

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115709
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	312040
Inspection dates	20–21 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Mary Harlow 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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	208
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Puddicombe
Headteacher	Liam Jordan
Date of previous school inspection	21 April 2004
School address	Cheltenham Road East Churchdown Gloucester GL3 1HU
Telephone number	01452 714053
Fax number	01452 714207

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector seconded to Her Majesty's Inspectorate.

Description of the school

St Mary's Catholic Primary School is smaller than the average primary school, and is situated in Churchdown on the outskirts of Gloucester. It serves two local parishes and most children are of White British heritage. A small minority are learning English as an additional language. The percentage of children with learning difficulties is below average. Attainment on entry to the Reception Year is broadly typical for this age group.

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 a lovely, thriving community.' 'Pupils are taught in a calm, relaxed atmosphere but well disciplined pleasant environment. We could not hope for better for our children.' 'We feel fortunate that our children are at an excellent school.' I am without doubt a very happy parent!

These are the views of the parents and they are right! St Mary's is indeed an outstanding school, a haven of educational excellence and care where pupils flourish, and a place the adults want to be. Every child and every adult really matters in this harmonious community where nothing but the best will do! All at the school work exceptionally hard to ensure the laudable mission: 'everyone is valued; the pupils are helped to do their best to unlock their individual gifts and to learn to care for others' permeates all aspects of its life; and it does so impressively. As a consequence, pupils' personal development and care are outstanding.

Achievement across the school is also outstanding. The children get off to a flying start in Reception, where all make very good progress due to high quality teaching and care. This excellent progress continues across Key Stages 1 and 2 and as a result, pupils attain well above average standards in all subjects by the time they leave. Pupils with learning difficulties achieve exceptionally well, as several parents aptly commented, because of 'the high level of commitment and understanding' they receive. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are highly developed at every stage because the school provides a wealth of opportunities for them to express their ideas.

'The staff and teaching assistants are first class; their dedication is second to none.' 'They are helping our children grow socially and academically; feedback is regular and informative and they make themselves available for any concern.' These parental comments are also right and fitting tributes to the quality of teaching and learning, which is outstanding. Lessons are lively, stimulating, often very imaginative and always challenging. As a result, the pupils rise to the high aspirations set with great aplomb and work impressively. The school is working hard to involve the pupils in the assessment of their work and make its existing good marking procedures even better.

The curriculum is good with several outstanding aspects. Planning is meticulous and every effort is made to provide the children with practical, stimulating experiences, which whet their appetite for learning. Good links are developing between some subject areas where relevant. Community links, particular with the parishes and the Catholic high school, are strong; the school now needs to reach out a little more to its immediate community. There is an excellent range of visits and clubs on offer which the pupils and their parents appreciate.

'We have nothing but praise for the new headteacher.' 'He is forward thinking and making a difference'. 'We are very impressed!' So many parents expressed similar sentiments; how right they all are. Leadership and management are outstanding at all levels. The school knows itself very well and sets the right targets to make it even better. There is no room for complacency, and improvements, including the issues identified in the last inspection, are tackled diligently and at an impressive pace. No stone is left unturned and difficult decisions are addressed assiduously. The partnerships with parents and governance are outstanding. The school provides excellent value for money and has excellent capacity for continued improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The Foundation Stage is another jewel in St Mary's crown. It is a hive of purposeful learning where the very young children show exceptional levels of enjoyment and concentration. Relationships and care are excellent, resulting in the children demonstrating tremendous levels of confidence as they move around the classroom and the school. Indeed, at such an early stage in the children's lives at school this is a fitting testament to the high quality of provision in the Foundation Stage.

Most children start school with the skills expected for their age; they make very good progress in all aspects of learning because activities capture their imagination and excite them to learn. Lessons are vibrant and full of rich opportunities for the children to explore the world around them, yet at the same time develop the important skills in language, number and personal development. Planning is structured carefully to achieve this and activities in the outside classroom are chosen sensitively to enrich all aspects of their learning.

