

St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Barnard Castle

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114261
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	311534
Inspection dates	8–9 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Joan Elton

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	76
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Kim Gilbert
Headteacher	Miss Liz Heffernan
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2003
School address	Birch Road Barnard Castle County Durham DL12 8JR
Telephone number	01833 637029
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School is a small school. It serves a predominantly White British population from a wide geographical area. All pupils have English as a first language and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. A below-average percentage of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Although the school is Roman Catholic in denomination, it has many pupils from other beliefs whose parents wish them to benefit from the school's Catholic ethos.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. It has a number of outstanding features, which include: pupils' personal development; the care, guidance and support given to pupils; and the quality of provision in the Foundation Stage. The school's self-evaluation is accurate, although it is modest in some of the judgements it makes about the quality of its work. It has addressed effectively all issues identified at the time of the last inspection.

The school is much loved by pupils and parents. Its warm, caring environment, its continuous commitment to self-improvement and its vision for whole-child development have ensured that its pupils are courteous, highly motivated and very well prepared for the future. Pupils understand the need for healthy lifestyles as well as the need to care for others and take responsibility. They are happy in school and say they feel safe and secure there.

Achievement is good. Standards are above average at the end of Year 2. By the time they leave the school, Year 6 pupils are performing above expected levels in reading, writing and science. Standards in mathematics are broadly average because only a small proportion of pupils exceed the level expected for their age. Overall progress is good because of effective teaching and a good curriculum. Excellent work in partnership with the church, other schools, the local authority and outside agencies greatly enhances provision.

The school has a clear and well-founded vision for improvement because it rigorously monitors its performance, widely consults and successfully targets areas for development. It has correctly identified mathematics for further development and has already begun to implement change. Leadership and management are good. The leadership team of staff and governors has managed resources very efficiently to provide very good pupil-teacher ratios. Overall, the school has a good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Outstanding Foundation Stage provision ensures that children achieve extremely well. They start school with a range of skills which are broadly typical of this age group but are lower in knowledge of numbers and literacy skills. By the end of Reception they reach the level expected of them in all areas of learning and many children exceed these levels. They make exceptionally good progress in their knowledge of letters and use of numbers. Children join Reception from several nurseries but quickly settle because of effective induction procedures. They make new friends and grow in confidence because of well-established routines, excellent relationships and the vibrant curriculum. They thrive because teaching and learning are outstanding. Highly skilled and enthusiastic staff work well together, creating a stimulating and caring environment both inside and outside the classroom. Effective assessment means their needs are quickly identified and appropriate strategies put in place. Basic skills and good manners are very well taught and personal and social skills are given a high priority. Very good links with parents help them support their children's learning at home and keep them well informed about their children's progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics across the school, especially for the higher attaining pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1 from their strong base at the end of Reception. By the end of Year 2 standards are above average in reading and writing, and average in mathematics. Teachers' assessments for this age group have been above average in 2006 and 2007 because of improvements to reading and writing. Standards in mathematics are broadly average.

In Key Stage 2, achievement continues to be good and many pupils in Year 6 are already working beyond expected levels. The school is on course to meet challenging targets in national tests at the end of the year. In 2007, Key Stage 2 national test results showed the school exceeded its targets, to reach above average standards in English, mathematics and science. Standards in mathematics throughout the school are not as high as in other subjects because higher attaining pupils are not always making enough progress. Fluctuations in the school's standards are usually the result of small year groups, where the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities can have a significant impact on overall performance. Nevertheless, these pupils achieve as well as their peers because of the school's outstanding inclusion policies.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Their behaviour is excellent and pupils have very positive attitudes to school, as their above-average attendance demonstrates. Pupils are highly enthusiastic in lessons and confidently express their views. They believe they must always consider others and be kind to them. Pupils say they are listened to and fully involved in school decisions. They are most enthusiastic about community and charity activities, especially their sponsorship of an African boy's education.

