

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Crewe

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111342
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	310572
Inspection dates	30 June –1 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Mark Williams HMI

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	600
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Wimpenny
Headteacher	Mrs P Walters
Date of previous school inspection	6 June 2005
School address	Dane Bank Avenue Crewe Cheshire CW2 8AD
Telephone number	01270 568912
Fax number	01270 651175

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's Catholic Primary School is a large school. It is situated close to the centre of Crewe and serves a wide and socially diverse area. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is about half the national average. Just over 80% of pupils are of White British heritage. This is broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils whose first language is not English has increased from the previous inspection and is now above average. This is because an increasing number of pupils from Eastern European heritage have joined the school. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is less than half the national average. The school holds a number of awards, including Healthy Schools and Investor in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Mary's Catholic Primary School provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. As a result, pupils attain standards that are broadly average overall and make the progress expected of them. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those who speak English as an additional language, make at least good progress in their learning and personal development largely because of high quality, focused support that meets their needs particularly well. The school has recognised the need to ensure all pupils make good progress. As a result, staff, well led by the headteacher, have implemented a number of important measures to track how well pupils make progress. The result is that class teachers are beginning to set more focused targets for individual children. Pupils, however, are vague about their targets in literacy and numeracy and what they have to do to achieve them.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. Some teaching is good and engages and enthuses the pupils well. However, in many lessons the pupils are not fully engaged in their learning and the more able are not sufficiently challenged. The quality of teachers' marking is variable; while some is very helpful, clearly indicating to pupils what they need to do to improve, this is not a consistent feature. Consequently, most pupils make satisfactory rather than good progress.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Nevertheless, there are strengths, not least in the way the headteacher is developing her senior leadership team and equipping it with the skills to evaluate what the school does well and what it needs to improve. Governors are supportive and active in committees. Measures introduced are timely and appropriate, and their impact on specific groups of pupils within the school indicates a good capacity to make the further improvements necessary. Overall, though, the leaders' and governors' work has not yet led to good rates of progress for all pupils.

The most significant strengths of the school are: the good personal development and well-being of the pupils; the quality of the curriculum; and the levels of care and support provided. As a result, pupils are polite, articulate and very well behaved. They willingly take on responsibility and are very active in the life of the school and community, in fundraising for example. Their relationships with each other and adults are strong, as is their sense of community. Their cultural development is particularly good, and improved from the previous inspection.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good and children make good progress.

Children enter the Nursery class with skills that are broadly typical for their age. Thorough induction arrangements and effective links with parents ensure the children settle quickly. They feel happy and safe in their new environment and treat each other and adults with respect.

There are effective procedures to care for the children and to ensure their welfare is a high priority. There is strong emphasis on children's personal development. This is good. Staff, including teaching assistants who are a valuable part of the teaching team, are very good at engaging children to extend their thinking. They provide an exciting and stimulating environment. However, sometimes the children sit for too long on the carpet. The outdoor environment is used well to promote learning in the Nursery. The school is aware of the need to develop this further in the Reception classes.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure pupils understand their targets for improvement and know what to do to achieve them.
- Ensure all marking is of a consistently high quality and makes clear to pupils what they need to do to improve.
- Ensure pupils are always engaged in their learning and the more able are given appropriate challenge in lessons.

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

Standards are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory.

In 2005, at the time of the previous inspection, standards attained by pupils in Key Stage 1 in the national assessments were significantly above average. In 2007 they were slightly below average in reading and writing, and slightly above in mathematics. The decline was the result of weaknesses in pupils' writing. The school has recognised this and now better identifies where such weaknesses are and has in place appropriate interventions to secure improvement. In Key Stage 2 standards in English, mathematics and science have fluctuated: in 2005 and 2007 they were broadly average, while in 2006 they were significantly above average. The school's own data and work seen in pupils' books show that pupils currently in Year 2 and Year 6 are on course to attain broadly average standards in this year's assessments. From their starting points, these standards represent expected rates of progress. This picture of satisfactory progress is mirrored across the school from Years 1 to 6. This satisfactory progress is the result of teaching that is satisfactory and which does not always present sufficient challenge for pupils, the more able in particular. Nonetheless, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those who speak English as an additional language, make at least good progress. This is because of the high quality focused support provided for these vulnerable pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school. They report their teachers are kind and that they 'like the way teachers make lessons good fun', for example teaching songs to learn multiplication tables. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their cultural development is particularly good, and improved from the previous inspection. An example of this was seen during an assembly in which a group of bilingual pupils read, sang songs and acted out a story in their native tongue.