Leadership and management of the Foundation Stage are outstanding. All the staff keep a very close check on each child's progress and assessment systems are rigorous. The 'My small steps book' is an excellent way to capture the children's achievements and provide their parents and carers with a lovely record of their development over time.

What the school should do to improve further

- Strengthen further its present good marking practices to ensure that all pupils know the next steps in their learning and are more involved in the assessment of their work and that of others.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils make very good progress in the Foundation Stage and most pupils enter Year 1 with above average levels of attainment in all areas of learning. Over the course of Key Stages 1 and 2 this excellent progress continues and by the time they leave, pupils' levels of achievement are significantly above national averages in all subjects. Pupils' attainment at the higher levels in English and mathematics is exceptional. The use of data to check pupils' progress is outstanding. Targets set are aspirational and plans for the pupils' learning are under constant review to ensure that they meet them. Pupils with learning difficulties make excellent progress due to the excellent support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

All flourish in this very special community and by the time they leave, pupils are self-assured young people with high aspirations for the next phase in their education. This is because the school places a great importance on developing their individuality and their sense of self-worth; and it does so superbly! Without exception, pupils enjoy school immensely and talk with glowing pride about why St Mary's is so special. When asked why, their replies oozed spontaneity: 'Lessons are fun, so are assemblies, we love information and communication technology and we make decisions!'

Pupils would now thrive on being given even more responsibility for their learning. All were overwhelmingly positive about the kindness and support they receive from the adults in the school. Attendance is consistently good and punctuality is excellent.

In conversations, pupils from a very young age are confident to express their views, which they do in a refreshing and honest way. Moreover, they are not afraid to offer constructive ideas to make the school even better because they know their voice really matters and their views are taken seriously. Pupils are consulted frequently about aspects of school life that make a difference to their young lives; the way they have been involved in designing the plans for their new outdoor play area is a fitting testament to this. Pupils even nominate adults for awards at the weekly celebration assembly!

Behaviour is exemplary. The pupils move calmly and sensibly in class and cooperate extremely well in paired discussions and group tasks. Around the school, they invariably stand back for visitors, greet them with a friendly smile and say 'hello' or 'good morning' and 'how are you?' in a most charming manner. The respect they show to adults and each other is exceptional. Indeed, it was a delight to see pupils chatting amiably during lunchtime and playing together in a harmonious and sensitive manner. The care shown by the older pupils to the younger ones was a joy to witness. The excellent supervision and interest afforded to them by all the adults contributed significantly to the wonderful ambience of these occasions.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. They benefit from a wealth of opportunities designed to cultivate these aspects, for example the exceptional assembly on 'What is love?' Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of eating a healthy lunch and participating in exercise. They feel very safe in school and know there is a 'buddy' to turn to or an adult if they feel unhappy. Pupils are developing excellent basic skills that prepare them for the next school and later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Planning and preparation are excellent and imaginative teaching is rewarded by high levels of motivation, enthusiasm and hard work. Practical activities give a real and creative meaning to the pupils' work and do much to stimulate their thirst for learning. These are planned thoughtfully to challenge all groups of learners and this ensures all make good and frequently outstanding progress in lessons. Notable examples observed were the exceptional teaching of mathematics, particularly in the higher ability set in Years 5 and 6 where the level of challenge was awesome, the excellent use of information communication technology (ICT) in several lessons and the individual support given to pupils with learning difficulties.

There are constant opportunities for discussion as a whole class or with a 'talking partner'. The exciting buzz that goes around the classes when they chat together to work out challenges or to act out stories was a joy to observe! Most impressively, the staff are not fazed when pupils go off at a tangent in discussion, as they are encouraged to take risks and have the confidence to do so. This is because the adults know the children exceptionally well and are skilled at getting the best out of them. The support staff make an impressive contribution to the children's learning, particularly for those with learning difficulties.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Planning is of a very high quality and informed by rigorous assessment; this ensures excellent progression in learning throughout the school. Meaningful links are developing across some subject areas where relevant, although they have not yet been extended fully to all aspects of the curriculum. The integration of ICT to extend pupils' writing, mathematical and thinking skills is developing extremely well. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about how the recently purchased laptops help them to improve many aspects of their work.

