

St Mary Magdalene Catholic Primary School

Inspection report - amended

Unique Reference Number	114565
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	289970
Inspection dates	20–21 June 2007
Reporting inspector	John Carnaghan

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	222
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	J Dance
Headteacher	Angela Brennan
Date of previous school inspection	26 February 2001
School address	Hastings Road Bexhill-on-Sea TN40 2ND
Telephone number	01424 735810
Fax number	01424 733664

Age group	4–11
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Amended Report Addendum

Report amended due to factual inaccuracy

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary Magdalene is an average sized school and caters for pupils from Catholic backgrounds throughout Bexhill. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is slightly above average. There are fewer pupils than average from minority ethnic backgrounds and very few whose first language is not English. The school has had an acting headteacher since April 2006, assisted by a consultant headteacher since December 2006. A permanent headteacher takes up post in September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with Section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to achievement which is inadequate. The school's effectiveness is therefore inadequate. Over the last six months, under the joint leadership of the acting headteacher and consultant headteacher the school has begun to tackle its weaknesses.

Pupils make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage (Reception and Nursery classes) because the quality of provision is sound; teaching is often challenging and activities are well planned to help children reach standards expected for their age. Standards in Year 2 have improved in 2007 and are now average. However, standards in Year 6 remain below average and they are very low in mathematics because pupils' learning has been poor. Teaching and learning are now satisfactory but inconsistent. Many lessons are lively and purposeful but a few are unchallenging and, while relationships are good, some pupils' behaviour is not always well managed. Marking can be uninformative and assessment information is not fully used to promote achievement. The curriculum is satisfactory, with developing strengths in links made between subjects.

Pupils' personal development is satisfactory but there are some pockets of bad behaviour and too many exclusions. Pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles has been recognised in national awards. Pupils are well cared for, but academic guidance is often vague, so they are unsure how to make progress. Effective support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities helps them to make satisfactory progress. The quality of care, guidance and support is satisfactory.

The school has been revitalised under the current headteachers. Monitoring and assessment of teaching and progress now provides the school with a clearer view of its strengths and weaknesses. Senior leaders have striven to improve teaching and achievement, but most subject leaders lack the experience to support them. Governors now understand what went wrong in the past and have started to monitor the work of the school more rigorously so that they can provide better support and challenge. The school has overspent its budget for many years and provides inadequate value for money. The changes in recent months and the strong commitment of the local authority and staff mean that the school's capacity for improvement is satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise pupils' standards and achievement, particularly in mathematics, by improving the quality of teaching across the school.
- Provide better academic guidance for pupils through better marking and setting targets to ensure that all pupils, particularly the more able, are properly challenged.
- Strengthen and develop the roles of middle managers in monitoring, evaluating and planning work in their subjects.
- Improve the ways teachers manage behaviour.
- Work with the local authority to reduce the school's debt.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Children start school with the expected level of skills and begin Year 1 with average standards. By the end of Year 6, standards are below average and in mathematics they are very low. Achievement across the school is inadequate.

Children make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage because teaching is well organised and challenging. In Years 1 and 2, achievement is also satisfactory, standards are average and there is little variation between the main subjects.

Achievement of older pupils has suffered in recent years because the school did not take appropriate action in response to falling standards. The recent strengthening of the school leadership has led to a more rigorous approach to learning. Wide-ranging improvements have started to raise pupils' standards but have come too late to undo the underachievement of the present Year 6. Current Year 6 standards are below average in English and science, and very low in mathematics. The achievement of pupils in mathematics is inadequate. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities receive carefully targeted support and regular progress reviews. In consequence, their achievement is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Parents say that children enjoy school and pupils confirm this. Attendance is average. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. This is reflected in their improving behaviour. They know how to act safely. One pupil explained, 'We've got Golden Rules so that everyone behaves nicely.' Pupils appreciate rewards given for good behaviour, but realise that some teachers are inconsistent when giving sanctions. The number of exclusions is too high. This is due to recurrent incidents of intolerable behaviour by a few pupils. There are systems to help these pupils behave, but improvement has been slow.

The school council enables pupils to express their views, but its role is not yet as developed as that of the school's Eco Club which has a high profile within the school, raising awareness of environmental issues. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to their community, for example by participating in performances at the town's De La Warr Pavillion. Pupils are confident and express their views clearly. They develop most of the skills essential for working life but, because their numerical skills are weak, this area is inadequate.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is variable in quality and little is outstanding. It is satisfactory and pupils' current learning is also satisfactory. Recent improvements in teaching have come too late to have a significant impact on pupils' long-standing under achievement.

