

St Mark's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103468
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	308331
Inspection dates	27–28 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Hemmings

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	202
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alistair Campbell
Headteacher	Christine Walker
Date of previous school inspection	5 July 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Almond Croft Old Walsall Road Great Barr Birmingham B42 1NU
Telephone number	0121 3579892
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than average and has Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision in a Reception class. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well above average and a significant minority are at an early stage of learning English. There has been considerable disruption to staffing in recent years caused by long-term absences, including amongst senior leaders. The headteacher was appointed in April 2008.

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. It is improving and, within a Catholic ethos, provides a caring environment in which to learn. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and particularly appreciate the changes made over the last year. This parental comment is typical of many: 'I think the headteacher has already initiated many positive changes and I am excited, as a parent, for the future. My child runs into school every morning and I know he is in a safe and nurturing environment.'

The good leadership of the headteacher has been central to the school's improvement. She quickly identified that the disruption to staffing had adversely affected pupils' learning and that standards were declining. A variety of strategies were introduced to halt the decline. These included more rigorous checking of pupils' progress, raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve, and providing more support for underachieving pupils. These are proving successful, and though they remain below average, standards are improving. The headteacher and recently appointed assistant headteacher carry out most of the checking and evaluation of the school's performance. This stems from the fact that, in recent years, the role of subject leaders in carrying out these responsibilities had not been sufficiently developed. This limits their involvement in moving the school forward and so restricts its capacity for improvement. Senior leaders are looking to develop the expertise of subject leaders to enable them to play a full part in school improvement. Nonetheless, leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Leaders promote community cohesion successfully at local, national and global levels. The curriculum is planned so that pupils study newspaper articles, which gives them a good understanding of global issues. Awareness of the different world cultures is enhanced through an annual 'World day'. There are good relationships in the school between staff, pupils, parents and governors and a willingness to be outward looking in their shared ethos of promoting a sense of belonging by all communities.

Children make satisfactory progress in the EYFS and this is maintained throughout the school. Standards by the end of Year 2 are below average in reading, writing and mathematics and, by the end of Year 6, below average in English, mathematics and science. This represents satisfactory achievement from pupils' attainment on starting school. The main reason why progress is satisfactory rather than good is that teachers do not always provide pupils with work that challenges them sufficiently. This leads to work being too easy for some pupils and too hard for others. Writing is a weaker aspect of pupils' performance in English. This stems from their lack of ability to write creatively in a range of styles, using accurate spelling and correct grammar. In mathematics, pupils lack appropriate skills in quick mental recall and in using their mathematical knowledge to solve problems in real-life situations.

Pupils behave well and are kind and considerate to others. This makes a positive contribution to the warm and friendly atmosphere evident throughout the school. They enjoy coming to school and show positive attitudes to their learning. Relationships between adults and pupils are good and help make classrooms friendly places in which to learn. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and manage lessons well to ensure pupils have a good work rate. The satisfactory curriculum is extended effectively by a wide variety of enrichment activities, including educational visits and out-of-school clubs. Pupils say they particularly like the many sporting activities in which they can take part. The pastoral care and support for pupils are good and underpin their good personal development. All staff are firmly committed to ensuring their safety and well-being. The strong links with outside agencies provide effective extra

