



St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report - Amended

Unique Reference Number 114574
Local Authority East Sussex
Inspection number 289976
Inspection dates 12–13 September 2006
Reporting inspector Sheila Browning

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Magdalen Road
School category	Voluntary aided		St Leonards-on-Sea
Age range of pupils	4–11		TN37 6EU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01424 427801
Number on roll (school)	225	Fax number	01424 200868
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Christopher Rowe
		Headteacher	Jane Smith
Date of previous school inspection	9 September 2002		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 12–13 September 2006	Inspection number 289976
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Amended Report Addendum

Report updated to resolve formatting inconsistency

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Most pupils in the school are from White British families, but children from several minority ethnic groups and a few Traveller families are also represented. The profile of the school is a changing one with more pupils joining the school with English as an additional language or with learning difficulties and disabilities. The attainment of children on entry to the school has changed since the last inspection and is below the level expected. The headteacher has been in post since April 2004. The school has also been without a deputy headteacher since May 2006. In addition, there have been some long-term staff absences and some significant staff changes.

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 and improving school. The headteacher is a driving force for change and she has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Much has been achieved recently such as improvements in lesson planning and the better use of interactive whiteboards to help make learning more interesting. Rigorous monitoring has identified strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning and staff are being supported to tackle these. The curriculum is improving, staff have been trained in the use of assessment, and the role of subject co-ordinators has developed. However, there has been insufficient time for some new initiatives to have had an impact. While pupils' achievement is satisfactory and standards are broadly average, there are still improvements to be made.

Small group teaching is improving pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics. These developments are starting to compensate for some inadequate progress in the past, particularly in mathematics. Standards are still too low in English, particularly in reading, in Years 3 to 6. Teaching and learning, while broadly satisfactory, vary in quality and this affects the amount of progress pupils make year on year. This particularly affects the more able pupils who do not always achieve as well as they should.

Children make a good start in the Reception Year. They make good progress and reach broadly average expectations because of the good teaching and curriculum. Throughout the school, pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and English as an additional language are well supported. Consequently, they make good progress in relation to their individual targets.

Pupils' behaviour is consistently very good. They develop good collaborative skills and actively engage in school life because of the good emphasis on promoting their personal skills. Pupils say they really appreciate the changes made to lessons when using new technology and resources and they enjoy the creative curriculum. They are pleased with the refurbishment of the school building and new toilets. They particularly like the improvements made to the environment such as the development of the outdoor activity area and enjoy the games organised by playleaders.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in Years 3 to 6 in English by improving pupils' reading skills.
- Raise the standards achieved by more able pupils throughout the school by ensuring that they are consistently challenged to meet their potential.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Reception children make good progress in all areas of learning. As a result, they reach average expectations by the end of the year except in communication, language and literacy. Children do well in the Reception Year because of good teaching, resources

and a well balanced curriculum. In the national tests in Year 2 in 2005, the school's results were broadly average. Test results in 2006 indicate some improvement.

In the work seen in pupils' books, portfolios and on display, standards are similar. In national tests in Year 6 in 2005, standards were significantly above national averages in mathematics and science and have improved since the last inspection. English results were relatively lower and have declined over time. Test results in 2006 and pupils' work indicate that this decline has been halted but there is still more to do to raise standards further. The school's targets for pupils' performance in the tests, though largely met, were not sufficiently challenging.

Progress is satisfactory from the start of Year 1 to the end of Year 6, but it is uneven, reflecting the variations in the quality of teaching. The school is addressing weaknesses well now but the outcomes are not yet securing sufficiently good progress for all pupils. Pupils are doing well and achieving good standards in science and in information and communication technology (ICT). However, in English, pupils do not achieve as well as they should and weaknesses remain in reading in Years 3 to 6. More able pupils throughout the school do not always achieve their full potential. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with English as an additional language make good progress towards their individual targets because of the good support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. This is reflected in consistently very good behaviour, attitudes and positive relationships. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school's Catholic focus enhances pupils' spiritual development well. Pupils know the difference between right and wrong, and are increasingly self-confident. They feel safe and say that any bullying is dealt with quickly and fairly. The school has successfully reduced the instances of unauthorised absence and attendance is satisfactory. Pupils actively enjoy all that the school offers and say 'We wouldn't change anything.'

Pupils organise fundraising activities and contribute well to the school, parish and local communities. For example, older pupils have worked with the local council to improve the environment. The school council has eagerly addressed friendship issues and planned improvements to the environment, and pupils on the council are keen to do more. Pupils' views are valued. Pupils have said they would appreciate more educational visits, as they believe that this brings their schoolwork to life, and the school is responding to this.

Pupils have good awareness of how to keep safe. They adopt healthy lifestyles and know the importance of taking regular exercise. Pupils say they enjoy the various opportunities for responsibility such as house captains, buddies and peer mentors. They are developing satisfactory skills for their future lives and enjoy working together and independently. The school is happy and purposeful and supports pupils well.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching varies from satisfactory to good throughout the school and this affects the amount of progress pupils make year on year. Lessons are well planned and identify what it is that teachers expect different ability groups to achieve. However, the school's own evaluation of teaching shows there is still work to do to make sure that this is fully effective in practice. Support staff are generally used well to help learners. The recently introduced interactive whiteboards ensure some good concentration from pupils during the lessons.

