

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Buckfast

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113460
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	311277
Inspection date	3 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Colin Lee

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	78
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Yeo
Headteacher	Paul Brown
Date of previous school inspection	6 November 2002
School address	Buckfast Road Buckfast Buckfastleigh TQ11 0EA
Telephone number	01364 642389
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This small primary school draws its pupils from a wide catchment area. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage, with a very small number from minority ethnic groups. All pupils speak English fluently. Children's attainment on entry is below national expectations. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average and the proportion with a statement of special educational need is well above average. There has been almost a complete change in teaching staff, including the headteacher, in the last two years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory standard of education with some good and improving features. Pupils' achievement is improving and standards are rising. The past uneven progress of many pupils and their failure to attain the standards expected nationally are being addressed successfully. Standards are satisfactory because a high proportion of pupils throughout the school now reach the standards expected for their age in writing and mathematics. Reading and science remain below the national averages but standards are starting to rise as a result of initiatives recently introduced. Pupils' progress is more consistent which means that their achievement in all subjects is satisfactory.

Improvement is as a result of more effective teaching, the impact of subject leadership and the establishment of a well-planned programme of change that is driven by the new headteacher. Leadership and management as a whole are satisfactory because many initiatives introduced by senior management are too new for their impact to be judged. However, teachers and teaching assistants have not received sufficient training in the new teaching methods and curriculum areas recently introduced. The headteacher's drive and clarity of vision help all members of the school community to work together to improve the school. Weaknesses found at the last inspection, together with areas of the school's work that have become less effective since then, are addressed satisfactorily. This shows that the school has a satisfactory capacity for improvement in the future. The school has a generally accurate awareness of its own strengths and areas for development owing to effective self-evaluation by the headteacher and the leadership team. The strong sense of teamwork that exists between staff and the governing body extends to the partnership between home and school. Parents and carers are very appreciative of the school's efforts to involve them fully in their children's education.

Pupils' satisfactory achievement and consistent rates of progress are as a result of the consistency of teaching. This is satisfactory at present but there are good features in the Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2. The quality of pupils' learning is satisfactory but they are not provided with sufficient information about why they are doing activities and the skills and knowledge that the activities are intended to develop.

Pupils' personal development is good as a result of well-planned provision for their personal, social, health and citizenship education. This has a positive impact from the moment children start in the Foundation Stage. Pupils' special qualities are their good behaviour and relationships with one another. At work and play, they are co-operative and enthusiastic, willing to take on responsibility and contribute to the smooth running of the school. The curriculum is satisfactory but different subjects are not used sufficiently for developing pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills. Pastoral care reflects the Christian ethos that permeates all aspects of the school's work.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The school recognises that, although many children have a low starting point, too few in the past have made sufficient progress to enable them to start Year 1 at the levels expected nationally. Recent improvements in provision, with a stable staff team who are teaching well, are improving achievement. This is now consistent in all areas of learning and is satisfactory overall. The 2006/7 group varied in the standards they had reached by the end of the year. These standards matched national expectations in all areas except writing and aspects of social

and mathematical development, where they were below expected levels. There was also a difference between girls and boys. Several of the boys had learning difficulties and/or disabilities that slowed their progress. Their needs are being addressed successfully and the fact that the Foundation Stage children are in the same class as pupils in Years 1 and 2 is helpful. Teachers ensure that pupils move between different groups to do activities that meet their needs, resulting in groups of mixed ages but similar ability. The curriculum is planned well and the classroom is well resourced but provision is hampered by the lack of a suitable outdoor area. This limits the range and balance of indoor and outdoor activities that can be provided.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and improve achievement in reading and science across the school.
- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring pupils understand what knowledge and skills their learning activities are intended to develop.
- Plan opportunities for literacy and numeracy skills to be developed in other subjects.
- Senior management should ensure that teaching staff have appropriate professional development opportunities to help them implement changes to the curriculum and strategies for making teaching more effective.

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

Results in national assessments and tests at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 have fluctuated from year to year. Similarly, pupils have varied significantly in the amount of progress made each year and too many have underachieved in the past. Improved checking of progress and prompt action to help pupils to catch up is proving successful. This has brought the majority of pupils up to levels expected for their age in writing and mathematics. Reading and science have been the weakest subjects for some time. The recent introduction of daily group reading sessions is having immediate impact and standards are rising. It is too soon to see any impact of the measures being taken to improve achievement in science, where many pupils do not have sufficient understanding of how to carry out investigations.

The school has raised its expectations of the progress that pupils must make, resulting in challenging targets for each year group. The effect has been to improve achievement by pupils of all abilities. It is particularly evident in the significant improvement seen in the 2007 assessments of Year 2 pupils' writing compared with the previous year. It is also seen in the general improvement in achievement by the current pupils in Year 6. When the targets for the 2008 national tests were set for this group, they represented considerable challenge in view of their erratic progress in the past. Pupils make more consistent progress and they are on track to achieve the targets in both English and mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' positive attitudes are reflected in their enjoyment of learning in lessons and in their enthusiasm for other aspects of school life. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

is consistently good and the school has done well to extend pupils' knowledge of a diversity of cultures.