support for individual pupils when required. This is particularly the case for pupils with learning difficulties and those pupils at an early stage of learning English.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Provision in the EYFS is satisfactory. Children enter school with skills and abilities below the levels expected for their age and make satisfactory progress across the areas of learning. On entry to Year 1, the standards they attain are below average. This represents satisfactory achievement. Children are friendly, well behaved and like coming to school. They share equipment, take turns fairly and work well together in pairs and small groups. Children show confidence when explaining what they are learning to visitors. Adults provide activities that are interesting and often linked to children's own experiences. Relationships are good and children feel safe and secure. Adults place strong emphasis on the health and well-being of all children and promote their welfare effectively. Children do not have enough opportunities to make choices for themselves and this restricts their development as independent learners. Satisfactory leadership has rightly identified the need to make better use of the outdoor area to support children's learning. Adults check the progress children make but do not always use the information collected effectively to set suitably challenging work. The arrangements for introducing children to school are good and enable them to settle quickly into everyday routines. The links with parents are good and they are kept fully informed about how well their children are doing.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure work always challenges pupils effectively in order to accelerate their progress and raise standards, especially in writing and mathematics.
- Raise the school's capacity to improve by developing the role of subject leaders so they play a full part in monitoring and evaluating its performance.
- Provide more opportunities for children in the EYFS to work independently and use the outside area more effectively to promote their learning.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils make satisfactory progress throughout the school. Though standards by the end of Year 6 are below average in English, mathematics and science, they are improving and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Most improvement has been made in the development of pupils' reading skills. This stems from a more systematic approach to teaching these skills and the provision of more stimulating reading material for pupils. Pupils' writing skills are weaker, particularly in their ability to use accurate spelling and punctuation in their independent creative writing. Standards in science are improving because pupils have more opportunities to take part in practical experiments to develop their investigational skills. Pupils with learning difficulties and those at an early stage of learning English make the same progress as other pupils because of the extra support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are polite, courteous and willing to help each other. This is shown in the way older pupils look after younger ones at break times. They take pride in their school and say, 'We all respect each other's cultures.' Pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school, which is reflected in their above average attendance. Pupils make a positive contribution to the school community by taking on responsibilities such as being a member of the school council. They also support the wider community through fundraising for charity and taking part in local events. They are adopting healthy lifestyles well, eating healthily and taking regular exercise. Pupils show a good awareness of how to stay safe, for example by moving responsibly in and around school. They are prepared for their future lives in a satisfactory manner.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to discuss their ideas in pairs and small groups, and this makes a positive contribution to their social development. They have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and manage lessons well, so there is a calm and friendly working atmosphere. Teachers do not always use information on pupils' progress effectively to plan sufficiently challenging work for pupils of different abilities. This restricts pupils' progress to being satisfactory rather than good. Marking is not always used effectively to guide pupils to improve their performance. Teachers encourage pupils to evaluate for themselves how well they are doing and how they might do better. This makes a positive contribution to their development as independent learners. Pupils have good attitudes to learning, and are willing to share ideas and collaborate with others. Teaching assistants provide sound support for all pupils, particularly those with learning difficulties and those at an early stage of learning English.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school's wide range of extra-curricular activities widens pupils' experiences and adds to the positive ethos of the school. Activities include athletics, gardening, choir and the Rosary Prayer Group. Pupils also have good opportunities to work with a variety of visitors and take part in educational visits. These include a residential stay that encourages team building, taking responsibility and showing initiative, which makes a positive contribution to pupils' personal and social development. The good links with other providers, such as professional sports coaches, help pupils develop a variety of skills further. Curricular planning does not always provide sufficient challenge for pupils. There are limited opportunities for pupils to practise and refine their numeracy and information and communication technology skills in other subjects. The programme for personal development helps them understand effectively the need to adopt a healthy lifestyle and raises their awareness of how to stay safe.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Safeguarding arrangements are rigorous and include comprehensive child protection arrangements, in which all staff have been trained. Consequently, they understand the procedures to follow if they have concerns about the well-being of a pupil. Thorough risk assessments are in place for activities in and around school and on educational visits. The good systems for checking and encouraging attendance are reflected in the above average attendance rate. The good links with other services, such as the police and fire brigade, effectively supports pupils' understanding of how to stay safe. The extra support provided for pupils with learning difficulties and those pupils at an early stage of learning English enables them to take part in all activities. Improved systems for checking the progress that pupils make give a clearer picture of the attainment of individuals. However, teachers do not always use the information collected to set work that is sufficiently challenging.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Self-evaluation is accurate and enables the school to identify and prioritise appropriate areas for development. Senior leaders give clear educational direction and all those involved in the life of the school show a common commitment to helping it improve further. A variety of good quality professional development opportunities are provided for staff to extend their expertise. These link well to both individual needs and whole-school issues. The school acknowledges that subject leaders could play a fuller role in promoting school improvement, for instance by monitoring and evaluating rigorously the impact of strategies introduced to improve the school's performance. Leaders have successfully promoted a positive ethos that celebrates the diversity of the school's community and all in school are treated fairly and equally. Governors support the school well and are keen to develop their role in holding leaders to account for its performance.

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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

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/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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 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?	2

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

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

1 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's Catholic Primary School, Great Barr, B42 1NU

Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you and seeing the things you do. Yours is a satisfactory school that is improving. Your satisfactory progress means that you reach below average standards in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6, although they are rising.

What we found about your school

- You behave well and work effectively with other pupils.
- Adults look after you well and make sure you are safe, both in and around school and on visits.
- You are keen to learn and show positive attitudes in lessons.
- It is a very friendly place in which to work and play.
- You are leading healthy lifestyles and show a good understanding of how to stay safe.
- You enjoy coming to school and your attendance is above average.
- There is a wide range of after-school clubs in which you can take part.
- You make a good contribution to the school and local community.
- Leaders of the school are working hard to make further improvements and help you do better.

What we have asked your school to do now

- Always give you work that makes you think hard to help you make faster progress and reach higher standards, especially in writing and mathematics.
- Help those staff who lead subjects to check more carefully how well the school is doing.
- Provide more opportunities for children in Reception to make choices for themselves, and use the outside area more effectively to support their learning.

You can help your school improve further by continuing to try your best in all you do. All my best wishes for the future and I hope you continue to enjoy your learning and being kind to others.

Yours sincerely

Melvyn Hemmings Lead inspector