

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118782
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	313086
Inspection dates	4–5 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Jacque Buttriss

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	406
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ewa Allison
Headteacher	Bernadette Long
Date of previous school inspection	2 June 2003
School address	Greenfield Road Gillingham ME7 1YH
Telephone number	01634 855783
Fax number	01634 856459

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger-than-average urban primary school. The proportions of pupils from ethnic minorities and those with English as an additional language are above average. There is a shared breakfast club situated in the neighbouring school.

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 with some outstanding features. Principal amongst these are the excellent care, guidance and support, which promote outstanding personal development and well-being. One parent describes the school as 'a very caring community'. Pastoral care is a great strength of the school and pupils are supported exceptionally well. Academic guidance is also a strong feature. As another parent said, 'We are more than happy with the education, care and dedication that St Mary's provides.'

The excellent 'Place2Be' counselling service is a great strength. The school's distinctive Catholic ethos contributes to pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Excellent partnerships with other schools and outside agencies create outstanding opportunities for pupils' academic and personal development.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. One of many positive comments is that 'the school is a safe and happy place'. Pupils say they feel very secure and they make healthy choices in school. They are enthusiastic learners. 'They love coming to school, even first thing in the morning!' as one parent put it. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. School council members are proud of their improvements to the environment, such as the newly redecorated toilets, and there are excellent community links. The school helps pupils to develop a good range of skills to prepare them for their future lives.

From exceptionally low starting points, Reception children make excellent progress to achieve very well. Pupils make good progress overall across the school and the majority of pupils achieve well. Standards by the end of Year 6 have been higher than expected in recent years, showing that pupils achieve well. The excellent support provided for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, as well as for those from ethnic minorities or with English as a second language, ensures that they achieve well. Standards in writing are improving as a result of the school's focus on all aspects of writing development. Boys in Years 3 to 6 are making satisfactory progress but achieve less well than they could, especially in mathematics. The curriculum does not always excite boys' curiosity, for example, by providing practical mathematics tasks relevant to their specific interests.

Teaching is good throughout the school, promoting good learning and personal development. Most lessons are well planned and 'fun', as several pupils said. Interesting and varied activities motivate the majority of pupils well and the typically lively, well-paced teaching encourages pupils to work hard and achieve well. However, in mathematics, boys in Years 3 and 4 are not always fully engaged by the tasks set. Good teaching and stimulating learning activities ensure that children in the Reception class have a very good start to their school life.

The well-planned curriculum and stimulating learning environments promote great interest and curiosity amongst pupils. The wide variety of themed weeks, visits, visitors and well-attended additional activities provide very good curriculum enrichment, and this is a particular strength. The English curriculum is being well adapted to suit the interests of boys, but this is not yet the case in mathematics, with the result that boys are less motivated to do well in this subject.

Good improvements since the last inspection result from a strong leadership team which remains actively involved in the shared drive for further improvement. Governors provide good general support for the school and are developing their monitoring role, but this is not yet sufficiently extensive or robust.

Parents feel welcomed to be involved in their children's learning and praise the school highly. One parent wrote, 'I would always recommend it to others as a good school.'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good overall. Reception children settle in quickly and happily. Good teaching and exciting, well-planned learning activities enable them to make excellent progress in all areas of learning and to achieve very well. However, a wider variety of more active learning tasks would provide increased motivation for some children. Outstanding support and care help children to develop a good range of learning and social skills, gaining impressively in confidence and self-esteem. The stimulating learning environment encourages the children's curiosity and teachers encourage them to take great pride in their achievements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve boys' achievement across Years 3 to 6, especially in mathematics, by adapting the curriculum to ensure that tasks more closely match their interests.
- Develop governors' monitoring skills by providing clearer focus for each classroom visit and by introducing a wider range of governors' monitoring activities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

From exceptionally low starting points, Reception children make excellent progress and reach standards only a little below national expectations by the time they move into Year 1. Pupils continue to make good progress through the school so that by the end of Year 2, standards are above national averages, and by the end of Year 6, pupils reach standards above the targets based on their Year 2 test results.

Achievement is good overall. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with English as an additional language achieve well. As a result of recent initiatives to improve the development of writing skills, pupils now make good progress. Girls achieve outstandingly well throughout the school. However, although boys in Years 3 to 6 make satisfactory progress, they achieve less well than they could, especially in mathematics, and are not meeting their targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Their spiritual development is a great strength and there are many opportunities for quiet reflection, for example, in class prayer. Older pupils show mature attitudes to work and social issues and involve themselves in church and community activities. Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils report that there is virtually no bullying or racism and the rare incidents that do occur are dealt with promptly and effectively. 'We get on like a family,' a School Council member remarked. Attendance is good, although a few pupils sometimes come in late.

