

St Mary Magdalen's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Seaham

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114236
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	311524
Inspection dates	29–30 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Gordon Potter

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	202
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father T Burke
Headteacher	Mrs Ann Gibb
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2004
School address	Dene House Road Seaham County Durham SR7 7BJ
Telephone number	0191 5813055
Fax number	0191 5813165

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is of average size for its type. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is well above the national average. Most pupils are of White British background.

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 Magdalen's Roman Catholic (VA) Primary School offers a satisfactory level of education to its pupils, but it has a number of good features and has implemented changes which will help it to improve. Pupils are well cared for and make satisfactory progress because of satisfactory teaching. It is a school at the heart of the community that cares deeply for its pupils and gives them good care and support. The school is highly regarded and parents appreciate the way their children are helped to feel safe and secure.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. From starting points broadly typical for their age, children make good progress in Reception. Overall standards in school have been average since 2004. The school's results in the 2007 national assessments for Year 2 pupils were above average in mathematics. Standards in reading and writing were average. The school's results in the 2007 national assessments for Year 6 pupils show that pupils' attainment is broadly average for pupils of their age. Well focused support enables pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to achieve well.

Very good relationships and sensitive support from a caring staff strongly promote pupils' good personal development. Pupils know that there is always someone to turn to if they need help. Attendance is average and reflects pupils' enjoyment of school. The large majority of pupils are well behaved and are polite and courteous. All pupils are keen to participate in the after school clubs and activities provided. They readily take on responsibilities, such as participating in the school council. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and stay fit, as the school puts good emphasis on these qualities. The school's focus on developing the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, along with the pupil's confidence in working with others, gives pupils a good preparation for their future lives and education.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. There is some good teaching but it is not consistent enough across school. Teachers set targets for pupils to improve but do not yet use this information to tailor their lessons to the pupils' individual needs. In addition, pupils are not sufficiently made aware of what they can do to improve their work. The curriculum meets requirements and is enhanced by a good range of well planned and stimulating activities. The school is developing the range of opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills in other subjects.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has introduced a model of shared leadership and encourages others to develop their leadership roles. There is a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses but not enough is done to ensure that initiatives are effectively monitored by leaders at all levels, including governors. The school has brought about satisfactory improvement since the last inspection, especially in development of the curriculum, but resources for information and communication technology (ICT) remain to be developed further. It knows that a key factor in raising standards further is to improve pupils' writing. The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further and provides satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children's attainment on entry to the Reception class is broadly typical for their age, although it is variable, with the highest attainment being in mathematical skills, and the lowest in

communication, language and literacy skills. As a result of carefully planned induction procedures, children settle in quickly and make good progress in their learning. By the time children enter Year 1, the majority have reached the levels expected for their age, with some achieving well beyond that.

Activities are planned to encourage children's independence, and they obviously enjoy the high quality resources and accommodation available to them. There are few opportunities, however, for the children to write in a variety of areas, although the mark-making table provides some useful chances for the children to begin to write independently. The outdoor area offers the children a variety of opportunities to learn through play, and usefully complements provision within the classroom. It is an area, however, which is still developing and planned activities do not always have a clear focus on learning.

The school is currently trialling a new system for assessing children on entry to the Reception class, and is using the information from this to ensure that activities are closely matched to children's individual abilities. Children who have special needs are very well supported by the teaching assistant who works in the class for part of the time. Children's attainment is regularly checked to ensure that they are making enough progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further develop the roles of all leaders, including the governing body, especially in monitoring and evaluating the school's progress.
- Improve the consistency and quality of teaching so that all pupils are appropriately challenged.
- Ensure that the information on pupils' progress is used effectively to inform teachers' planning.
- Use tracking systems and marking to ensure pupils clearly understand what they need to do to improve their work.

A small proportion of 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

Achievement is satisfactory. Standards are broadly average. At the end of the Foundation Stage, children reach the levels of development expected for their ages, with some well above expectations; this represents good progress. Since 2004, standards have fluctuated at the end of Key Stage 1, but reflect the satisfactory progress that the pupils make in Years 1 and 2. The school's results in the 2007 national assessments for seven year olds were average overall, although in mathematics they were above average. Pupils continue to make satisfactory progress in Years 3 to 6, not better because teaching lacks sufficient challenge. Results in the national tests at Year 6 show that standards are usually average, as they were in 2007. At the higher level (Level 5), performance was below the national average, significantly so in English. Progress in writing is a weaker aspect of the pupils' performance. Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the good support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being, including spiritual, moral, and social development, are good. Pupils have a good understanding of the cultural diversity within Britain today and of their local heritage. They enjoy coming to school, work hard and are friendly and polite. They say that they feel safe and secure, and that bullying is rare; this was confirmed by inspection findings. Behaviour is good overall except where teaching is not clearly matched to children's abilities, and they become restless and fidgety. Pupils know how to stay healthy; they eat healthy lunches and appreciate the opportunities to take exercise. Attendance is satisfactory.

