

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Scarisbrick

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 119683 |
| Local Authority | Lancashire |
| Inspection number | 313391 |
| Inspection dates | 16–17 June 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Lynne Read |

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 4–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 80 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Mary Ormsby |
| Headteacher | Mrs Jacqueline McNally |
| Date of previous school inspection | 1 May 2005 |
| School address | Hall Road Scarisbrick Ormskirk Lancashire L40 9QE |
| Telephone number | 01704 880626 |
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small school serves families in the immediate rural location and also from a much wider geographical area between Southport and Skelmersdale. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds; the proportion claiming free school meals is low. Overall, there is a below average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but this varies significantly between year groups. The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational need is average. The vast majority of pupils come from White British or Irish backgrounds. In some year groups, a significant percentage of pupils transfer to the school part way through their education.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Mary's Catholic Primary is a good school with outstanding features. It provides good value for money. Parents have very positive views of the provision. One wrote, 'the school promotes traditional values such as care, respect, trust and honesty' whilst others praised the 'warm, friendly and nurturing atmosphere' and the 'hard working staff'. Through their association and active involvement in their children's learning, parents support the school very well. Links with the church, other schools and outside agencies are excellent and provide valuable benefits for the pupils in terms of their personal development and education.

Pupils make consistently good progress through both key stages. Standards for the current Year 6 are much improved and are well above average. Many pupils are exceeding their challenging targets with around three quarters working beyond the level expected for their age in mathematics and science. In English, slightly fewer are doing so. Good improvements are evident in writing but standards are not as high as in reading. Pupils' personal development is outstanding and relationships are excellent. The school's Catholic foundation provides a strong caring ethos which ensures that pupils feel secure. As a result, there is a calm, productive atmosphere and pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school.

Teaching is good. Lessons challenge pupils' thinking and problem-solving skills, providing good opportunities for them to be active, enthusiastic learners. Teachers now have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve and set exacting challenges for the more able. This is an important factor underlying the accelerated progress and higher standards this year.

The curriculum is good and promotes academic, creative, personal and practical skills in a balanced way. The Healthy Schools Award recognises the good work done in teaching about healthy living and generating pupils' enthusiasm for exercise and sport. Pupils have varied opportunities to experience responsibility, share in decision-making and they carry out a range of jobs diligently. This prepares them exceptionally well for their future lives, whilst also contributing to the strong sense of community in school. A very interesting range of additional activities, visiting specialists and visits to places of interest enhance learning well and generate added interest.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher works closely with the senior manager, to provide very good leadership. Their strong teamwork kept disruptions to a minimum during the recent period of staffing changes, and ensured that any shortfalls in learning were quickly addressed. Attention to pupils' welfare is excellent. Senior managers continually identify areas for improvement and develop the relevant plans for action. These plans are effectively translated into action and result in a record of good improvement since the previous inspection. The school has good capacity to maintain its strengths and improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage are good and the provision is highly praised by parents. Children's skills and knowledge at entry to Reception vary widely between individuals and from year to year. The 2007 intake was typical for the age group. Pupils' progress is assessed constantly and tasks are planned very effectively to build on children's developing knowledge and skills. Planning also takes account of children's interests in order to keep them well motivated. As a result, they make good progress, especially so in personal and social development

and in early mathematics, knowledge of the world and physical and creative skills. The current Reception year are exceeding the level expected for their age in all areas of learning. Behaviour is excellent and children are well versed in class routines.

A good programme of introducing children to school enables them to settle quickly, within the inviting and stimulating learning environment. Children benefit from being in a small teaching group with good adult support. Sessions include some opportunities for independent exploration and for children to follow their own interests but there is scope to extend free choice activities further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards in writing further to match those seen in reading.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. The numbers in each year group are small and the results of national tests vary considerably from year-to-year and do not give the full picture of pupils' performance. School records show that progress in Key Stage 1 is good. In past years, attainment on entry to Year 1 has been broadly in line with expectations. Current standards for the Year 2 pupils are above average, as in most previous years. In 2007 the teachers' assessments at the end of Year 2 were below average. This group included a very high percentage of pupils who needed extra support with their learning. All had made good progress from some low starting points and many exceeded their teachers' expectations.

Progress is good in Key Stage 2 and current standards at the school are well above average. The 2007 test results were average. There were three main reasons for these lower than usual standards. First, several pupils joined the school during Key Stage 2; second, there was a high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Finally, there had been insufficient time for the improvements made in mathematics and writing to impact on standards. This impact can clearly be seen in the current Year 6 where pupils have exceeded their challenging targets and a very good proportion of pupils are working at the higher level in mathematics, science and reading. Progress in writing has improved significantly and standards are now above average although they are not as high as reading. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make equally good progress to their peers and have very good self-esteem.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being, including pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, are outstanding. They are effectively encouraged through very close links with the church and an excellent programme for personal and social education. Across school, pupils enjoy learning, have a strong work ethic and are very confident in their own abilities. They say there is no bullying and they feel very safe. The 'I care' code of conduct, which was written by the pupils themselves, is respected and followed. As a result, behaviour is exemplary and pupils are very considerate of each other. Older pupils demonstrate excellent self-discipline and maturity. The presentation of work in Year 6 is excellent.