Pupils know who to go to when they need support. They have a good understanding of the need for healthy eating and exercise and they make healthy choices. Pupils make an excellent contribution to the school and the community through such activities as the active School Council, singing in the choir at events, fund raising and community action. Good development

of a variety of key skills, such as good attainment in core subjects, thinking skills, independent learning and co-operation, prepares pupils well for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good, well-planned teaching predominates across this school. One outstanding Year 6 lesson was observed during which pupils daringly relished the relevant challenge of writing a newspaper article about their school's successful Ofsted inspection! Lively and well-paced teaching typically engages pupils' curiosity and interest and motivates them to fulfil their teachers' high expectations. Work is well matched to pupils' abilities, providing appropriate degrees of challenge for all. Good marking and assessment of pupils' work help them to know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Teachers' good questioning skills extend learners' understanding. Pupils are encouraged to learn both collaboratively and independently and to reflect on their learning. As one Year 6 pupil said, 'Teachers make you think about important things, like what you are going to do with your life.'

Another pupil confided, 'I think the teachers work really hard.' Teachers and teaching assistants alike provide very good support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with English as an additional language, enabling them to make good progress and achieve well. Occasionally the pace slows or activities, such as overlong discussions, cause a loss of concentration, particularly amongst boys.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The well-planned curriculum provides a good framework for learning and is successfully enriched by a variety of visits, visitors, themed weeks, activities and clubs. Very good links with other schools and organisations further extend learning opportunities. Good use of literacy across subjects and recent initiatives have led to improved standards in writing, for example, through drama and the use of football links, which have especially motivated boys. A recent focus on problem solving has resulted in some improvement, but there has been comparatively little adaptation of the Year 3 to 6 mathematics curriculum to make it more appealing to boys. There is a good programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education. Pupils are helped to develop enterprise skills and social awareness, for example, by choosing a charity to support and devising ways to raise funds.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Outstanding care, guidance and support is a great strength of this school. Pastoral care, in particular, is a distinctive feature. Excellent management of the support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those with English as an additional language promotes good progress. Provision is further enhanced by the outstanding provision of the 'Place2Be' counselling service for vulnerable pupils and the excellent links established with outside agencies. There are excellent links with parents and regular opportunities for them to discuss their children's progress with staff. There are good systems for identifying pupils at risk and staff are well informed about their pupils' needs. All statutory requirements are met to safeguard

pupils' welfare, and protection procedures are fully in place. Tracking procedures are used very effectively to set individual targets so that pupils know what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership is characterised by strong and hardworking teamwork and a clear, shared vision which gives good direction for driving forward school improvement. Very good improvements include the raising of standards in all core subjects since the last inspection, and there is a good capacity to improve further.

Pupils' progress data are carefully analysed and challenging targets set to successfully raise standards. Comprehensive and collaborative self-evaluation processes correctly identify priorities for development and the thorough school development plan sets clear priorities and is updated regularly to show progress. Initiatives to develop pupils' writing have successfully improved skills. Whilst recent adaptations of the writing curriculum to engage boys' interest have been particularly successful, little has yet been done to achieve the same effect in mathematics.

The recent Inclusion Award recognises very good equal opportunities practice which enables most pupils to achieve well. Despite the constraints of the building, the highly effective deployment of staffing and learning resources ensures good value for money. The dedicated governors give good support to the school and the chair challenges appropriately, but governors do not yet carry out sufficiently rigorously their monitoring roles.

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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	2
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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
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	2

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	2
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	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

6 December 2007

Dear Children,

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Gillingham, Kent ME7 1YH

Thank you for being so friendly, polite and helpful when we came to inspect your school. You made us feel very welcome and we enjoyed talking with you. Yours is a good school that helps you to do well in your work and cares for you outstandingly well.

These are the things we especially like about your school:

- You are friendly and polite and your behaviour is excellent. Well done!
- You tell us you enjoy school very much and you are keen to do your best.
- Yours is an extremely caring and supportive school that encourages excellent personal development and well-being and good achievement.
- There are some excellent links with other groups that help your school to give you such great care and support.
- You tell us that your teachers work very hard to provide enjoyable learning activities that help you make good progress and achieve well.
- The teachers make school a calm place where you can think about what you believe and have excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Children in the Reception classes have a very good start to their school life.
- Your headteacher and staff are leading the school well and are working hard to make it even better.
- Your parents and carers are very pleased that you come to this school.

These are the things we think your school could do even better:

- Help the boys in Years 3 to 6 to make better progress in numeracy by setting tasks that are more interesting for you all.
- Arrange for some of the governors to come into classrooms more often so that they can see you working. You could tell them about your targets and show them what you have been doing in your books.

We would like to wish you lots of success in your future learning. Keep up the good work!

With very best wishes,

Jacquie Buttriss