

St Mary Magdalene Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110483
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	310326
Inspection dates	9–10 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Hugh Protherough

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	299
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	83
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Phil McCue
Headteacher	Mrs Rosemarie Jones
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Ardwell Lane Greenleys Milton Keynes MK12 6AY
Telephone number	01908 321746

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	9–10 September 2008
Inspection number	310326

Fax number

01908 220533

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school serves a diverse and widespread set of communities. The single largest ethnic group is White British, but in recent years the number of other groups has increased. More than a third of pupils are of Black or Black British African background and a growing number are from Eastern Europe. More than a third of pupils speak languages other than English at home. The school has identified twenty three different languages within this group, the largest proportions speaking Twi, Nigerian and Polish. The proportion of pupils entering or leaving school at times other than the beginning or end of the school year is well above the national average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average, but rising. The main areas of need are dyslexia, social and emotional and speech and language difficulties. The school has been awarded the Activemark and Healthy School status.

At the time of the inspection the school was in the midst of a major building project.

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 Magdalene is a caring school which provides well for its children, parents and visitors. It welcomes you from the moment you enter the building...' Inspectors agree with this parent's assessment of the school that is typical of the overwhelmingly positive views expressed by parents during the inspection.

This is a good school that has successfully reversed a recent trend of falling standards and ensures that pupils of all backgrounds and abilities now achieve well. The key to this improvement lies in the effective leadership of the headteacher and her deputy. Their honest evaluation recognised the rapidly changing profile of the pupils arriving at the school and ensured the effective development of teaching and resources to meet their very different needs. In particular, over the past few years, the school has developed its own outstanding provision to support those pupils who speak English as an additional language. As a result, these pupils are swift to improve their command of English and make rapid progress towards their targets.

The standards achieved by the Year 6 pupils who took the national tests in 2007 were below the national average. The unvalidated results of 2008 show considerable improvement. All those pupils entered for the tests achieved the expected level and a large proportion exceeded this in English, mathematics and science. These results show good progress from the scores achieved when the pupils were assessed at age seven. The significant number of new pupils arriving during Key Stage 2, including several who speak EAL, all achieved very well.

The key strength underpinning pupils' good achievement is the school's highly effective emphasis on developing excellent personal qualities that contribute significantly to pupils' well-being. Arrangements for pastoral care are outstanding and the school's vibrant curriculum offers wide-ranging opportunities that excite the pupils' appetite for learning. As a result, pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes to school and work hard. They follow the excellent personal example set by all staff and take good care of each other, behaving considerately in lessons and around the school. Their involvement in supporting the many new pupils who arrive during the course of each term is particularly effective. Pupils know how to stay fit and what it means to eat a healthy diet.

Teachers have high expectations for learning and share these with the pupils. They question carefully to explore pupils' understanding and make good use of this information to set interesting and challenging work. In the most effective lessons pupils have opportunity to work independently, but this is not yet a consistent feature across all classes. The work of teaching assistants makes a significant contribution to pupils' learning, especially in the support of pupils who speak English as an additional language or who those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Significant work is underway to ensure the school reaches out to parents of all backgrounds. The staff team ensures that much useful information is shared in letters and publications, some of which are provided in other languages. However, the quality of annual reports on pupils' progress is inconsistent. The language used is not always easy to understand and some pupil targets lack clarity and detail. Even so, the school offers a good range of social and educational meetings where parents can meet and speak with the staff. There are regular events for new parents and those who speak languages other than English at home. Their increasing involvement in the life of the school is palpable in its curriculum and the pupils' learning.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The profile of children entering the Nursery class is mixed, but generally below age- related expectations. Children thrive because the staff team work together very closely, offering a secure environment and a stimulating variety of learning experiences. The confident way that most children arrive at the start of each day, self-register and start work is testament to the effectiveness of the school's induction arrangements. Sensitive arrangements ensure that parents can enter the classroom with their children and help them settle before leaving. Those who spoke with the inspector were very happy with the way their children were settling into school.

A key strength of nursery provision is the way that learning develops in both indoor and outdoor environments. Adults are skilled in their observation of the children's development and through careful questioning and engagement move learning forward at a good rate across all of the areas of learning.

In the year in which they become five children enter the neighbouring Reception classes where they are joined by a further group of pupils new to the school. Teachers' planning and expectations build clearly on the pupils' previous experiences, but a significant proportion starts with beneath age-related expectations, especially in their communication, language and literacy (CLL) and problem solving, reasoning and numeracy (PSRN). Induction arrangements are good and adults are successfully establishing positive relationships with the children. Effective use is made of a shared area so that children from both classes can work together. Outdoor learning is being further enhanced as part of the current building work. The teaching assistants ensure that children are safe and conscientiously support their learning, but sometimes at the expense of developing the children's independence.

The analysis of last year's final assessments shows that the majority of pupils leaving Foundation Stage did so with good levels of overall achievement, but that a significant minority still has gaps in their CLL and PSRN.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase opportunities for pupils' independent working throughout the school.
- Ensure reports to parents and carers, and especially the pupils' targets, are written in straightforward language that is easy to understand.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The Year 6 pupils taking national tests in 2007 attained below average standards and continued the downward trend from 2006. The unvalidated results for 2008 show significant improvement with all those pupils entered for the tests, including ten who speak English as an additional language, reaching the expected level in English, mathematics and science. Well over a third exceeded this. Overall scores are comfortably higher than the national average for 2007. The analysis of the school's past assessment data shows these pupils made good gains in attainment since their assessment at age seven. The voluntary tests taken by the current Year 6 last May show sustained improvement. Almost a half of pupils are working comfortably within the levels expected by next July in English and mathematics with a significant number exceeding this in their reading.

