

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Horsforth

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108013
Local Authority	Leeds
Inspection number	309568
Inspection date	31 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Jane Hughes

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	205
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs C Byrne
Headteacher	Mr Neil McDermott
Date of previous school inspection	23 June 2003
School address	Broadgate Lane Horsforth Leeds West Yorkshire LS18 5AB
Telephone number	0113 2584593
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school, the effectiveness of the Foundation Stage and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, pupils' personal development and well-being, the quality of teaching and learning and the effectiveness of leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, the scrutiny of pupils' work, assessment data, school documents and parents' questionnaires. In addition, there were discussions with the headteacher, staff, governors, pupils and parents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This smaller than average school draws the majority of pupils from the Parish of St Mary's, Horsforth, an area of favourable socio-economic circumstances. A smaller than average proportion of pupils is eligible for free school meals or has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most pupils are of White British heritage and few speak a language other than English at home. The school has achieved Investors in People status, Sportsmark and Healthy Schools' (Level 1) status, along with School Achievement Awards. It is working towards Investors in Pupils status. The headteacher took up his post in January 2006 following an unsettled period for the school. A deputy headteacher was acting headteacher for five terms over the two years prior to January 2006. There has been significant turnover of teaching staff since July 2005, mainly due to five maternity leaves. Children from 14 different pre-school settings arrive in the Reception class with skills above those expected for their age.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Mary's is a good school. The headteacher, governors and staff promote outstanding personal development and well-being among pupils, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. School life reflects a strong spiritual and moral vision at all levels. Pupils say that they feel the school's mission statement of, 'happy together in God's family, we love, grow and learn', sums up their school very well. Pupils develop into highly motivated and self-confident citizens. They are very aware of the high expectations staff place on them in terms of their attitudes to work and behaviour; indeed, they revel in these, saying, 'Behaviour is of quite a high standard. It helps you to concentrate'. As a result, behaviour is exemplary at St Mary's. Pupils flock into school each morning, keen to learn. Some attend the popular breakfast club and enjoy the study support facility it provides. This ensures a calm and sociable start to the day. As a result of the school's efforts to manage pupils' behaviour with positive interventions, exclusions have been eliminated and pupils' attendance is consistently well above the national average. The school works hard, along with other local schools, to ensure parents are aware of the importance of regular attendance. Changes to daily routines at the start of the school day ensure that almost all pupils are punctual and ready to learn by the start of registration. Pupils have a good understanding of how important such reliability will be for their future success as they eventually enter the world of work. Such impressive personal qualities all contribute to the consistently above average standards pupils attain.

The headteacher has stamped his philosophy well on the school over the past 20 months. With unflinching support from the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders, he spearheads unequivocal leadership of the school. Well-founded priorities accurately reflect the most urgent needs in terms of school improvement. Most parents acknowledge that the school is well led and managed. Typically, parents comment, 'The management keeps on going from strength to strength, always finding ways to improve and never afraid to do so.' The headteacher has refined the processes staff use to assess and track pupils' progress. There is also a central focus on the accountability of teachers for the progress of each pupil in their class. Teachers see that this system works well and show ready acceptance of this approach to moving the school forward. Governors bring considerable expertise to the school and offer good support. They hold the school to account well. They have managed a period of extreme and extended staff turbulence effectively and made some astute appointments. Good achievement, above average and improving standards, along with good improvement since the last inspection, particularly in terms of the standards pupils reach in foundation subjects such as art and music, underline the school's good capacity to improve. Effective administrators, well trained lunchtime supervisors and conscientious ancillary staff ensure the smooth day-to-day running of the school. They all play an important part in the success of the school.

Pupils achieve well. Standards are above average in English, mathematics and science by Year 6. Current information on the make-up of different year groups shows that these levels represent good achievement for most pupils as they make more than the nationally expected rates of progress. Results in national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2007 reflect that a few did not achieve as well as expected last year but closer analysis shows there were extenuating reasons, mostly personal, for this. The most recent assessments show that pupils currently in Year 6 are already well on the way to meeting their targets. They are also on track to surpass the levels attained by Year 6 last year. Approximately half the projected number is already working comfortably at the higher levels in mathematics while more than half of the whole-year group have reached

the higher levels in reading. Most recent data for this year show that pupils in Years 1 and 2 are making good progress towards challenging targets. These are regularly reappraised and raised by the headteacher in order to push pupils on apace. In 2007, teachers' assessments show that pupils performed best in writing in terms of national average scores. The proportion of pupils who reached the higher levels in reading was lower than in writing, where pupils scored above the national average. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make consistently good progress and achieve well because teachers pay increasingly close attention to their individual needs. Teachers plan activities with care in order to challenge all pupils. From a relatively slow start, pupils who learn to speak English as an additional language attain exceptionally well in English and mathematics. This is due to the effective personalised support programmes put in place for them and other pupils with particular needs.