Pupils appreciate their teachers helping them to make friends. They also realise that the skills they are taught will help them become safe, healthy and happy adults. They say there is little or no bullying in school and that buddies and staff resolve all potential trouble. Pupils help to maintain safe practices, ensuring doors are locked and equipment is stored tidily. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school's Christian values, nurtured through links with the local church, are a significant source of the pupils' excellent spiritual awareness. Exemplary personal qualities and good basic skills ensure pupils are very well prepared for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good, and some outstanding teaching was seen. Staff work well as a team, monitoring each other's work and sharing ideas. Lesson planning is thorough. Staff have good subject knowledge and give clear explanations. Teachers have high expectations of presentation and this leads to pupils checking their work and presenting it neatly; they use the correct terminology according to the subject. Most lessons are challenging, although in mathematics the higher attaining pupils have not always had their learning fully extended. In all classrooms, relationships between pupils and adults are very good and staff are particularly sensitive to pupils' feelings. All staff strive to provide interesting and imaginative

activities with unusual resources. For example, in a Year 1/2 class, pupils estimated and measured pirate swords and chains, and trees from treasure islands! When teaching is outstanding, lessons have a brisk pace and keep pupils fully engaged. Occasionally, too much time is spent listening to the teacher and pupils start to lose interest. Teachers support their pupils very well through high quality marking and give individual pupils the opportunity to revise their work in response to written comments. This focuses the learning well and is much appreciated by pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It is well matched to pupils' needs, and additional support is targeted correctly to help if pupils are seen to need extra help. Interesting topics are planned which focus on investigation and enable pupils to discover for themselves. Staff have started to link subjects so that pupils' experiences are richer and more meaningful. This has led to better use of time. However, pupils are not fully accessing all opportunities for writing across the curriculum to enhance their skills. A wide range of activities, including fundraising and visits, enhance provision. Good use is made of visitors, and pupils enjoy a wide range of clubs as well as a residential week with a partner school. Physical education is a strong feature; pupils make weekly visits to the local sports centre. French is taught to all junior pupils and the school makes this more relevant with their links with a French school. Pupils have been involved in literary and healthy living projects. They are highly confident giving information and communication technology or role-play presentations to communicate their learning to others.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The school has very thorough procedures to ensure pupils' protection and safety. Staff are well qualified and training is regularly reviewed. They know their pupils and parents very well and support them in any way they can. Parents appreciate this and the following is a typical response in the parental questionnaires, 'St Mary's is a very friendly school with a caring atmosphere and a sense of belonging. It has helped my children thrive in all subjects.' Excellent links with external agencies support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make the same good progress as their peers. The school goes to great lengths to ensure that all pupils have the same good opportunities for learning.

Pupils' progress is monitored very well. Assessment information is analysed thoroughly and used to adjust teaching and resources to meet pupils' changing needs. The headteacher has an excellent overview of progress and is in regular discussion with class teachers if pupils do not meet expectations. Pupils' knowledge of their own performance is very good. The older pupils understand what is expected of them and most pupils know how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher believes in the development of the whole child and puts this belief into action by providing many opportunities for life-long learning. This is clear in the school's determination to ensure all have equal access to all the school has to offer. This vision is shared with staff and governors, who work hard to support these goals. The headteacher is well supported by two assistant headteachers, who have clearly

defined roles and responsibilities. Self-evaluation is accurate because contributions by staff are based on careful monitoring of what is happening in lessons and in the subjects they lead. Consequently, the school is aware of the need to raise standards in mathematics. As a result of this collaborative management style, relationships and trust are excellent. All staff feel valued and have opportunities for professional development and to lead initiatives. Governance is good. Governors work as a committed team with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. They are well informed and analyse all available information before making decisions.

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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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	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 disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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 the learners' needs?	2
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?	1

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?	2
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
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	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

Age group

4–11

Inspection date(s)

8–9 November 2007

Inspection number

311534

12 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Barnard Castle, Durham,
DL12 8JR

Thank you for the welcome you gave me when I inspected your school recently. I enjoyed meeting you and was most impressed with your excellent behaviour and your enthusiasm during lessons. I appreciated the help you gave me and was very interested in your anecdotes and opinions.

I think your school is a good one and you have lots of opportunities there. Your teachers and other staff take excellent care of you and their teaching is good. You learn a lot of interesting things, including how to be healthy, safe and happy. You show consideration for others and are tolerant of different viewpoints. Your teachers prepare some imaginative activities for you. No wonder you find your lessons fun! You all make good progress in your school because you work hard and your teachers are good at helping you.

I have asked your teachers to help you further by improving your mathematics so that when you go to the secondary school you are equally confident in English, mathematics and science. As you know, these subjects are very important to your future. In your lessons, I saw that you were already beginning to make quicker progress. You can help your teachers by doing your homework and learning your tables.

I hope you continue to love school and to work so well. I know you will be preparing for Christmas in school and church now. Do enjoy the activities. It's a busy time of the year but I know you will help your teachers and have a wonderful time.

I send you all my best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Joan Elton

Additional Inspector