



St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124356
Local Authority Staffordshire
Inspection number 295790
Inspection dates 5–6 December 2006
Reporting inspector Ceri Morgan HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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|---|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Type of school | Primary | School address | Cruso Street |
| School category | Voluntary aided | | Leek |
| Age range of pupils | 4–11 | | ST13 8BW |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01538 483190 |
| Number on roll (school) | 146 | Fax number | 01538 483190 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair | John Heely |
| | | Headteacher | Kevin King |
| Date of previous school inspection | 8 March 2005 | | |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Mary's is situated in the centre of the town of Leek but serves a larger area. It is the only primary school for 4 to 11 year olds in a town where the pupils in other non denominational schools transfer at 9 or 13 years old. The school is slightly smaller than average and moved into new premises in 2005.

The proportions of pupils who are entitled to free school meals and those who have additional learning difficulties or disabilities are in line with national averages. There are slightly higher than average proportions of pupils with English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Mary's Primary School is improving rapidly and is satisfactory overall with elements that are now good. This improvement has continued since the last inspection and is accelerating due to good monitoring and evaluation. This is evident in all aspects of the school and, despite some further staffing change yet to come, the school is now providing an acceptable standard of education.

As a result, in accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

The school has been through an extended unsettled period. However, staff have worked hard to respond to the areas of weakness identified in the inspection of March 2005 and, with the guidance of thoughtful and constructive leadership, have re-established a focus on pupils' learning whilst maintaining a strong school ethos. This leadership is about to change again to a more permanent structure but the systems now in place are secure enough to help the school continue to improve. The new leadership team is ambitious for the school but is also sensitive to the need to gently refine and develop what the school now does.

The standards reached and the progress being made by pupils are now satisfactory overall and good in some classes. In 2006, three quarters of all pupils aged 11 reached the required level in English and mathematics and almost all did so in science. For the first time, some managed to attain the higher levels. Standards reached by pupils at age 7 in 2006 also reflect this improvement, with a strong performance in the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels. There remains a concern about standards of writing and the progress of some of the older pupils. Encouragingly, the school knows this and has appropriate plans to tackle these aspects and a sample of work shows that improvement is happening

Good provision in the Foundation Stage ensures that children progress well. Most achieve the expected levels by the start of Year 1 and a significant minority exceed these.

The quality of teaching is good overall and there is a tangible enthusiasm to continue to improve, although the ways teachers work in partnership with each other could be used more effectively to meet whole school needs. The good teaching is helping to improve pupils' standards but has yet to fully secure effective progress year on year and shows some variation in the quality of planning.

Good use of assessment helps pupils to plan the next steps in their own learning and regularly evaluate their own progress. In one example, parents were asked to evaluate progress made by their children during a drama lesson during a performance. The pupils were far harder judges of their own standards than their parents and they showed a keen and accurate knowledge of their own work. This is partly due to the school's efforts to develop this skill. It is a routine part of classroom work and is contributing hugely to improvement.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They especially appreciate the school's responsiveness to any problems that may arise. Pupils themselves say the same and enjoy their learning, especially the increased range of extra-curricular clubs.

The school improvement plan is very new and the school's evaluation of its work is not yet fully shared with governors, although it is honest and accurate. There are too few school level targets built into the overall plan and this, together with the need for greater ambition in this area, is a key priority for the new leadership team.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve whole school development planning and increase the level of ambition in school performance targets.
- Ensure pupils' progress is improved throughout the school.
- Iron out the differences in the quality of teachers' planning.
- Improve standards of writing in all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards in school continue to rise and are now satisfactory overall. The rate of progress made by pupils as they pass through the school is slightly more erratic but good progress is now made up to age 7. The slower rate for older pupils is partly due to the legacy of underachievement from previous years rather than as a result of current teaching.

Children achieve well in the Foundation Stage, making satisfactory gains in learning. By the time they enter Year 1, most attain the expected levels for their age, with a significant minority exceeding these. This good start is maintained and contributes to the much improved standards by age 7 when in 2006 the results showed the best performance for three years, in particular in mathematics, where every pupil reached the expected level.

Standards reached in reading are significantly higher than those in writing, especially for more able pupils, and the school has appropriate plans to make writing a continued priority. The school confidently expect this improvement to continue in 2007 and now sets more challenging targets for the pupils although there is still room for even greater ambition.

Standards of writing remain an area of concern and are currently inconsistent across the school. Whilst handwriting and sentence construction have improved and are now satisfactory, the use of language skills in other subjects and, in particular, in problem solving work remains underdeveloped. Pupils understanding of basic number skills are now satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils behave well in and around the school and are keen to learn. They say that 'school life is enjoyable and they like coming to school.' Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory. There is good provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. The cultural element of the school is satisfactory. Pupils are encouraged to make charitable donations, for example to a children's home in Uganda. Relationships are good. The pupils respect each other and celebrate each others' achievements, for example during assemblies. There is an active school council who likes making a positive contribution to school life, such as setting out a playground area for the Nursery. Pupils feel safe and secure and know whom to turn to if they need help.