The school accurately judges that the quality of teaching and learning is good. Disrupted staffing inhibited the school's push for continuous improvement for some time but this situation is now successfully resolved. Teachers make the best use of all the data they collect to mix just the right cocktail of challenge versus consolidation for pupils in lessons. This galvanises pupils to succeed at increasingly high levels and accelerates the progress they make. Pupils comment, 'Lessons are interesting. Teachers know how good you are and they set the right standards.' Teaching assistants are skilled practitioners who support pupils with varying degrees of need in their learning. Teachers and teaching assistants develop good working methods so that they constantly challenge pupils to move on well in their learning. Parents value highly this element of the school's work.

The rich curriculum stimulates pupils' curiosity as teachers widen pupils' horizons. To this end, the school establishes first class links with the local secondary school and community service providers. A modern foreign language expert visits school to support the teaching of French, for example. Close liaison within the local sports' partnership ensures that specialist sports coaches regularly train pupils to develop good skills across a range of sports. First class pastoral care for all pupils ensures they feel safe and well cared for in school. All staff play their part well here and make certain that all the appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place. Health and safety for all are a high priority. Pupils say, 'People trust you here', and this is clear in the way pupils carry out their duties independent of adult support. This grounding begins in Reception. As a result, by the time they leave Year 6, pupils are accustomed to making a positive contribution to the life of the school and the wider community. Some are councillors, others playground pals or buddies. Staff assess and track pupils' progress with great accuracy and provide pupils with effective verbal feedback in lessons. Teachers' marking is regular and supportive of pupils' efforts. Nevertheless, it is inconsistent throughout the school in that it does not always show pupils how to improve their work, nor do teachers always check that pupils follow any written guidance.

The school listens carefully to the views of pupils, parents and parishioners. The school council is an effective vehicle for change. The school is careful to maintain a very productive partnership with parents. The hardworking parents' association provides many new resources to support learning. Many methods exist through which the school gauges parental opinion. Parents say that they feel the school encourages them to play an active part in school life and their children's learning. One comment reflected the views of many, 'I feel St Mary's is our school, not just the children's.'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

By the end of Reception, children are working securely within, and some attain beyond, the goals expected for their age. Good quality provision in all areas of learning ensures children achieve well during their first year in school. In 2007, children made most progress with their communication, language and literacy skills along with the calculation element of mathematical development. All children either met or exceeded their targets. The least able made the most progress because staff are very adept at identifying exactly what children need to move their learning on. For instance, improvements in children's writing are a direct result of the substantial development of the outdoor provision in the Foundation Stage. Writing activities are now part and parcel of this outdoor learning environment and make a huge difference to children's perceptions of when and why they write. They now regard writing as a 'fun' activity and are more willing to choose writing activities when indoors. Knowledgeable staff make learning exciting and bring a new dimension to familiar activities. For example, some pictures and labels are displayed in very small print on the walls. Children love to choose a colourful magnifier in order to decipher what they depict. The Reception classroom hums with purposeful play as children work on a variety of stimulating activities. They show increasing maturity as they access resources independently or collaborate very well during role play. This allows the classteacher to offer high quality support through a focused activity to one group of children who make good progress during the session as a result. Children's behaviour is impressive and they know exactly what is expected of them. They do not disappoint and this calm learning environment helps them to make the most of their time in school and to learn well. There are increasingly close links between Reception and Year 1 staff, although these are still not strong enough. The school recognises that it could do more to incorporate Foundation Stage approaches within the Year 1 curriculum.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of pupils who attain higher levels in reading by the end of Year 2.
- Ensure teachers' marking provides consistently clear guidance to pupils on how to improve their work and that pupils follow this in practice.

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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?	1
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?	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.

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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Horsforth, LS18 5AB

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful during my recent visit. I enjoyed chatting to many of you in the playground, over lunch and in your classrooms. You all told me how much you enjoy coming to St Mary's and having spent the day with you, I understand why. Your school is such a happy place. Everyone gets on so well and you help each other in lessons and around the school which is lovely to see.

I judge yours to be a good school. You reach high standards in your work and do well because the headteacher and all the adults make sure that the work they give you is set at just the right level. Teachers make sure your lessons are interesting and often fun. I saw how all the adults in school look after you very well and your parents also told me this. I know that there have been many changes in school over the past few years. You have coped with these well and should be proud of yourselves. You show resilience and determination, behave beautifully and can be trusted to do any jobs without fuss. As a result, your personal development is outstanding. Along with the good academic standards you reach, these key skills are helping you to prepare well for future success.

Part of my job is to see how your school could do even better. I found two important areas. First, I have asked your headteacher to help more of the children in Years 1 and 2 to reach higher levels in their reading. Second, I have asked your teachers to make sure that when they mark your work they always give you guidance on how to improve it - and that you follow their suggestions. It is important that you all remember how much time your teachers take to mark your work. Your job is to read what they say, go back, make the changes and then remember these when you start your next piece of work! We all learn from the people around us every day and this is an important skill that will serve you well in later life.

Keep working hard and enjoying safe and healthy lifestyles.