The school has excellent links with the local Catholic high school, which provides specialist teaching in a number of subjects including French. The range of musical and sporting activities on offer is impressive and the school makes very good use of visitors to enrich pupils' learning experiences. For example, pupils responded very positively to speakers from the local heritage centre who gave an interactive and informative assembly about the history of the building they work in. The school's commitment to strengthen further its links with the immediate local community is now appropriate.

Displays throughout the school are of a high quality and do much to celebrate success. The 'working walls' provide an excellent focus for current learning for pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The adults at St Mary's always go the extra mile to ensure their pupils' needs are met and their families kept informed. Relationships are excellent; the school's powerful values pervade all that it does. Partnerships with outside agencies are a real strength and ensure that support is available when needed. Pupils' academic progress is checked rigorously and although marking is diligent, ways to improve are not consistently highlighted and pupils could be more involved. The school is developing good systems for those pupils who are gifted and talented, beyond the excellent challenge they already receive in lessons. Pupils' successes are celebrated and all strive hard to achieve the weekly rewards. Child protection procedures are in place and well established. Risk assessment is robust and every care is taken to ensure the safety of the pupils and staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership shown by the new headteacher is exceptional. He is ably supported by new senior leaders who are dynamic, thoughtful and not complacent. Although it is still early days, all are developing into a remarkable senior team.

Pupils' needs drive decision-making and this is highly consultative. All members of the school community are valued equally and feel they have a voice. As a result, there is an impressive team spirit and an infectious enthusiasm permeating throughout the school. The administration and support staff are outstanding; they too make a significant contribution to the pupils' care and learning needs. Communication with parents is excellent; the school listens to their views and acts upon them.

The school's systems for checking on its improvements are rigorous and leaders at all levels, including governors, are focused relentlessly on raising standards. All possess an accurate picture of the school's strengths and aspects for improvement, and strive, with a steely determination, to raise the bar even further. Evaluation is honest, although a little modest, and documentation is most impressive. The improvement plan is an excellent tool to make the school even better. The governors are outstanding. They are passionate about the school, provide energetic leadership and hold it to account in a rigorous but sensitive manner.

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

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	2
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	2
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?	1
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?	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 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	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

23 November 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Gloucester GL3 1HU

I am writing to say thank you very much for giving the inspectors such a warm welcome. We were impressed with the way you greeted us so confidently and courteously with friendly smiles. We enjoyed talking with you about your work and hearing about the exciting things you do. What superb children you are!

Your school is outstanding in many ways. Here are some of the special things that it does very well indeed.

- Your school looks after you very well and the adults want to do their best for you.
- Your behaviour is exemplary and everyone in the school cares for each other. It was a joy to observe you chatting amiably at playtimes and lunchtimes.
- In Reception you get off to a flying start in all aspects of your learning and you make excellent progress and achieve very high standards in all other year groups.
- Your teachers plan exciting, lively, imaginative activities for you, which help you to really enjoy school.
- The new laptops you enjoy using are helping you to produce very good work, as well as developing your very good ICT skills.
- There are lots of clubs and visits which you enjoy. Your contributions to the excellent assemblies are impressive.
- Your headteacher and other adults are always looking for ways to make your school an even better place to be! They value your views and those of your parents and carers in helping them to do this.

You are lucky to have such a wonderful headteacher, fantastic adults and great governors at the school, and they are already working on making the marking of your work even better. We are sure you will enjoy using the planned outdoor areas that you have all been involved in designing.

It was a real privilege to visit St Mary's Catholic Primary School. Keep up the excellent work and, most importantly, continue to enjoy your learning! Best wishes for the future; we hope that you achieve great things! Thank you all again.

Mrs Harlow HMI Lead inspector

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- ☺ The new laptops you enjoy using are helping you to produce very good work, as well as developing your very good ICT skills.
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Mrs Harlow HMI
Lead inspector