

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118763
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313079
Inspection dates	5–6 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Kevin Hodge

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	186
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Malcolm Parfitt
Headteacher	Annie Keane
Date of previous school inspection	22 September 2003
School address	St Richard's Road Deal CT14 9LF
Telephone number	01304 375046
Fax number	01304 375046

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller sized school than average. There is a wide social mix among pupils. Few pupils come from minority ethnic groups. Children enter the school with levels of ability that are slightly below those that are typical for their age. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is just above that which is found nationally. The proportion entitled to free school meals is below average. During the past two years there have been a significant number of staff changes. The school is currently having new classrooms built for Years 5 and 6 and improvements made to the main entrance of the school.

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's provides a satisfactory standard of education for its pupils. It has good features in the way it cares for its pupils, so they enjoy school, relate well to each other and leave the school as confident and mature young people. Parents are particularly pleased and the vast majority recognises these strengths. One comment was typical of many, 'Our children shine at school and hate to miss a day if poorly.'

Children have a smooth start to school and make steady progress in the Reception class. When they start in Year 1, the majority of pupils reach the age-related expectations, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development. Pupils make satisfactory progress and reach broadly average standards by the end of Year 2. Pupils sometimes make good progress but this is not even through the school because the quality of teaching is not consistently good in every class or subject. This means that their achievement is satisfactory rather than good overall. When they leave the school, pupils reach broadly average standards and do well in their English work. Their ability to use and apply their skills in mathematics and science falls short in some aspects. In mathematics, pupils are not confident enough in applying their number skills to everyday situations and 'hands on' activities in science do not extend their investigative abilities sufficiently. Pupils' skills in information and communication technology (ICT) have improved since the last inspection and they now reach the expected level as computer work is a regular activity within lessons.

As a result of the school's good focus upon pupils' care, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness develops well. This ensures their good levels of personal development, including their knowledge of how to stay healthy. Pupils willingly take responsibility for themselves and classmates and they say they feel safe. They make a good contribution to both local and more distant communities. The curriculum, although broad and balanced, is satisfactory rather than good because it has weaknesses in the planning of some activities. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Teachers appreciate the flexibility to try out new ideas, but not all teaching is consistently effective, particularly in planning investigative work in mathematics and science. This means that pupils' achievement varies. Good relationships are a noticeable feature within classes and help ensure pupils work well together. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution, often providing suitable help for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities so they keep up with their classmates.

The senior leaders manage the school satisfactorily. They have a clear commitment to move the school forward. Although the senior leadership team is relatively new, the strong sense of teamwork they have created is aiding improvement. However, the monitoring of teaching is not always rigorous enough to help spot how it can improve more rapidly. Governors, who have recently reviewed their arrangements to gauge the school's effectiveness, give satisfactory support.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Provision, including leadership, in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Pupils make a smooth start to school, because the school gains a clear idea of each child's experiences before they start. The clear, structured teaching enables children to make satisfactory progress in gaining early writing, number and reading skills. Many are on course to meet the age-related expectations

for learning when they enter Year 1. Children do particularly well in their personal, social and emotional development as the positive ethos of the class creates a secure and safe environment in which to learn. There is a good range and variety of class-based activities, but the outdoor area is not enticing enough. It does not stimulate and develop children's independent learning skills or have enough resources to extend their physical abilities fully. Class assistants provide timely support for children needing extra help.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise pupils' confidence in using and applying their mathematical and scientific skills to solve 'real life' practical problems.
- Improve the monitoring of lessons and pupils' work to focus more sharply on those areas which will improve teaching and learning more quickly.
- Provide a more inviting and better resourced outside area in the Foundation Stage to develop children's capacity to learn independently and to extend their physical skills further.

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

Children make a secure start in the Reception class. They make satisfactory progress in most areas of their learning by the start of Year 1, although their personal and social development is a stronger feature. The fostering of their physical skills is a weaker aspect. In 2007, pupils reached broadly average standards in the Year 2 and Year 6 national tests. They achieve satisfactorily, but do least well in mathematics and science by the time they leave. This is often as a result of their lack of confidence in using and applying number skills or investigating problems in science. Current work indicates that pupils are making up for some past underachievement, but their progress is patchy owing to variations in teaching quality. The closer eye now kept on pupils' progress is helping ensure more are on track to meet their targets. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities keep pace with their classmates as they receive good practical support, often by able class assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy attending school and have positive attitudes to learning. Pupils say they feel safe and well cared for. They are self-confident and usually behave well as their moral and social development is good. When activities in lessons are less interesting, pupils become restless and lose attention. They report that bullying is rare and that adults deal with any inappropriate behaviour fairly. Pupils appreciate being able to offer suggestions to make improvements through the active school council. In addition, older pupils have responsibilities at playtimes to act as play leaders, so activity levels are high. Their knowledge of how to keep healthy is good, reflected in the 'healthy school' status just awarded. Pupils make a good contribution to local events, including singing at a residential care home and performing in dance festivals. Their links with the local church and those living further away, such as in Nigeria, help develop their care for others. Pupils' preparation for their next stage of education is aided by their good levels of self-esteem, better skills in information and communication technology (ICT) and