The importance of leading a healthy lifestyle is promoted well. Pupils know that taking regular exercise and eating healthy food will help them to concentrate in their lessons. Fundraising activities successfully promote pupils' social awareness and sometimes enable them to manage simple budgets. An improvement in standards, especially in mathematics, is helping to promote economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection and is now good in many lessons. There are some examples of outstanding teaching and none is inadequate, although teachers are aware that there is still a way to go before the improved quality results in secure progress for all pupils. It is noticeable how well pupils respond to the increased levels of teachers' expectations and challenge.

Particular strengths are the good use of timings and a brisk pace to maintain enthusiasm. Teachers' planning is now good and in Years 2 and 6 is exemplary. Lessons are now well matched to pupils' needs and teachers are carefully increasing the ways in which pupils take responsibility for their own learning. Recent improvements to the resources available to teachers have been welcomed and are now adding a sparkle to lessons which pupils thrive on.

Where teaching is less effective, there is not enough time for pupils to use written language during the main part of the lessons. This is more evident in the older classes. The school is aware of this but it is not yet built into the review of teaching. Similarly, although teachers use questioning well, pupils' responses are not always extended or used to assess knowledge. This restricts the opportunities to develop a richness of vocabulary.

Marking is now constructive and offers support to improvement. In Year 6 this is exceptional. There are a few occasions where marking remains missed for some subjects however, including homework.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It is planned well and evaluated carefully. In the Foundation Stage, the curriculum is matched well to the children's age and experience and activities are interesting. A good range of additional activities, such as music and sports, enhances the quality of the curriculum. Opportunities for improving the pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are systematically planned for. Pupils' information and communication technology skills are satisfactorily developed across the curriculum and some valuable opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their independent learning skills.

There is good provision for pupils' personal development and pupils' learning is also enriched by a good range of educational visits and clubs as well as interesting visitors to the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are well cared for and they are taught about the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles and staying safe. Staff have a good knowledge of pupils' social and emotional needs. The support of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with English as an additional language is good. The school now has effective procedures to check on pupils' progress and it is using the data collected to raise standards, although there are some inconsistencies across year groups.

There are good links with parents, carers and support agencies to ensure pupils' needs are well understood. Parents are pleased with the good start the children get to their education. There are rigorous child protection procedures in place and risk assessments are carried out regularly to ensure that pupils are kept safe.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The quality of leadership and management remains a complex area to evaluate due to imminent changes in personnel and roles. However, the outgoing leadership team has established a sense of purpose and an ethos which has secured considerable improvement. Together, senior leaders and managers have put in place a system of continuous review that staff have welcomed and developed. In particular, the analysis of pupil assessment carried out by the outgoing deputy headteacher is admirable.

The recently appointed permanent deputy headteacher has already shown the rigour and expertise to continue this approach. She has a detailed awareness of the relative strengths and weaknesses and shows an ambition for continued change that is a positive start. Although the new headteacher has yet to take up post, the secure systems established and the contribution of all staff to leadership in their subjects allow for confidence in the future.

The roles of subject leaders have evolved significantly and the leaders have clear and accurate views of priorities and strengths in their subjects. These are based on an accurate analysis of the findings from their monitoring.

Governance is satisfactory. Governors now question the school's leaders regularly on progress. They are aware of some pressing issues to face, including financial issues, and are conscious of the continued need for urgency. Reports and committee work, both an area of concern previously, are much improved. The governors have persevered with recruitment difficulties and have now secured a stable staffing structure.

As a consequence, leadership, although showing some good elements, currently is judged to be satisfactory overall. However, the capacity to continue this improvement is good.

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Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

| | |
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| 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 | 2 |
| 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 | 3 |

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? | 2 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 2 |

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 | 2 |
| 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

Thank you for being so welcoming on our recent visit. I would now like to share with you what we found out. There is much that is good about your school including the following.

- The youngest children get a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- You enjoy school life and behave well.
- The teachers are good and they use the interactive whiteboards well to help make lessons interesting.
- You told us how much you appreciate your school, particularly the opportunities to take part in activities like sports, musical activities and visits to places of interest.

We also know that you feel safe in school, knowing there is someone to talk to if there is a problem.

These are the things we have asked your school to work on now.

- We have asked your teachers to make sure you have more opportunities to practise different types of writing.
- We would like those teachers responsible for English, mathematics and science to check regularly that work planned for you is helping you to learn better and achieve your best.
- Those responsible for running the school should now plan for the future and aim to make the school even better than it is now.

Everybody at your school is working hard to improve it and have some good ideas as to how they will do this. Of course, they will need your help and support to do this.

Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly.