

St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Bacup

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119662
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	313380
Inspection dates	13–14 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Dave Byrne

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	135
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Father Micheal Twoney
Headteacher	Mr Michael Kermath
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2003
School address	Tong Lane Bacup Lancashire OL13 9LJ
Telephone number	01706 873123
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a small school that serves an area with very high levels of social and economic disadvantage. Almost all pupils are from White British families. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. The proportion with statements of special educational need is over twice the national average. The percentage with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also well above average. A relatively high proportion of pupils starts and leaves the school at times other than the normal. The headteacher of eighteen years retires at the end of this term. An associate headteacher will support the school until a replacement headteacher is appointed.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with good features. It enjoys strong support from parents and is a valued part of its local parish. The headteacher has created an ethos in which each pupil is valued; their emotional needs are extremely well met. Pupils enjoy school and their behaviour is outstanding. Most acquire a good knowledge and understanding of how to live healthily and safely and are satisfactorily prepared for their next stage of life.

Given the very low skill levels of children starting the Foundation Stage, achievement is satisfactory. Good progress in the Foundation Stage levels off to satisfactory between Years 1 and 6. In Years 2 and 6, the results of national assessments and tests fell in 2007 to well below average. An improvement is predicted this year although current standards are below average in English, mathematics and science. Pupils can do much better in writing across the school and in investigational aspects of mathematics and science.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory but there are variations across the school. Strengths exist in the Foundation Stage, most particularly in Nursery. In Key Stages 1 and 2, lessons are generally well managed and relationships with pupils are very good. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well met, but expectations for more able and talented pupils are often not high enough. Marking is not used well enough to inform pupils about how they can improve their work. A satisfactory curriculum meets the needs of most pupils. Links with other schools and the community enrich the pupils' learning.

Leadership and management, including governance, are satisfactory. Systems for checking on standards, progress and the quality of teaching are not always effective enough. This is because of a lack of dedicated time for staff to instigate and drive forward improvements. The school has a generally accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and its actions for development are mostly the right ones. The progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory and the school provides satisfactory value for money. Considerable change is imminent with the retirement of the much respected headteacher but the school has satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge that are considerably below that which is typical for three-year-olds. Weaknesses exist in communication, language and literacy, mathematical development and knowledge and understanding of the world. Children make a very good start in the Nursery. They go on to make good progress across the Foundation Stage, but most noticeably in their social development. Despite this, only a minority of children reach the levels expected of five-year-olds by the time they start Year 1. Resources are satisfactory and the school is soon to upgrade facilities. Children benefit from a safe environment. The outdoor provision for the Nursery is good, but for Reception it doesn't give enough scope for outdoor learning. The provision available is well managed. Staff are constantly seeking ways of improving what they do and are in the process of refining the school's assessment systems. The school actively encourages parents to get involved in their children's education although some are reluctant.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, especially in writing, science and investigational mathematics.
- Increase expectations for more able and talented pupils.
- Improve marking so that pupils know their next steps in learning.
- Improve systems for checking the effectiveness of the school.

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

Achievement is satisfactory. From a starting point much lower than is typically found, pupils make satisfactory progress. The rate of progress varies, however, between classes. In the Foundation Stage children make good improvement on the extremely low skill levels with which most start school. In Key Stage 1, progress is satisfactory overall. Standards at the end of Year 2 fell in 2007 and were well below the national average. In Key Stage 2, progress continues at a steady rate although stronger teaching boosts progress at Year 6. In 2007, standards dipped compared to previous years and were well below average in English and science. The weakest areas were writing, and investigation work in science and mathematics. Predictions for the current Year 6 group indicate that results are likely to improve but current standards throughout the school are still below average.

At the end of both key stages, the results of national assessments and tests are affected by the high percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils who find learning difficult make good progress but higher attaining pupils are not consistently challenged so that they do as well as they can. Across the school, girls tend to do better than boys, most noticeably in writing, although recently introduced initiatives such as 'Exciting Writing' are starting to narrow the gap.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and wellbeing, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Great pride is expressed by pupils in the school and everyone is willing to help others. The school councillors and the 'Eco-Warriors' eagerly get involved in improving the school and its environment. Pupils are proud of the school gaining its Eco Award. 'We love school because we make great friends and have a good time', typifies the views of most pupils. Throughout the school, learners enjoy lessons. This is one reason why attendance has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory.

Good provision in the Foundation Stage helps children make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development. This sets most pupils up well for developing good social skills and a strong moral awareness. These contribute to the outstanding behaviour of the vast majority of pupils. Pupils have a good understanding of their own culture, and of the Catholic faith, but their understanding of the richness and diversity of modern society is not as strong.

Pupils understand the choices required to live healthy and safe lives. The school's gaining of the Activemark is reflected in the importance of exercise in many pupils' lives. Although pupils have good attitudes to others and are able to use their initiative in day to day aspects of school

life, many lack the confidence to work with reasonable independence during lessons such as science and mathematics. Pupils are satisfactorily prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory with some good features. There are particular strengths in teaching in the Nursery, where children get a flying start. In Years 1 to 6, good contributions by specialist teachers for French, music and sport benefit all pupils. The quality of teaching in other subjects, however, varies, which results in an uneven rate of progress. The main reason for the variation is the lack of time for subject leaders to support teachers and check on the progress of pupils. In all lessons, teachers manage behaviour well and develop amongst pupils a desire to learn. Calmness typifies lessons and smiling faces amongst pupils is the norm. Teachers are aware of the fact that some pupils lack self-confidence, and try to address this by offering them reassurance.

Expectations are not high enough for the more able and talented pupils. This is most noticeable in writing and in investigational work in mathematics and science. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported by the good interventions of teaching assistants. Teachers are starting to use marking to involve pupils in their own learning, but there isn't a consistent model used in all classes. As a result, they do not always achieve as well as they are able.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. It meets the needs of most pupils but is not planned well enough to accelerate the progress of the more able and talented pupils. Improvements are underway to improve the provision for writing and boost the progress of boys. Currently there are not enough opportunities for pupils to apply their basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum. Good links with local schools and the local authority enrich lessons effectively. For example, activities provided by sporting partnerships and the music service promote great enjoyment and achievement. Pupils talked with great enthusiasm about their residential visit to the Lake District.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. There are outstanding levels of pastoral support, but academic guidance is satisfactory. The headteacher has successfully created an ethos that provides all pupils with a safe, stable and caring environment. Procedures for safeguarding children are rigorous and child protection procedures are very effectively followed. The school works very closely with external support agencies, particularly with social services, to provide very good support for vulnerable pupils and those with medical and learning needs.

Procedures for assessing pupils' academic performance are satisfactory. The information is not, however, used well enough to ensure that all groups, and in particular the more able and talented do well enough.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school is satisfactorily led and managed. The headteacher has established a good ethos of care throughout the school. This has a marked impact on pupils' personal development and increases their life chances. A nurturing environment has been created in which each pupil feels valued. Expectations for their academic development, however, are not high enough. The role of managers in checking on standards, progress and the quality of learning is not effective enough. Consequently, many differences exist in teachers' expectations of pupils.

The school's self-evaluation is broadly accurate. Satisfactory use is made of assessment data to inform staff about the school's performance. It is used to create suitable priorities for development in the school improvement plan. The plan, however, lacks detail to enable accurate monitoring of the progress towards each target. Academic targets for Year 6 are set in accordance with requirements but are not always used effectively to steer the school's work. Governance is satisfactory. Governors work closely with the school and form a good bridge between the school and the community.

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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?	3
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	4
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	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	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?	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

17 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Bacup, Lancashire, OL13 9LJ

As you know, my colleague and I visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and your staff and listening to your views. You told us that you enjoy school and that was obvious by the happy smiling faces we saw. Most of the time, your behaviour is excellent. Judging by your enthusiasm for sport and desire to eat sensibly, you know how to keep healthy.

Your school is doing a good job in keeping you safe. All staff care about you and do very well in helping you when you are worried or upset. We appreciated your friendliness. You clearly have a great pride in your school and we were impressed by the way you held doors open for others and took care of each other. Those of you who are school councillors are helping to improve the life of everyone in the school. The 'Eco-Warriors' are making a great start to making everyone's environment better.

Although you all make progress in lessons, we feel that standards could be better. There are three subjects in which you need to improve. These are writing, and some aspects of mathematics and science. To do this, we have suggested that your school asks more of you in lessons and makes better use of marking to give you more information about how you can improve. We have also asked that the teachers who manage subjects have more time to help other teachers and keep an eye on how well you are doing. We hope that you will all work hard and act upon the advice given by your teachers.

We wish you all lots of happiness and success in future. It is important to continue to be helpful to others, but it is also important for you to do as well as you can in lessons.

Yours sincerely

Dave Byrne

Lead Inspector