lesson. This ensures that teacher and pupils are focused on what is important throughout the lesson and this helps pupils to make at least satisfactory progress.

Most pupils are attentive and enjoy their learning because teachers provide interesting work using a good range of teaching styles. Relationships are harmonious and caring, and are the cornerstone of effective behaviour management.

Teachers have accurate information about pupils' previous attainments. When this information is used well to plan work which meets pupils' varying needs, progress is good. Evidence in lessons and work in pupils' books indicate that this is not yet consistent in all lessons. At times, the level of challenge is not high enough and this slows learning. This is particularly the case when targets for improvement are based on national expectations for pupils of this age rather than upon what individual pupils need to learn next. When teachers mark work well they provide helpful individual guidance to pupils on how to improve, but this is not yet consistent across the school.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The school provides a good curriculum; this is one of the reasons why standards and progress, particularly in writing, are improving. Good opportunities are provided to develop the basic skills of literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) in many areas of the curriculum. However, the use of basic numeracy skills is less effective and there are still too few opportunities for pupils to write at length. The curriculum caters very well for pupils' personal development. Through a wide variety of activities, pupils are able to develop a good understanding of the importance to society of democracy and rules. They listen well to others and carefully consider their responses. Extra-curricular provision is good. It enhances pupils' learning and provides good opportunities for pupils to be fit and healthy.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 3**

Care, guidance and support throughout the school are satisfactory. Arrangements for child protection, health and safety, the safeguarding of pupils and risk assessment all meet national guidelines. There are good links with outside agencies in order to provide

support for all pupils. As a result, for example, pupils are effectively made aware of their responsibility to stay safe.

Teachers are good role models in the care they give to pupils who, in turn, adopt this caring approach in their own relationships. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported by the teaching assistants who help them to learn as well as their peers. A new system has been developed to track pupils' progress and to set targets. This is more effective in English than in mathematics and is most effective in Years 5 and 6.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has developed an effective leadership team who work together well to set a clear direction for improvement. There is a good team spirit throughout the school and with governors. The school's self-evaluation systems are satisfactory. As a result of this, the leadership has a broadly accurate view of what the school does well and how it could be improved. This has enabled the school to halt the recent decline in standards and there are clear signs of improvement, particularly in English. This is because, in this subject, standards and progress have been effectively evaluated and actions are beginning to improve the weaknesses identified. In mathematics, improvements are still at an early stage of development.

Leaders and managers are beginning to monitor the success of their agreed strategies; for example, to group pupils by ability in Years 5 and 6 for numeracy and literacy. At present, this monitoring is neither varied nor frequent enough to recognise when progress is still not fast enough or to pin-point where further adjustments are needed. As a result, whole-school and individual pupil targets are not always challenging enough. Governance is satisfactory. Governors are supportive of the school and adequately fulfil their role of asking challenging questions. They played an important role in establishing stability following the many changes in staffing at all levels in the school. The school has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection and provides satisfactory value for money.

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## Inspection judgements

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

### 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> | 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                                                                                                        | 3   |
| 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

|                                                                                                          |   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| <b>How well do learners achieve?</b>                                                                     | 3 |
| The standards <sup>1</sup> 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                              | 3 |

### Personal development and well-being

|                                                                                                               |   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| <b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>                           | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development                                     | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners                                                                                     | 2 |
| The attendance of learners                                                                                    | 3 |
| How well learners enjoy their education                                                                       | 2 |
| 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

|                                                                                                           |   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| <b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>          | 3 |
| <b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b> | 2 |
| <b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>                                             | 3 |

<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.

## Leadership and management

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

St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Pemberton Road

Blackhill

Consett

County Durham

DH8 8JD

16 January 2007

Dear Pupils

We enjoyed our visit to your school. Thank you for giving up your time to talk with us. You provided us with a lot of valuable information and we were impressed with the work you do as school councillors, mediators and buddies. Well done.

You go to a very caring school. Most of you are making steady progress in your lessons. This means that the results of your tests are once again improving. We saw lots of good behaviour. You told us that you all feel safe and secure in school and shared with us how much you know about healthy eating and the importance of regular exercise. We agree with you that your teachers make learning fun and that they provide you with a lot of exciting activities.

All the staff work hard to help you learn at a satisfactory pace in most lessons. We have asked the teachers to make sure that this is the case all of the time. We have asked your headteacher and governors to make regular checks of how you are doing and to make sure they challenge you all to do even better.

You can help with this. You have a lot of talent and need to continue to work hard, behave well, come to school every day and set your sights high.

Yours sincerely

Linda Buller

Lead inspector