Pupils form good relationships with each other and adults, and are confident in their conversation. Behaviour is very good and demonstrated in the way pupils work and play well together. They are confident that school is a safe place and they know who to turn to if there is a problem. They also take on responsibilities willingly and contribute to the life of the school well, for example through the school council or as play leaders. The school council was instrumental in raising funds for the adventure trail. In addition, the school's eco council is very proactive as 'eco warriors' promoting the importance of conservation and recycling. While pupils

willingly take responsibility for others, they do not always have enough opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning.

Pupils know how to live healthily and they enjoy the nutritious meals and snacks available. They understand the need for physical activities. Attendance is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory because, as demonstrated in pupils' work and lessons observed during the inspection, a good rate of learning is not yet a consistent feature throughout the school. This is because teachers' marking is not always helpful in letting pupils know what they must do to improve. Too often, pupils are not challenged; the more able, for example, often complete similar tasks to other pupils in the class. In about half of the lessons seen during the inspection, pupils were not sufficiently engaged in their lessons and they became passive learners. However, in the best lessons observed and as seen in these pupils' work, when children are fully engaged their achievement is good; they are given opportunities for collaboration, cooperation and independent work; there is a variety of task to enable all learners to succeed; and teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge. In these lessons there is a genuine buzz from pupils who exude enthusiasm for learning. An example of this was seen in a Year 5/6 mathematics lesson where pupils were excited by the range of investigative and fun opportunities they were given. This was further evidenced in their books and through the vast array of mathematical talk which was encouraged and, in turn, demonstrated their secure knowledge of concepts.

Resources, teaching assistants and other classroom helpers are deployed well to support the learning of pupils with additional learning needs. As a result, these pupils make at least good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It places a good emphasis on developing literacy and numeracy skills and developing links with other areas of the curriculum. Examples of this include the use of information and communications technology and instructional writing in Year 4, for example, in relation to tasting bread from around the world. Similarly in Year 2, pupils used their developing literacy and geographic skills to compare and contrast seaside towns with Crewe.

The curriculum contributes very well to the personal development of pupils. Science and physical education promote health education well. This is further enhanced by the large take-up of extra-curricular sport on offer. Other opportunities for out-of-school learning are residential visits, golden time and sports competitions. A particular strength of the curriculum is the way in which staff adapt it to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or those who speak English as an additional language.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and support provided by the school are good.

Appropriate safeguarding procedures are in place. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those who speak English as an additional language make at least good progress

because of the skilled support from a team of high quality staff, including the special educational needs coordinator and learning mentors. Learning mentors have also made good progress with pupils whose attendance is poor. The great majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire were appreciative of the care provided. Parents of pupils new to the school speak highly of its inclusive policy.

Academic guidance is satisfactory. A new system for tracking pupils' progress was introduced in September 2007. As a result, class teachers are beginning to set more focused targets for individual children. Currently, however, most pupils are uncertain about their targets in literacy and numeracy and what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher is successfully developing a new leadership team, providing it with good opportunities to observe teaching, scrutinise lesson plans and check pupils' work in books. New and improved systems for tracking pupils' progress have also been introduced this academic year. As a result, strengths and areas for improvement are being identified increasingly well. However, the intended impact of good progress for all pupils in their learning is not yet evident. Plans are in place to secure improvement but the school is aware its success criteria do not always make clear the intended outcomes for pupils.

The school uses its resources well, for example in developing the Family Learning Centre and enhancing staffing ratios to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of pupils who speak English as an additional language. Staff and governors are committed to improving the outcomes for all pupils in terms of the standards they attain and the progress they make in their learning and personal development. Given the measures introduced, and their impact on specific groups of pupils within the school, their capacity to do so is good.

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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	2

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	3
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	3

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?	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?	3
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	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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**

On behalf of Mrs Farnworth and Mrs Ferrie I am writing to you to thank you for all the help you gave to us during your recent school inspection and to let you know our findings.

St Mary's provides you with a satisfactory education. It enables you to make the progress expected of you in your learning. We know Mrs Walters, the staff and the governors want this to be at least good progress, as it is for those of you who sometimes find learning difficult or who speak English as an additional language. We have therefore asked Mrs Walters and the governors to: make sure you all understand your targets and know what to do to achieve them; ensure when teachers mark your work they make clear to you what you need to do to improve from lesson to lesson; and make sure you are always involved in your learning and are given appropriate challenge in lessons.

We found several good features in your school, including you! You are polite, well mannered and behaved. We were impressed by the way you get on with each other and adults. We were also impressed by your contribution to school and community life. We know you have brought about important improvements in the school, the adventure trail for example. Well done to the school council and eco warriors in particular! Also good is the curriculum and the way the school cares for you and supports you.

We know you enjoy school because you told us so. We also know you will want to help Mrs Walters make St Mary's an even better place. We believe the school can do this well. Keep working hard and attend regularly and we are sure, by acting together, this should happen.