Teachers' assessments of the Year 2 pupils in 2008 also show an upturn following a period of decline. Pupils' overall scores were close to the national average for 2007 and showed significant improvement in mathematics and in the performance of the boys.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Inspectors agree with the many parents who express pleasure about the way the school supports the development of the 'whole child'. The school's Christian ethos successfully underpins the pupils' excellent social, cultural, moral and spiritual development. Pupils feel safe, special and valued. They attend well and arrive keen to work and eager to contribute to school life. The staff team ensures there is a strong and appropriate emphasis on mutual respect and recognition of the unique qualities that each individual can offer the school community. As a result, pupils are happy, responsible individuals who make a positive contribution, whether as learners, members of the school council or 'buddies' to new pupils. Large numbers enjoy the good provision made for sport and respond well to the school's emphasis on healthy eating. Improving standards in literacy and numeracy and the pupils' management of a school savings bank contribute positively to their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers' high expectations are evident in their planning and the good variety of learning experiences they provide for the pupils. Work is well matched to the wide range of pupil needs and abilities. A key factor in this is the well-trained team of teaching assistants who provide valuable support by working with groups and individuals. The work with pupils who speak English as an additional language is particularly effective because the assessment information gathered in each session is put to very good use in planning the next steps in learning and accelerating pupils' progress.

Consistent expectations for behaviour and the positive relationships between staff and pupils mean that teaching is seldom interrupted unnecessarily. Pupils are enthusiastic learners, many of whom are eager and able to take responsibility for their work. In the best lessons, teachers are making provision for pupils to develop these skills by setting open-ended tasks, or allowing for unexpected questions to open up a brief diversion from their original plans that extends their thinking further. Pupils welcome this and respond positively, but the practice is not yet a feature in all classes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Pupils speak with animation about the outstanding range and variety of learning experiences offered by the school. Teachers go to considerable length to match the curriculum to the diverse needs and interests of their pupils, taking account of both personal and academic development. Particular attention is given to ensuring that all pupils master the basics of literacy and numeracy, especially those who speak English as an additional language. Even so, the leadership team encourages a creative approach towards curriculum planning and the development of cross-curricular skills that helps pupils understand the links between different subject areas.

A range of educational visits, including a residential experience in France during Year 6, supports this. These contribute strongly to pupils' exceptional social skills and teamwork.

The many cultures represented within, and beyond the school are celebrated through language, costume, food and dance, bringing breadth and excitement to learning. A comprehensive programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE) informs pupils about healthy choices and helps develop life skills. The pupils are enthusiastic in their support and membership of the excellent variety of extra-curricular activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Parents and pupils are all agreed that one of the main reasons why St. Mary Magdalene is a good place to be educated is because pupils feel safe, happy and secure. Levels of pastoral care are outstanding and arrangements for safeguarding pupils secure. In recent years the support offered to learners with special educational needs and those for whom English is not their first language has been successfully enhanced.

At the time of the inspection, teachers were in the process of assessing pupils in order to set them new targets. Inspectors' analysis of pupils' annual reports shows that whilst most contain targets, their quality and clarity is inconsistent.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and her deputy provide strong leadership for the work of the school. They recognised the impact of a changing school population on pupil achievement and have taken effective steps to put things right. Central to this has been the development of the staff team. Teachers are held accountable for the achievement of the pupils in their care. Progress is monitored regularly and successfully informs the school's rigorous approach to target setting as well as teachers' performance management. Subject leadership has improved because teachers have a clearer oversight of standards and provision in their areas of responsibility. There has been significant investment in the training of teaching assistants, including the recruitment of adults from minority groups represented at the school. The positive impact of their support for pupils who speak English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a key factor in improving standards.

The school has responded successfully to the findings of the previous inspection. Parents are consulted on a regular basis and their positive views of school reflect this. Governors have an improved oversight of the work of the school and can now offer appropriate challenge as well as very good support to staff. The school is well placed to improve further.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
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?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	2

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?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
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 learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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

22 September 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary Magdalene Catholic Primary School, Milton Keynes, MK12 6AY

Thank you very much for the friendly welcome you gave the inspectors when we visited your school at the start of term.

We think that St. Mary Magdalene is a good school. What impressed us most is the way that everyone gets on so well together. The staff set an excellent example. They take care of you and make sure everyone understands the importance of behaving politely and considerately. The way you welcome new pupils to your school is fantastic and really helps them settle in quickly. You are right to be enthusiastic about the excellent range of exciting opportunities you have in lessons and in clubs before and after school. We are pleased to see so many of you making the most of these opportunities.

There are a couple of things we think could be even better. Year 6 told us how last term they had enjoyed taking responsibility for writing a story over several days. We also saw that the nursery children are very good at making sensible choices in their work too. We want you all to have more opportunities like this in your lessons throughout the school.

We enjoyed reading some of your reports, but would like them to be easier to understand and for your targets to be included. This way your parents can remind you of your targets before the start of term and you can make an even faster start to learning.

Last year you all did really well in your tests and assessments and results were much better than before. Keep up the good work and you will soon become an outstanding school.

Yours sincerely

Hugh Protherough

Lead Inspector