

St Mary's Catholic Primary School High Green

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107118
Local Authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	309319
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Joe Peacock

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	194
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr Martin Clayton
Headteacher	Mrs Amanda Wassell
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2003
School address	Pack Horse Lane High Green Sheffield South Yorkshire S35 3HY
Telephone number	0114 2848488
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is situated in a semi-rural location on the northern outskirts of Sheffield and takes pupils from a wide area. It is smaller than average and less than 10% of pupils are from minority ethnic families. There are very few who speak English as an additional language but extra support is provided for them by visiting language specialists. The proportion entitled to free school meals is well below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. A new headteacher and deputy headteacher started this year and the school is currently undergoing a major building extension.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. It is providing good value for money. The message that 'We are a family' is prominently displayed in the school entrance and all staff work exceptionally hard to ensure that a family atmosphere exists. Pupils feel it and parents like it, knowing how much their children enjoy coming to school. It results in excellent attendance and very special relationships all round.

The new headteacher and deputy headteacher have quickly established a strong working partnership. This has been crucial in ensuring that the massive building project does not disrupt the smooth running of the school or the quality of education that it offers to its pupils. Pride in the school is a striking feature shown by pupils, staff, parents and governors. Together, they all help to create the wonderful family atmosphere that exists in school today.

Achievement is good. The attainment of most children entering Reception is broadly in line with that expected. The good quality of teaching in the Foundation Stage ensures that all children make good progress by the end of their Reception year. Pupils continue to achieve well so that by Year 6 standards overall are significantly above average, with pupils doing especially well in English. In science, however, standards have been falling slightly for the past three years although they are still above average. In some classes insufficient curriculum time is devoted to science and there is not enough emphasis on pupils conducting experiments or investigations for themselves. As a result, not enough pupils are achieving above average standards. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress as they are provided with appropriate work and excellent support from highly skilled teaching assistants.

The dedication and commitment of all staff has a major impact on all pupils' personal development and well-being, which is outstanding. The good manners and politeness of pupils are a pleasure to experience. Excellent relationships exist between teachers and their pupils and pupils' very positive attitude towards their learning ensures that all make good progress. The school promotes pupils' knowledge and understanding of different cultures and world religions well. As a result, all pupils are tolerant and respectful of others. Community links, especially with local churches, are strong and help to broaden pupils' understanding of their responsibilities within communities. Attendance has been maintained at well above average levels since the previous inspection.

The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good and this is largely responsible for helping pupils of all abilities to make good progress. Across the school, learning is made exciting and fun. Simple but creative ideas, such as Year 2 pupils using modelling clay to cut out fractions, are typical of teachers' effective planning. The curriculum is good with some outstanding features. It is enhanced by a wide range of activities for pupils to enjoy outside normal school hours. As a result, pupils of all ages and abilities are successfully motivated and challenged by the interesting tasks that they are given to do.

The quality of care, support and guidance is outstanding. Pupils benefit from the high level of care and support provided for them. The support for pupils who are in the early stages of learning to speak English is excellent. Arrangements for assessment provide a wealth of information on the standards being achieved and this enables children's progress to be carefully tracked term by term. Parents and pupils know what targets have been set and these are closely monitored and evaluated by pupils and their teachers.

Leadership and management are good. Stability of staffing has eased the workload on the new headteacher and deputy headteacher, enabling them to establish an effective working partnership quickly. Too many priorities for improvement have been identified in the school improvement plan, giving staff a difficult task to tackle all of them successfully. Furthermore, it is not made clear how staff will measure their success in sorting each priority. The governors are well led and committed to helping the school to monitor its effectiveness. The school has been accurate in its evaluation and has a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Experienced leadership and management in the Foundation Stage is the key to ensuring that all children, including the more able, benefit from the good quality of teaching and curriculum. As a result, all make good progress. Children enter school from as many as twelve different pre-school settings with skills that are broadly average for their age. Staff carefully assess each individual's development and use the information effectively to support and challenge each child, ensuring that all quickly settle in and enjoy their time in school. A range of effective strategies has been introduced to ensure that relative weaknesses identified in children's communication skills and social and emotional development are improved.

Since the last inspection the accommodation has been extended and now has an exceptionally spacious and well designed covered area. Exciting learning opportunities are carefully planned to stimulate children's curiosity and promote effective learning both indoors and outdoors. Children worked hard to solve the problem of getting the gingerbread man safely across the blue stream, for example. There is a strong emphasis on mark making and developing early writing skills in every area of the classroom, including the outdoor area. The additional space provided by Amy's garden is used well to support outdoor activities. Children make good use of computers but the latest interactive whiteboard technology to further enhance teaching and learning is not yet available in Reception.

By the end of Reception, almost all children achieve the skills expected for their age. Progress is especially good in literacy skills and in personal, social and emotional development, with most joining Year 1 as happy and confident learners. The transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 is managed effectively. Relationships between children, staff and parents are a key strength.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in science by Year 6, especially for the more able pupils.
- Concentrate on fewer priorities for improvement and ensure that specific, measurable outcomes are identified for each priority.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

By Year 2, standards are above average in reading, writing and mathematics, with pupils doing particularly well in reading. The reading mornings, supported by parents, have contributed to the significant increase in the proportion attaining above average standards in this subject, which in turn is helping to raise standards further in writing. However, on occasions in mathematics, the more able pupils are not always provided with sufficiently challenging work so standards are not improving as quickly as they are elsewhere.