There are good opportunities to contribute to the school family and beyond. Pupils have a good awareness of the local community and the needs of others. They show this care by regularly raising funds to help others. Older pupils look after younger ones, and are keen to take on responsibilities. The school council gives pupils a voice, although they say they would like it to meet more regularly. Enterprise activities and the development of group work skills that help prepare pupils for the world of work are good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory but improving; many good lessons were seen during the inspection. The improvement has not yet had the necessary impact on pupils' progress and achievement. Teachers prepare lessons to ensure that there is a range of interesting activities for pupils. However, they do not make the best use of assessment information to plan lessons that meet the needs of all pupils, especially the more able pupils. Marking shows pupils what they have achieved; it does not always tell pupils what they need to do to improve and it is inconsistent across school. Whiteboard technology is well used to enhance teaching and learning. Until recently, pupils had too few opportunities to develop their writing; the school is addressing this by offering more time for pupils to write at length in a range of subjects and this is beginning to have an impact on standards in writing.

In good lessons, there is a lively pace and a range of activities. Pupils work well independently and together to discuss the work they are doing and plan together. Teachers use skilful questioning to encourage pupils to think more deeply. Relationships and behaviour in classrooms are good. Teaching assistants are very skilled at supporting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It meets statutory requirements and takes account of national initiatives and guidance. The school's focus on basic skills is strong although information and communication technology (ICT) is not yet firmly enough embedded across the school. The curriculum does not always offer sufficient support for the highest ability pupils through specific activities that will stretch them. The curriculum, including extra-curricular activities, offers pupils ample opportunities for exercise. Personal development is well supported and developed by the personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) and the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) curriculum.

Teachers help pupils to see the links between subjects and are beginning to use all curriculum areas to provide opportunities to develop pupils' writing skills. There is a strong emphasis on creative subjects in the school, especially art and developments in drama. French is taught to all pupils in school. Pupils' personal and academic development is well supported by good enrichment activities which have added enjoyment to pupils' learning and helped them to extend their knowledge of the local community and the wider world. Pupils appreciate and take advantage of the extra-curricular opportunities offered by the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall. The care and support pupils receive is good, reflecting the Catholic ethos of the school. All members of staff know the pupils well and are aware of their needs and how to meet them. Support for vulnerable pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is both sensitive and effective. There are effective relationships with the many outside agencies who work with the school. The health and safety of all pupils are paramount and all necessary child protection and safeguarding requirements are in place. The school supports pupils well when they move into school, between phases of education and for their future education. Close social and academic links with the local nurseries and secondary schools ensure pupils are ready for their new school. Reports for parents about pupils' progress are clear and informative.

Academic support is satisfactory. Individual targets for pupils are beginning to be identified, but these are still in the early stages, and have not yet had time to make a significant impact on pupils' progress, especially in literacy.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher offers clear strategic vision for the school and has developed a process of shared and devolved leadership. She has identified appropriate areas for improvement for the school. Senior leaders have helped to implement changes which have broadened the curriculum and which are beginning to raise standards in writing. However, senior staff, including the assessment coordinator and subject leaders, have not yet developed their roles in the systematic evaluation of the work of the school. The school has developed systems to identify whole school and class targets for improvement but these targets are not yet challenging enough to raise standards. The governing body is developing its role as a critical friend but it is not yet rigorously monitoring the work of the school to ensure that all leaders are accountable and that standards are high enough.

Parents overwhelmingly support the work of the school. Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection, especially in the development of the curriculum. The school offers satisfactory value for money and has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

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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	2
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	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	2

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?	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

31 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary Magdalen's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Seaham,
Durham, SR7 7BJ

Thank you so much for making us welcome when Mrs Snee and I visited your school. St Mary Magdalen's Roman Catholic Primary School is a satisfactory school. The staff care for you very well and help you to learn.

We were pleased to see that you work hard and do your best. You come to school regularly and on time, and most of you behave well in lessons and in the playground. We found that you are very polite and helpful, and we enjoyed talking to you about your school. You told us that you enjoyed coming to school and that you liked your teachers. You said you appreciated the activities the school provides for you like the visits to castles and museums. Your parents and carers like the school very much, especially the way you are cared for.

The school is going to help you to improve your work by making it even more interesting and challenging, and by telling you clearly what you need to do to make it better. The school will also spend more time double-checking the school's progress to make sure it is doing the best for you.

You can help by continuing to work hard in lessons especially when you do your writing and by concentrating on all your work.

Thank you for all your help and I wish you every success in all you do in the future.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Potter

Lead inspector