Pupils have an excellent understanding of healthy living. They understand the importance of a balanced diet and engage in vigorous exercise at playtimes. Attendance is above average. Pupils play an important part in decision making through their elected school council. They

engage eagerly in fundraising projects and are keen to take responsibility for jobs around school. For example, they are well trained for their roles as play-leaders. These factors, together with good standards, prepare pupils extremely well for their future education and citizenship.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Well trained teaching assistants play an important role in ensuring that the needs of pupils in the mixed age classes are met. Teachers constantly assess progress and pupils receive good feedback on how they are doing during lessons. Teachers routinely include praise and very useful suggestions in their marking. Tasks are planned accurately at different levels of difficulty. This helps to accelerate progress for the more able and ensures good provision for pupils who need extra help. However, the practice of occasionally withdrawing some pupils from lessons for extra English work is less successful since they sometimes miss important parts of other lessons.

Teachers make the purpose of learning clear so pupils know what is expected of them. Introductions to lessons usually have a fast pace and include a good amount of problem-solving and collaborative work. These factors enthuse pupils and extend their thinking skills. Pupils are taught to critically evaluate their own work which promotes good skills of independent learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. One pupil said, 'We learn something new every day.' It includes ample opportunities for pupils to extend their English and mathematical skills and includes French lessons. Creative work such as art, dance and music feature strongly and help to develop pupils' talents. Links between subjects are beginning to develop. For example, pupils have good opportunities to practise and enhance their computer skills when studying other subjects. However, the school recognises that more could be done in this respect. A useful partnership with the secondary school enhances learning very well and helps pupils to prepare for the transfer. Opportunities for experimental science, as well as engaging in outdoor pursuits alongside pupils from Year 7, are just examples of the benefits derived.

A wealth of additional experiences are provided through visits and expert visitors which broaden pupils knowledge and understanding of the world. After-school clubs, such as those for tag rugby, cross country and craft are well attended and pupils enjoy competitive sport.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Parents praise the 'family atmosphere' in school and the excellent relationships. Close attention is given to care, health and safety issues. Robust procedures for safeguarding pupils are in place. Staff are diligent and supervision at break and lunchtime is very good. Pupils say there is always an adult on hand if they have any worries although they pointed out that 'by the time we reach Year 3 we can sort out most problems ourselves'.

Academic guidance is well established and provides a clear picture of pupils' progress. As a result, additional help and guidance are provided where they are most needed. Individual targets for pupils are very useful and shared with parents. They provide a goal to aim for and clearly illustrate what needs improving.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good and clearly focused on achieving high standards. The headteacher, very ably assisted by the senior manager, provides good leadership. The recent turbulence in staffing in this small school was handled very well. Disruptions to learning have been kept to a minimum, school development has gone ahead and, in spite of the difficulties, standards have risen. Subject managers contribute effectively to the school's accurate evaluation of its performance. Detailed assessment and tracking records in English, mathematics and science are used to keep a close eye on achievement and standards as well as the school's provision. As a result, good improvements in standards are seen this year. Similar processes are in place for the other subjects in the curriculum but due to staffing changes, the cycle of evaluation has not gone to plan. Light-touch monitoring by senior managers has ensured that provision is maintained and plans are in place to re-introduce the more rigorous, planned approach from the start of the new school year.

Governors have a very efficient committee structure and secure overview of standards, achievement and provision. Members bring a great deal of expertise and experience to management. Through their active involvement in school, they support the drive for further improvement well. Governance is good and all statutory requirements are met.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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|---|-----|
| 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

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|--|---|
| 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**

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| 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 | 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 |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

18 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Scarisbrick, Lancashire, L40 9QE

Thank you very much for your warm welcome and for helping me when I came to visit your school. I would like to tell you what I found out.

St Mary's is a good, and very friendly, school. Your behaviour is excellent and you take really good care of each other. You enjoy your learning, try exceptionally hard and are making good progress. Your teachers say that you are 'a pleasure to teach'. What a wonderful compliment. I enjoyed watching you at break time and I think your play leaders do a good job in providing equipment and games to keep you occupied. You get lots of exercise using the exciting sound and adventure trails in the play areas, so that is good.

Please thank your parents for sending me lots of replies to the questionnaire. They like being involved in your learning and think the school gives you a good start to your education. One described it as 'a wonderful place for children to be' which coincides with the view of one young pupil who said 'I like it here.'

I know that you have been working hard to improve your mathematics. Well done -your progress is now good and many of you are working at a high level. You have also made good improvements to your writing but there is still a little way to go before the standards match those in reading, which are very high indeed. I know that you like a challenge and are prepared to persevere when the work gets harder so I'm sure you will be successful. Please keep up the excellent standard of handwriting and presentation; your workbooks are a credit to you.

Thank you once again for the interesting conversations I had throughout the day and for letting me know your views so clearly. There is a great deal about your school of which you and the staff can be very proud. Please accept my best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Lynne Read

Lead inspector