Teachers are starting to use assessment information to help them plan lessons. This is evident in English lessons, where achievement is satisfactory. In other subjects, especially mathematics, able pupils are not always given sufficiently challenging work and this slows learning. The management of behaviour is inconsistent. Most teachers are adept at promoting a calm, positive atmosphere, but a few tolerate background noise and disruption, spoiling pupils' concentration

and learning. The pace of learning in some lessons lacks urgency and time can be wasted unnecessarily.

Lessons are often enlivened by links with other subjects or by using the local environment as a stimulus. Teaching assistants are gaining in skills and confidence and provide effective support, both in the classroom and when they withdraw small groups for intensive coaching. Teachers' marking is regular but the comments do not give clear advice about how to improve. Teaching in the Foundation Stage is well planned and consistent. Topics are woven together well to promote stimulating lessons and satisfactory development of skills.

The school has begun to gather useful assessment data and pupils' progress is now tracked across the school. These indicate where achievement is good and where it is not. This information is too new to have had a significant impact on teaching and achievement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

There have been improvements to the curriculum in information and communication technology since the previous inspection and it is now satisfactory. The school meets all curriculum requirements. There has been insufficient emphasis on practical learning in science and mathematics and the school is working to develop these areas.

Links between subjects in the 'learning journeys' initiative are very popular with pupils. They promote better teaching and learning by helping pupils to develop a range of skills in interesting contexts. One example, based on an ecological study, includes work in English, mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT) and geography as well as developing pupils' problem solving and creative skills.

There is a satisfactory range of out of school activities in sport, the arts and academic areas. All pupils are able to take part in a residential trip and a reflective retreat.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school cares well for pupils' welfare but acknowledges that academic guidance is weaker. Pupils' academic progress is tracked but not enough use is made of this information to help all groups of pupils, particularly the most able, to make good progress. Pupils do not all reach their academic targets because they are not sufficiently aware of the next stage in their learning.

Systems for safeguarding pupils are thorough. Pupils feel that they are well looked after and parents agree. Pupils feel safe and are confident they can approach an adult if they have a problem. They are carefully helped through the transitions from pre-school, and later, on to secondary school.

The special needs coordinator works closely with teachers, support staff, outside agencies and parents to ensure that children with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported and their progress monitored. These pupils are fully involved in discussions about their progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The present team of acting headteacher and consultant headteacher has successfully led the school for the past few months, following a period of turbulence, which detrimentally affected the achievement of pupils. The local authority is now fully involved through an intensive intervention programme. Evaluation by leaders and governors is more accurate, with comprehensive tracking of pupils' progress and regular monitoring of teaching and learning. Newly appointed subject leaders show determination to raise standards, but lack the experience to do this.

Teachers are starting to use tracking data to identify pupils' needs and progress is beginning to improve. However, this is not happening quickly enough for all pupils. The management of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is good.

Governance is satisfactory. Until recently, governors were not fully aware of the school's weaknesses. They now have a clearer view of the school and, whereas in the past they were not offering sufficient challenge, they are now more familiar with this aspect of their role and committed to improvement.

Since the last inspection improvement has been inadequate because, until recently, leadership and management have not addressed weaknesses with sufficient rigour. The school has now begun the road to improvement, but pupils' achievement remains inadequate.

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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	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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
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	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

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?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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	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	4
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

22 June 2007

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of St Mary Magdalene Catholic Primary School, Bexhill-on-Sea TN40 2ND

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspectors when we visited your school recently. Both inspectors liked talking to you very much.

You told us that there are many things about the school that you like. The inspectors agree that there are some good points about the school and that it is improving. But there is one area where there is a big concern and that is how well you progress with your studies, which is too slow. Because of this problem, the school has been told it is not good enough and has to improve quickly.

The inspection found that your teaching and learning are satisfactory as is the range of subjects you are taught. You are well cared for and your personal development is satisfactory, but you do not always get enough good advice about how to improve your work. The school is now improving because the headteachers have started to tackle its problems.

There are a number of things that the school has been asked to improve:

- Standards must be raised, especially in mathematics, by making teaching better planned and more lively.
- You need better advice on how good your work is and how to improve it.
- Subject leaders need to play a bigger part in checking on how well you are learning and being taught.
- Behaviour is not always well handled by teachers. You could help here by always ensuring that you are well behaved.
- The school should organise the way it spends its money better.

We are confident the school has all it needs to continue to improve and are sure that you will all help with this. Once again, many thanks for all your courtesy and help during the inspection.

With best wishes for the future,

John Carnaghan

Lead inspector