

St Maxentius CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105231
Local Authority	Bolton
Inspection number	308802
Inspection dates	6–7 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Denise Shields

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	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	211
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev David Dunn
Headteacher	Mrs Clare Wilkinson
Date of previous school inspection	30 June 2003
School address	New Heys Way Bradshaw Bolton Lancashire BL2 4AE
Telephone number	01204 333106
Fax number	01204 333107

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Maxentius is an average sized school situated on the outskirts of Bolton. The socio-economic circumstances of the area are above average. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. An extremely small proportion is from minority ethnic backgrounds. Eligibility for free school meals is low. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is increasing but is much lower than average. Since the previous inspection, there have been many staff changes, including a new headteacher and deputy headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Maxentius is a satisfactory school. It is caring, happy and friendly, and is on track to improve further. This is because the headteacher has tackled some staffing difficulties effectively. She has a very clear vision for the school's future and, ably assisted by her deputy headteacher, is determined to improve the rate of pupils' progress and the quality of provision. Together they are steering everyone in the right direction so that the needs of pupils, staff and parents are at the heart of everything that is done. School self-evaluation is robust and accurate. As a result, priorities for improvement are correct. Firm action has been taken to bring about improvement, but many initiatives are still at an early stage of development and their impact is yet to be seen in national assessment and test results and improved achievement in all classes.

When children start school in the Reception class, their skills are above those typical for their age. By the time they leave school at the end of Year 6, they reach standards that are above average. Achievement is satisfactory overall, although it is not as good as it should be in mathematics, where there has been a more notable decline in pupils' achievement over the last two years than in English. The school is clearly addressing the falling trend in standards in English, particularly writing. In writing lessons, pupils are very enthusiastic about their learning and comment, 'Wow words are fun! Writing is more exciting now.'

Pupils' progress is satisfactory overall but is uneven as they move through the school because teaching and learning are inconsistent. In some lessons teaching is adept at accelerating the rate at which pupils' learn. But not all teaching shows the same high expectation of what pupils' can achieve. This holds back pupils' learning over time.

Pupils enjoy school. This is shown in their very good levels of attendance. Pupils appreciate, as do parents, the very good range of activities outside lessons. The rich variety of visits and visitors enhance pupils' learning and boost their self-esteem. There is a good focus on personal, social, emotional and health education. As a consequence, behaviour is good. Pupils' have a good awareness that they should respect people's differences. 'We should not make fun of anyone because they look different or believe something different to what we believe,' is a view echoed by many. Their understanding of healthy and safe lifestyles and global citizenship is good. Parents confirm this by their comments that they are often told 'to buy healthy food and drink and make sure its 'fair trade'.' Relationships are strong and support for pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is sensitive and caring. Pupils say there is always someone to turn to for help. Safeguarding checks have been made on staff, but have not been recorded in a way that fully meets statutory requirements.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Provision in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Children achieve satisfactorily. By the time they transfer to Year 1 all children reach expected learning goals, and many exceed them. Progress is satisfactory but varies in response to the variable quality of teaching. In small group structured activities or whole-class lessons led by an adult, children's learning is good. In sessions where children choose their own activities progress slips because staff are not adept at quickly grasping the learning opportunities in these situations. Children play together well and know the difference between right and wrong. They understand the class routines and have settled to school life well. The deputy headteacher's expertise and experience of the Foundation Stage

has ensured some good improvements to the way this phase is organised. The curriculum provides plenty of opportunities for children to make choices and learn through play. Personal and social development is generally promoted well, although 'tidy up' time and snack time are less well organised and there are missed opportunities to provide an effective social experience. Provision for extending activities and learning outside is limited. Assessment systems are satisfactory. Observations of children are beginning to contribute to the overall picture of their development and achievements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and improve achievement in mathematics throughout the school.
- Improve teaching and learning so that it is at least good in all classes, enabling pupils to achieve as well as they can.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage during activities that children choose for themselves.
- Ensure that statutory requirements for safeguarding children are met in full.

A small proportion of the 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

In recent years, standards by the end of Year 6 have been well above average. However, there has been some decline year on year and standards are now above average. Pupils' good levels of achievement and progress during past years have dipped to satisfactory. Over the last two years pupils' progress in mathematics has particularly faltered and they do not make as much progress as they do in English. Staffing changes and other staffing difficulties have been significant contributory factors to the recent drop in achievement. Because of good self-evaluation the school has a clear picture of what needs to be done to improve and is taking effective steps to do so. It has introduced several programmes to promote this, some of which have already had a positive impact. The gender gap between boys' and girls' achievement, for example, has been closed because of the good emphasis on improving the writing skills of the more able boys.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have a good understanding of cultures and traditions other than their own. Pupils regularly raise money for charities and show good care and concern for those less fortunate than themselves. They make informed choices about healthy lifestyles and many choose the healthy snacks of fruit or yoghurt from the snack trolley at break time. Older pupils talk knowledgeably about how to deal with stress during tests. Pupils get on well with each other and in many lessons show good cooperation in group and partner work. They make a good contribution to the school community through the school council, peer mediators and class monitors. They also willingly take part in parish activities but their contribution to the wider community is not as extensive. Above average standards in the basic skills of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) give them a good start to their secondary education. Many pupils are starting