The use of assessment information to plan sufficiently challenging and demanding lessons of the more able is not yet fully embedded through Years 3 to 6. The school has identified that the teaching of mental arithmetic is a particularly weak aspect. Marking is generally well focused on telling pupils what they should do to improve. However, teachers do not always engage all the pupils through questions in the lesson or by ensuring that there is sufficient feedback given to maintain their involvement.

The pupils learning English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and disabilities are taught well. A range of strategies is used effectively to support their learning, such as quality resources and individual and small group work with trained specialists using specific learning programmes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and some good elements have been recently introduced. Children in Reception have a very well balanced curriculum that is particularly focused on developing their personal skills. School monitoring identified some weaknesses in pupils' learning and various methods are being tested to improve this. For example, to improve ICT skills, Years 5 and 6 pupils used laptops and tablets intensively for a term. Lesson planning has improved and different teaching and learning methods are being introduced to make learning more interesting and relevant. The school is aware that more needs to be done to improve pupils' English skills and to improve their learning experiences. The curriculum for more able pupils lacks challenge and as a result they are not achieving as well as they should.

Strong features include the creative curriculum, with, for example, the opportunity to try film animation and to participate in liturgical dance in Years 3 to 6. Spanish has successfully been introduced and a full range of extra-curricular activities is enjoyed. These and strong links with outside agencies, such as the English, as an additional language service extend provision for learning. The use of booster groups for pupils who have been identified as needing specific extra help and better use of teaching assistants are examples of recent action taken to improve standards. These are having a positive impact on the achievement of lower attaining pupils. Education for safe and healthy lifestyles and opportunities to contribute to the community are good.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The care, guidance and support for pupils are satisfactory with strengths judged in the care and support of pupils. The school places a strong emphasis on ensuring the safety and welfare of its pupils. A high priority is placed on promoting healthy lifestyles and the good work in this respect has resulted in a silver healthy schools award and a travel plan award. There are good levels of supervision at lunchtimes that ensure a happy and safe playtime for all. The range of games, activities and quiet areas is impressive. The attention to helping pupils deal with personal issues is very good.

There is now sufficiently detailed tracking of pupils' progress in English and mathematics to help teachers to match activities in lessons. This is relatively recent, but on the whole the information has been used well to provide less able children with support in lessons. However, it is not used well enough to ensure a good level of challenge for more able pupils. Pupils learning English as an additional language get regular help in many lessons and their positive relationships with adults give them great confidence when working independently. Support programmes to ensure that children with learning needs meet their short-term targets are effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since her appointment, the headteacher has shown strong determination to improve subject leaders' involvement in evaluating the areas for which they are responsible. As a consequence, there have been significant improvements in a number of areas, particularly in the teaching of science and ICT, which have led to improved pupil achievement. The headteacher has redeployed staff so that they are more effective and has re allocated responsibilities for school development to ensure priorities are met. Now that there is stability in the staffing, the headteacher and the governors have taken the necessary steps to ensure that there is no slippage in the pace of improvement. Without doubt, the headteacher and senior teachers know their school well. Much of the action taken to address weaknesses is recent but nonetheless robust and having a positive impact.

Whilst a range of evaluative techniques is used, there is a lack of rigour in some areas. Strategies such as talking with pupils and a regular and sustained programme of lesson observations provide useful information to help to plan improvements. However, not enough emphasis is given to evaluating the progress different groups of pupils are making in lessons and there is lack of focus on checking the effectiveness of teaching styles. The role of the teaching assistants has been developed well through training. A good system of performance management targets is in place that links to the school improvement plan. This has resulted in greater accountability for raising pupils' standards and their achievement. The headteacher supports the work of subject leaders through effective management of the budget, ensuring that funds are available to purchase resources and training. The governors are supportive, and work closely with

the headteacher and local authority. The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

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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?	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	2
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	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ 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	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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	3

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.

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	2
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

Thank you for helping us when we visited your school recently. We very much enjoyed talking and listening to you and seeing your work. We were impressed with your good behaviour and how well you get on with each other.

Your headteacher leads the school well. She and all the adults, including the governors, are determined to provide the very best for you. As you know, your headteacher and teachers are making several changes to help you learn more and to make learning fun and interesting. You told us how much you appreciated this. You said that you enjoyed the creative curriculum and new 'learning journeys'. You like getting involved in all of the different activities. Those of you that have special support are really doing well. You know how to lead safe and healthy lifestyles and this will help you in your future lives. We know everyone wants to do better and we have suggested some things to help:

We think some of you would benefit from some harder work and we have asked the teachers to expect even more from you. Your teachers are keeping a check on how well you are doing so that they can help you to make better progress. We think that you could do better in English in Years 3 to 6, particularly in improving your reading skills. You can help with this by reading regularly at home as well as at school.