Standards in Year 6 are well above average in English and mathematics. Standards in English have improved for three consecutive years. Although standards in science are above average, the school's performance is not keeping pace with other schools nationally in this subject. Not enough pupils are attaining the higher Level 5. Overall, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those in the early stages of learning to speak English make the same good progress as others. This is because they benefit from tasks that are closely matched to their ability and the excellent support of staff, which ensures that they have the help needed to complete them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils are proud of their school, which they enjoy very much. Older pupils cite friendships, 'very helpful and understanding adults' and sporting achievements as the major reasons for this. Pupils are keen to learn and attentive in lessons. Their behaviour is exemplary. Pupils confirm that incidents related to bullying or racism are very rare and dealt with quickly and effectively. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Pupils quickly grow in confidence and work very well in pairs and groups.

The school's work to achieve a Healthy School Award has benefited pupils. Pupils, for example, have a very good understanding of the importance of fitness and how to keep safe and healthy. Opportunities to join the school council and take other responsibilities give pupils very good experience of working together for the benefit of the school community. Excellent social skills, combined with very good literacy and numeracy skills, prepare pupils exceptionally well for the next stage in their education and future well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good and this is helping to raise standards, especially in English and mathematics. In one outstanding literacy session, the teacher's excitement about writing a story with different pathways at the end of each chapter fired the pupils' imagination and spurred them on to produce work of a high standard. All staff enjoy excellent relationships with pupils and, as a result, pupils try to do their best for them, displaying very positive attitudes towards learning. Most of the time teachers plan challenging and interesting tasks for pupils but on occasions the more able find work too easy.

Pupils' progress is carefully assessed and this information is used well by staff to set challenging new work and to identify any pupils who need additional help or support. Teaching assistants do a marvellous job of supporting any pupil who is experiencing difficulty and, as a result, the pace of learning for these pupils is good.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and balanced, with an important emphasis on basic skills and arts activities, as recognised by the Artsmark award. The life-size model of Henry VIII and other large-scale models add a striking dimension to the quality of pupils' creative talents. The social, emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) programme makes a very good contribution to pupils'

personal development, especially their social and emotional development. Thematic weeks on the arts, literacy, and healthy eating plus topics such as the Second World War create useful links and relevance between subject areas. In history, for example, Year 5 used their literacy skills to imagine what it was like to be an evacuee, and have almost finished creating a large model of a Spitfire. There are still opportunities to improve the curriculum in science, particularly in investigative work, to provide a good level of challenge and enjoyment for all learners.

The range and participation levels in after school activities, covering sport, music and drama, are good. Pupils thoroughly enjoyed the dance club, for example, and gave an impressive performance. The good range of visits, visitors and the opportunity to learn both French and Spanish broaden learning experiences and play an important part in extending pupils' knowledge and understanding of the wider world.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of pastoral care provided for pupils is outstanding. Parents and pupils find staff highly approachable and very understanding. Views of parents and pupils are sought, valued and taken into account. Pupils experiencing personal difficulties are very well supported, not only by adults but by their peers. Child protection requirements and health and safety procedures are well established. Pupils rightly feel safe and very well cared for.

Support for pupils with learning and/or disabilities is excellent. Academic guidance for all pupils is a strength, with teachers' marking giving pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work. Staff regularly set and review pupils' targets in English, mathematics and for their personal development. These targets are also shared with parents so that they can help to support their children's learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, deputy headteacher and staff work effectively as a team and know the school well. As a result, their evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is wholly accurate. Weaknesses identified in the previous inspection have been successfully tackled. Building work has begun on a new hall, along with other improvements to the accommodation. The school is reviewing its procedures for subject leadership and management, with staff pooling their expertise to work in teams. All staff regularly and carefully monitor standards and their developing role in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning is helping to identify areas to improve further. Governance is a strength. The long-serving chair of governors is very astute and uses his considerable experience effectively to guide and support new governors. Governors are deeply committed to the school and visit regularly. Their role in helping to monitor school effectiveness is being successfully developed.

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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?	2
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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
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?	1

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
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	2
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

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

It was amazing to meet Henry VIII, pass the street of timber framed Tudor houses in the hall and see the galleon sailing on top of the cupboard! I wish that I could have stayed longer to see Year 5's spitfire get its wings and would love to watch the dance club perform again in your new hall, when it is finished. They were so good! You are right to be proud of your school because it is a good one with some excellent things happening there.

It was refreshing to meet such polite, friendly and well behaved pupils. I really enjoyed talking to you all and looking at your good work on display around school and in your classrooms. I thought that the Year 6 paintings in their art gallery were brilliant. You obviously enjoy being at school and work very hard in lessons. It was good to see Reception children making such good use of their new outdoor area. What a relief it was to see the gingerbread man get across the stream without getting wet and going soggy. All of you are making such good progress with your letter sounds and writing. Keep up the good work.

The reading mornings are really helping Years 1 and 2 to improve their reading and they are also improving your writing. Well done to all your parents who are coming into school to help out. Your hard work and concentration is paying off as many of you do better than expected in English and you have also improved in mathematics. I hope your teachers will now concentrate on doing more science investigations with you so standards can rise in that subject too.

All the staff seem very proud to work in your school and are planning many interesting and exciting things for you to enjoy in lessons and after school. I can see why none of you like to miss any days at school. Your parents think that the school takes excellent care of you and I agree. All your teachers and their helpers are quick to support you if you need help. You have excellent links with the church and I especially enjoyed talking to Father Martin.

Your headteacher, governors and staff know the school well and have their own programme to make it better. I think that maybe they are trying to do too much though and should concentrate on fewer things to improve.

Thank you again for helping me with this inspection. I hope that you will carry on enjoying everything that school offers and try your best to make it even better.