to take more responsibility for improving their own learning and progress but this is not consistent in all classes.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Whilst the proportion of good teaching is increasing, the consistently good quality of teaching and learning that the school is striving for has not yet been achieved. Harmonious relationships with pupils, detailed planning and skilful questioning are features of many lessons. Strategies to accelerate pupils' learning, for example, through 'talking partners' are used well in some lessons. In the best lessons, teaching shows high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Work is tailored sharply to individuals' abilities and so pupils work enthusiastically and learning is brisk. However, expectations are not always high enough and work set is sometimes unchallenging. As a result, learning slows. In some pupils' books the presentation of work is poor. Teaching assistants often work closely with teachers so that they are able to make a significant contribution to improving the progress of those pupils' who find learning more difficult. New arrangements to involve pupils' in reflecting how easy or difficult they found their work and how well they have progressed during the lesson are being successfully implemented in several classes. At its best, marking is constructive and clearly pinpoints what pupils need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Most teachers plan work that is interesting and enjoyable. Increasingly, subjects are linked together within themes. This helps pupils to apply the skills learnt in one subject to another. Pupils appreciate this and state, 'teachers think up fun lessons'. There are satisfactory and growing opportunities in other subjects for pupils to develop their basic literacy and ICT skills. However, planning to develop numeracy skills is inconsistent and this holds back the schools efforts to raise standards in mathematics. There are strengths in the creative curriculum with a strong emphasis on music, art and drama. This develops pupils' speaking and listening skills well and promotes their self-esteem. The impact of the good emphasis on personal, social health and citizenship education is seen in confident, articulate and polite pupils. The curriculum is adapted satisfactorily for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Teachers know pupils well and the quality of relationships is strong. Pupils say, 'Staff here are very friendly, they're not horribly strict, but they're fun!' Good provision is made to teach pupils how to stay safe and keep healthy. Pupils appreciate the 'worry wall' and have confidence that school will help them if they have any concerns. The vast majority of parents hold positive views about the school. They appreciate the approachability of teachers and welcome recent changes, such as, the introduction of learning targets and a modern foreign language. 'My children are happy and love coming to school,' is a comment that typifies that of many parents. The school has a policy for child protection and safeguarding pupils, but its record of checks carried out on staff does not fully meet requirements. Academic guidance is developing well.

Many pupils have a growing understanding of their learning targets and say these help them know how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and deputy headteacher bring different strengths to the leadership and management of the school and complement each other well. They work effectively as a team and have a clear picture of the school's performance now and of the changes that need to be made to secure future improvement. School improvement planning is closely linked to a thorough assessment of the school's strengths and weaknesses and involves all stakeholders. A rigorous system to track and monitor pupils' progress has been introduced this term. Any underachievement can now be quickly identified and tackled, although it is too soon for all these arrangements to have had a measurable impact on achievement and standards. Arrangements to train and develop staff are now more closely linked to school improvement planning. Many staff comment positively on how much they welcome the headteacher's open approach to managing change. Subject leaders' roles are developing well. Approaches to checking quality and the progress pupils make in their areas of responsibility are improving. Governors are in close contact with the school. They provide good support and help to set strategic direction. They do not, however, meet all their statutory responsibilities. The school's many good partnerships, with the parish community, local schools and external agencies help to raise the quality of pupils' education and ensure the most vulnerable pupils are well supported

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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well 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	2

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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?	No
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**

We thoroughly enjoyed our recent visit to inspect your school. Thank you for talking to us and for being so polite and helpful. Your behaviour was good and it was good to see how well you all get on with each other. Your singing in assembly was beautiful and the orchestra was delightful to listen to. We were impressed with how much you know about how to keep safe and healthy. You were all very sensible when choosing your healthy snacks from the trolley at break time. We were pleased that you find the 'worry wall' helpful and that you are confident adults will help you if you are sad or unhappy.

Your school is satisfactory and it is improving. This is because your headteacher, deputy headteacher and other staff know where improvements need to be made. They have introduced lots of plans and projects to do this, but it is too early to judge what effect all these are having on improving your test results and assessments at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. Your achievement in mathematics is not as good as it is in English. You did tell us, however, that writing lessons are much more fun now, and teachers make many of your other lessons more interesting. We have asked your school to make sure that you do better in mathematics. We have also asked your teachers to make sure you learn as well as you can in all your lessons. You can help, too, by always trying your best, working hard and remembering your learning targets.

Lots of you told us you enjoy the many after-school clubs, visits and visitors to the school. We agree with you that these are very good for extending your learning and making it more exciting. Children in the Reception class also get to try lots of different activities in their lessons. Sometimes, when they choose these themselves, they do not learn as much as they should so we have asked your school to find ways of encouraging them to learn more quickly if they have chosen an activity themselves.

Adults care a great deal about you and ensure you all enjoy life at St Maxentius' school. The governors work closely with your headteacher, too, and help her to plan what needs to be improved. There are some important pieces of paperwork, however, that have not yet been completed and so we have asked that they put this right as soon as possible.

Thank you once again for being so friendly.