Attendance is satisfactory and improving. The school works constructively with the families of the few pupils with particularly poor attendance records. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay healthy and talk knowledgeably about the importance of regular exercise and healthy eating. They have a well-developed awareness of safe practices in and out of school. The school council is newly elected each year. The present group's enthusiasm reflects their confidence that, like their predecessors, they will be listened to and will have the opportunity to improve the school. All pupils appreciate how their views are sought regularly; they clearly feel valued. Pupils' good social skills and their improving basic literacy and numeracy skills mean they are prepared satisfactorily for future education and eventual economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers plan learning activities for groups of pupils so that they match the ability levels of the pupils in each group. Before this group work is introduced, lessons in literacy and numeracy tend to start with introductions to the whole class and tend to be geared to the younger pupils. This means that older or more able pupils are sometimes covering ground they already know when they could be starting on written tasks sooner. Whole-class introductions are often too long, leaving insufficient time for pupils to complete written or practical work.

Pupils are set suitable targets for their learning in units of work in literacy and numeracy. They are not informed clearly enough about the specific learning that tasks in lessons are designed to achieve. Teachers make constructive use of their assessments of pupils' learning. They identify any individuals not making expected progress and pay particular attention to improving those pupils' achievement. The regular group work in reading that has been introduced is having an immediate effect on raising standards. The school's knowledgeable teaching assistants work closely with teachers and have good impact on pupils' learning. The guidance and support they give to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are significant factors in helping these pupils to make as much progress as their peers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Children in the Foundation Stage experience a range of stimulating learning opportunities, albeit with some restrictions to outdoor learning activities, and this fosters a love of coming to school. Good attention is paid to developing children's spoken language in all their activities. In Years 1 and 2, pupils' learning is aided by subjects being linked, creating a topic approach that pupils find interesting. The curriculum for pupils in Years 3 to 6 is based on lessons in single subjects. Last year, attention focussed on developing the literacy curriculum to improve opportunities for writing. This has improved achievement and standards. The science curriculum is this year's priority because it has previously included too few opportunities for practical investigation and pupils' achievement has been unsatisfactory. The school recognises that there is insufficient planning of ways in which literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills can be developed in other subjects. The curriculum is enriched by regular educational visits and there is a satisfactory range of clubs providing learning opportunities outside the school day. These activities are well attended.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

There are sound systems to ensure that pastoral care is effective and all adults in the school know the pupils and their needs well. The school works hard at maintaining a collaborative school/home partnership. Pupils feel safe and know that they can talk to staff if they have any worries. Child protection procedures are in place and health and safety checks are very thorough. The school works well with external agencies to provide support for pupils. This liaison is crucial because there is a diverse range of needs in a high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Effective transition arrangements help children to settle into the Foundation Stage and prepare Year 6 pupils for their next stage of education. Pupils generally receive satisfactory support and guidance for their academic development. Although marking helps pupils to know how to improve their work, teaching does not always ensure that pupils understand what they are expected to learn during lessons.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school has emerged successfully from an unsettled period of staff change, short-term leadership, and limited governance owing to governors moving away. The headteacher has quickly gained a clear vision of where and how the school can improve. The recently created senior leadership team has a good breadth of expertise and is already having a positive impact on school effectiveness. This is chiefly through the systems introduced for monitoring and evaluating pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching, both of which are improving. Working closely with the local authority, senior staff and governors are now making steady progress in implementing a wide range of changes. In order to accelerate progress, senior managers have yet to ensure that teaching staff have appropriate professional development to enable them to be confident with changes to the curriculum or ways of making teaching and learning more effective. This will help them to fill gaps in their present knowledge, such as the teaching of science to mixed age classes and the teaching of the skills of reading.

Senior staff have responsibility for leading several subject areas. They are doing this satisfactorily and are helping to improve the effectiveness of the school's leadership. Senior staff have adequate knowledge of standards across the school and they analyse strengths and weaknesses in order to plan action for subject development each year. The quality of governance is satisfactory. Under the astute leadership of a new chairperson, the governing body supports the school conscientiously. The nomination of individual governors to monitor progress in each of the priorities in the school development plan is mutually beneficial for staff and governors.

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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?	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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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	3

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?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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	3
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	3
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

4 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Buckfast, Devon, TQ11 0EA

Thank you for making us welcome in your school and for talking with us so willingly. We thoroughly enjoyed joining you in lessons and seeing you at work. We think your school gives you a satisfactory education overall and does some things well. This is what we particularly appreciated:

- You are making steady progress in your work each year.
- By the time you reach Year 6, many of you reach the standards found in most schools in the country, especially in writing and mathematics but not in reading or science.
- You behave well and this makes your school a friendly, pleasant place where everyone helps one another.
- You understand well about healthy eating, the importance of exercise and about what are safe things to do at school and home.
- All the adults look after you and make sure that you are safe and get help whenever you need it.
- The school has many new staff and governors. They are helped by the headteacher to work well together to improve your education.
- We think your school could get even better if:
 - you work hard to improve your reading and your knowledge of how to carry out investigations in science
 - you think about what you are trying to improve when you do activities in lessons
 - you have opportunities to practise literacy and numeracy skills in different subjects
 - teachers find out more about new things before they are introduced in your school.

We hope you will carry on enjoying learning and helping your teachers to make St Mary's Catholic Primary School an even better school.

Yours faithfully Colin Lee Lead inspector

4 October 2007

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OEA**

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