

St Mary's Catholic Combined School, Poole

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113832
Local Authority	Poole
Inspection number	311392
Inspection date	9 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Judith Rundle HMI

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	Middle deemed primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	5–12
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	491
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Morris
Headteacher	Maurice O'Brien
Date of previous school inspection	6 June 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Devon Road Poole BH15 3QQ
Telephone number	01202 676207
Fax number	01202 667505

Age group	5–12
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the current standards of pupils, especially boys in Key Stage 1 and the more able mathematicians in Key Stage 2
- the extent to which the curriculum meets the needs and interests of all pupils.

Evidence was gathered from national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, curriculum and planning documents, observation of the school at work, interviews with staff and pupils, and the parents' questionnaires.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

St Mary's is very large for a primary school, and is oversubscribed. It has Early Years Foundation Stage provision in the Reception class. The school has a below average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils from a minority ethnic background is low. The numbers of pupils eligible for a free school meal or who speak English as an additional language are well below average. The school has gained numerous awards including Basic Skills, Unicef's Rights Respecting, Healthy Schools, Activemark Gold, Artsmark Silver and a school achievement award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Mary's is an outstanding school where pupils attain significant academic success because of high quality teaching combined with a rich and varied curriculum. Pupils' personal development is exceptional during their time at the school. They have wide-ranging opportunities to take responsibilities for themselves and their peers and rise to this challenge admirably. The vast majority of parents are overwhelming in their support of the school. One parent said, 'St Mary's is a happy school where my very different children learn in a harmonious atmosphere.'

Pupils enter the school with knowledge and skills that are slightly below the levels typically found for their age, particularly in their understanding of mathematical calculation. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language, make outstanding progress, and standards are very high by the end of Year 7. Progress tends to be most rapid in the Early Years Foundation Stage and between Years 4 and 6, particularly for boys. Significantly more pupils than average attain the higher Level 3 and Level 5 by the end of each key stage. Although standards are well above average for both girls and boys in Key Stage 1, girls have tended to reach slightly higher standards than boys. The school is well aware of this, and has put in place effective strategies that are already narrowing the gap. These include adjusting the curriculum so that it appeals more to boys. Progress in mathematics is outstanding and standards are significantly above average, although not as high as in English and science. The school has good plans in place to raise them further, including professional development for staff and the wider use of problem-solving activities, but these have not yet been fully implemented.

Pupils make this rate of progress because of the quality of teaching, which is never less than good. A high proportion of teaching is consistently outstanding. Staff use a wide variety of teaching methods and activities to engage and excite pupils in their learning. Activities and the range of tasks planned meet the needs of all pupils exceptionally well. One Year 4 pupil said that 'lessons are always fun and interesting'. Lessons include excellent use of 'talking partners' so that pupils have time to reflect and evaluate their own and others' work and understand how it can be improved, and this is leading to high levels of independence for pupils of all ages. Teachers and support staff are skilled at using questions and intervening at the right time to develop pupils' thinking skills.

The curriculum exploits fully opportunities for both discrete subject teaching and projects that combine a number of subjects to help pupils make links between different aspects of their learning. Learning is brought to life through events, visits and visitors. Year 1 pupils were excited when explaining how they lived as Victorians for the day and Year 2 pupils loved giving orders to the 'king' on how to rebuild London after the great fire of London. The innovative whole-school theme on money ensures that Year 7 pupils are prepared very well for their future economic well-being and are developing a good understanding of financial capabilities. The extra-curricular programme is extensive with very good take-up, particularly in sport and music. Music across the school is of a very high standard, particularly the gospel and boys' choirs.

Pupils at St Mary's benefit from a powerful ethos of care and inclusion. They receive outstanding pastoral and academic care, guidance and support. The support for pupils with specific learning needs and/or disabilities is excellent, especially from teaching assistants. Pupils are polite, articulate and show great kindness to each other. On the very rare occasions where this does not occur the school has secure procedures to tackle it to help bring about positive changes.

Staff know pupils and their individual needs very well; pupils say they feel safe in school and are confident to talk to an adult if they have any concerns. Pupils have a highly developed understanding of rights and respect because of the emphasis placed on this during innovative classroom and enrichment projects. For example, Year 7 pupils are leading a 'just community' project, the 'Oi' group write to and receive responses from government officials on topical issues, and the Suffragette House is exploring even more ways for pupils to have their say in the school. Pupils' understanding of other people's faiths and cultures is remarkable; they even explore their impact on finances during the themed money week. The school's international work in Kenya, India and East Europe all helps to reinforce the strong sense of community that is evident everywhere around the school.

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors know the school's strengths and priorities for development very well because of the rigour of their monitoring programmes. The school's procedures to assess, track progress over time and use the information to plan subsequent lessons are highly developed. The headteacher has very effectively developed strong leadership at all levels that has led to a cohesive and determined approach for continuous improvement. All issues from the previous inspection have been addressed; library provision has been expanded with one-to-one laptops for pupils in Years 6 and 7. This outstanding school is always looking for the next challenge for staff and pupils, and this is evident in the introduction of innovative practices in the curriculum, teaching strategies and personal development activities. This demonstrates outstanding capacity to bring about even further improvements. Senior leaders set and achieve ambitious targets, not just academically but to ensure pupils, and staff, achieve their very best.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children have an outstanding start to their education in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Programmes include an exciting mix of indoor and outdoor activities, teacher-led and child-initiated tasks. The learning environment is bright and stimulating. Staff are skilled at identifying and addressing individual and group needs. For example, in a lesson seen during the inspection they introduced a wide variety of resources to stimulate discussion and learning on shapes and patterns. Role-play areas include a broad range of activities to engage boys in learning, such as working in the garage, and encourage writing skills from an early stage. Children have a wealth of opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills, including through singing. Parents are involved through activities such as the phonic workshop and ideas on role modelling, such as dads reading or writing shopping lists. As a result of all these excellent features, children make outstanding progress across all the areas of learning. Leadership and management are also outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement and embed the planned arrangements to increase problem-solving activities, in order to further raise standards in mathematics.

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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?	1
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

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	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 learners' needs?	1
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?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
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	1
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**

10 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Combined School, Poole, BH15 3QQ

I am writing to say thank you for making us feel so welcome and for talking to us when we came to visit your school recently. I also want to tell you what we found out about your school.

You are very lucky to go to such an outstanding school, where you achieve your best, both academically and in your personal development. We were fascinated to hear of your innovative work with the 'just community' and the Suffragette House projects. You show great care of others in both your own school and in other countries through your Kenyan, Indian and East European links. You were very enthusiastic about learning from your visits, visitors and themed weeks, such as living as Victorians or learning about finances during money week. You have many opportunities for extra-curricular activities and we think music is a real strength of the school especially the gospel and boys' choirs.

Teaching at your school is outstanding; you work hard in lessons and we especially liked the way you work with your 'talking partner' to help understand and improve your work. You make outstanding progress in your learning and reach exceptionally high standards that are significantly higher than others attain in England, especially when you get a Level 3 or Level 5. You work well both independently and in groups and the school's leaders have already identified that they want you to use more problem-solving activities to raise standards in mathematics even further.

Your headteacher, senior leaders and staff are continuously looking to make your outstanding school even better. Your ideas and contributions also help with this.

We hope that you continue to work hard, keep enjoying school and keep making your positive contributions.

Thank you once again for telling us so much about your school.

Yours faithfully

Judith Rundle

Her Majesty's Inspector