English. It is satisfactory overall, rather than good, because of their weaker skills in mathematics and science.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is typically satisfactory throughout the school. There are some good features, such as the way teachers foster good relationships, which encourages pupils to work together effectively. In the Reception class, pupils' personal development is promoted well, but aspects of their physical and independent-skills development are not so well catered for. All teachers use interactive, audiovisual whiteboards confidently to help present information to good effect. In Years 1 to 6, not enough activities in mathematics and science extend pupils' problem solving skills. In some lessons, pupils mark time as their attention dips or wanders when explanations are too long. Teachers give clear individual help to pupils and the marking of their work is usually helpful in giving guidance to pupils about how they can improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum provides an appropriate range of activities to meet most pupils' needs. Reception children benefit from well-planned indoor activities, but their physical and independent-skills based activities are hindered by the limitations of the outside area. In the rest of the school, steps to improve links between subjects, so that learning becomes more enjoyable and interesting, are a relatively recent innovation. Class displays are of good quality and reflect the range of work covered. Problem solving activities in mathematics and science are not challenging enough or based on 'real life' situations. Visitors, visits to places of interest and extra-curricular activities help extend class work and help promote pupils' understanding of the wider world. Personal, social and health education and citizenship activities make a good contribution to raising pupils' awareness of health issues and encourage them to be safe, healthy and fit. Clear planning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensures they make satisfactory progress.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good care and support have a positive impact on pupils' personal development and well-being. Parents are pleased with the level of care their children receive. As one commented, it is 'a wonderful, caring, thoughtful, Christian place'. Procedures for child protection, including risk assessment, are good and ensure that pupils are properly safeguarded. There are good procedures for identifying pupils who are feeling vulnerable and for supporting those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Through praise, recognition and the provision of opportunities to take on responsibility, pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem are successfully developed. Links with local secondary schools to ease the transfer to Year 7 are particularly effective. Procedures for monitoring pupils' academic achievement and in providing day-to-day guidance for them are good. Efforts to involve pupils in assessing their own learning through target setting are still in the early stages, so not all are clear about how they can improve their own learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The senior leaders succeed in fostering the care and personal development of pupils well. As a result, pupils are mature and want to learn. A good team ethos is evident, with senior staff rising to the challenge of their new leadership roles. The monitoring of teaching and pupils' learning by senior staff, while regular, is not effective enough in identifying those aspects of teaching which need improvement. Self-evaluation is largely accurate, such as identifying the need to accelerate pupils' progress in mathematics. It is aided by regular feedback from parents, who recently asked for clearer information about their children's progress. Governors have helped steer the new building developments of the school and are an increasingly good sounding board for ideas and concerns. Their routines to check on the school's work have changed, as they were not fully effective, reflecting the governors' commitment to challenging the school to improve still further. Good improvements made in the accommodation, subject leadership and checks on pupils' progress show the school 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	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?	2

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

7 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Deal, CT14 9LF

Thank you for making us feel welcome at your school when we visited it recently. Yours is a satisfactory school, which is trying to be even better. It has some good things about it.

Here are some of the things we found out.

- Children in the Reception class settle in well and quickly feel at home.
- You said you 'feel safe' and all the staff make sure that you do; you said you 'like the caring atmosphere' and we noticed it too.
- You make satisfactory progress in your work and most of you reach the expected levels; your investigative work in mathematics and science is not quite as good as your writing, information and communication technology (ICT) and topic work.
- Teachers plan some activities, like the Australia or rainforest topics, really well.
- Those of you on the school council enjoy your responsibilities and enjoy helping the school to get better.
- You know about keeping fit and active and you are trying to eat sensibly.
- You behave well at playtimes and you appreciate the 'friendship stop' that helps you to make friends; the school helps you become sensible and mature.
- The staff and governors are working hard to make sure that the school runs smoothly and we know they cannot wait to open the new classrooms for Years 5 and 6.

We have asked the school to do three things to make it better.

- Help those of you in Years 1 to 6 to have more activities that help you to do more 'real life' problem solving in your mathematics and science work.
- Make sure that the school looks more closely at how the teaching can be even better so you learn more quickly in lessons.
- Provide the youngest children with a more exciting outside play area so they can increase their activity levels and choose activities for themselves.

You can help the school improve by trying your hardest to learn in your lessons.

Best Wishes

Kevin Hodge Lead inspector