

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109261
Local Authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	309944
Inspection date	10 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Geoff Burgess

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	211
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Karen Mullally
Headteacher	Anthony Brennan
Date of previous school inspection	1 April 2004
School address	Penn Hill Road Weston Bath BA1 4EH
Telephone number	01225 429030
Fax number	01225 319012

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: current achievement from Reception to Year 6; why the school feels its curriculum and quality of care, guidance and support are outstanding; and why the school judges its leadership and management to be outstanding when its academic outcomes are not. Evidence was gathered from: analysis of pupils' performance in national tests; scrutiny of the school's records on pupils' progress and the targets set for them; firsthand observation of the school's work; discussions with school leaders, other staff and pupils; analysis of parents' responses to the inspection questionnaire; and scrutiny of documentation. 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 selfevaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

St Mary's serves an area of mainly privately owned homes in the western outskirts of Bath. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is low and few pupils join or leave the school other than at the usual times. Most pupils are of White British origin but a growing number of pupils come from other backgrounds. The number of pupils whose first language is not English has grown since the school was last inspected. Most children start school with skills and knowledge above expectations, although the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is about average. In recent years a small but increasing number of children have started school with more complex needs.

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 where, in the words of a parent, a 'caring Christian ethos comes across in everything they do'. It has many strengths and is highly regarded by the community it serves and much appreciated by its pupils. A parent speaks for many, saying it provides 'a wonderfully caring and nurturing environment'. Constantly good provision makes it possible for St Mary's pupils to achieve high academic standards and flourish personally. Children, most of whom start school with skills and knowledge above expectations, with good teaching, make good progress and regularly achieve exceptionally high standards in English, mathematics and science by the time they leave. The current Year 6 pupils were, however, a lower attaining group on entry and standards were still below average in reading, writing and mathematics in Year 2. The school evaluated this situation carefully and, due to very effective academic support and guidance and the efforts of the teaching and support staff, this year group has made commendable progress and provisional results in this year's national testing show that standards have risen to above average in English, mathematics and science. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with more complex needs, make similar progress to their classmates. The school's records show that high standards are being sustained in the rest of the school. Another example of the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation and academic support and guidance is the way the school quickly identified an unusually high level of need in the current Reception class and invested in arrangements that have made it possible for this group to make very good progress over the year. All children are now well prepared to move on to Year 1. Thanks to good teaching, achievement from starting school to leaving in Year 6 is good. However, the school is aware that teaching is not consistent throughout the school and that progress is better in those classes where activities regularly absorb, excite and challenge pupils. Teaching assistants make an important contribution, especially in supporting pupils who need extra help. Work is well marked and good use is made of individual learning targets to ensure that pupils are clear about how well they are doing and what they need to do next. Pupils' personal development and well-being are a major focus for the school. A parent notes that academic success 'is achieved by nurturing confident, happy, secure children'. The quality of pastoral care is excellent and pupils appreciate having adults who are 'always nearby' and 'teachers who care about you'. Everything possible is done to ensure pupils are healthy, fit, safe and happy, and pupils are quick to say that they are. Pupils' moral and spiritual development has been a particular priority for some time. As a result, a parent accurately describes behaviour as 'superb', saying that 'respect and caring for one another is high on the agenda'. The impact of the school's more recent priority to promote pupils' cultural development by working towards an 'International School Award' was exemplified by the three classes that were out of school for most of the inspection day finding out about Mozambique through music and dance. In another class, a good example of community involvement saw young pupils entertaining grandparents, showing them their work and performing for them. The school council has had a significant voice in campaigning for a pedestrian crossing and protesting about dog fouling in the park across the road. With high standards in literacy and numeracy, the school's investment in upgrading provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has meant that pupils are well prepared for moving on to the next stage of their education. The curriculum is very effective in enabling pupils to achieve high standards in the basic skills and the school has begun a process of making it broader and richer. A good range of events and extra activities enhance pupils' learning. For instance, music is a strength of the school; pupils of all ages say they 'love' learning Spanish; and the school is working towards gaining an 'eco' award. However,

the school acknowledges that there is scope to be more creative in planning the curriculum to engage and enthuse pupils more by making taught activities more out of the ordinary, relevant and challenging. The good quality of leadership and management can be seen in the good rate of progress that pupils make in their work and by its high reputation in the local community. Well supported by the governing body and the deputy headteacher, the headteacher ensures that targets, expectations and morale remain high. A recent redistribution of responsibilities has refreshed aspects of middle management. Ambitious plans in the areas of ecology, inclusion, international awareness and the development of teaching show that the school's desire and capacity to improve are undiminished.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

A decision made early in the school year by the headteacher to invest extra resources and time in the Reception class has been very effective. Children who, when they started, found school and learning difficult are now happy, independent learners who are comfortable working and playing together. During the inspection, children dressed as pirates confidently and very sensibly, and thoroughly enjoyed a range of activities inside school and out, planned for their special day. Parents are very happy with their children's start in school. They note how much their children like the staff and how very happy they are at school. Achievement is good and in most years, the school's records show that children move on to Year 1 above the expected levels in all areas of learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement by ensuring teaching is equally good in all classes.
- Excite and motivate pupils to achieve even better by providing more class activities that captivate, stimulate and challenge pupils.

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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	1
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	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

- 11 July 2008 Dear Pupils Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Bath BA1 4EH I would like to thank you for your friendly welcome during my recent brief visit to your school. I particularly liked the fact that the school was so busy, with lots of you out of school studying Mozambique, Year 1 showing their grandparents what they have been doing, children in the Reception class dressing up as pirates, the brass group performing and Year 6 practising 'Joseph'. You are obviously very proud of your school and, like you, I think it is good. I found these good things:
 - Your behaviour is excellent; you work very hard and really enjoy learning.
 - Everybody gets on fantastically well together.
 - You know extremely well how to stay healthy, fit and safe.
 - Your teachers and helpers are good at helping you learn and you make good progress.
 - Most of you are good at several subjects.
 - You are able to enjoy lots of extra activities during and after school.
 - You know you are safe and that there is always someone to turn to.
 - I know you appreciate everything the grown-ups do to make sure your time in school is as happy as possible. To make things even better, I have asked your school to:
 - help you to achieve as well as you can by making sure all teaching is as good as the best
 - make what you do in lessons more fun by choosing things to do that interest and excite you and by doing things in different ways. You can help too by continuing to work hard and doing your best. Again, thank you for all you do to make your school as good as it is. It was a pleasure for me to share it with you for a short time. Yours sincerely Geoff Burgess Lead inspector

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Yours sincerely

Geoff Burgess
Lead inspector