

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122036
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	314200
Inspection dates	5–6 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Hazel Callaghan

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	161
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Hugh Williams
Headteacher	Pauline Turner
Date of previous school inspection	30 June 2003
School address	Woodside Way Northampton NN5 7HX
Telephone number	01604 581011
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's changed from a lower school to a smaller than average primary school in September 2003. Most of its pupils are of White British heritage but about a third are now from a variety of other minority ethnic groups. An increasing number of pupils join the school in all age groups and about a tenth are in the early stages of learning English. Although there is an average proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities, attainment on entry to the Reception class is below average. The school has had significant changes in staff in the last two years with three headteachers during that time. The substantive headteacher took up post in the spring term and the deputy was appointed in the summer term.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

Although improving quickly, St Mary's is not yet sufficiently effective. In accordance with legislation, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' achievement and standards and their regular attendance to school.

The school has been through a difficult time and pupils' achievement has been inadequate over the last three years. Pupils' progress is improving and there is clear evidence of satisfactory progress in lessons. As a result standards are rising. However, standards remain below average because progress has not yet accelerated enough for pupils to make up for the inadequate achievement of the past. Standards and progress in mathematics are particularly weak. The school is now turning the corner under the good leadership of the new headteacher and deputy headteacher. Teaching is improving and is now satisfactory. Provision for children in the Foundation Stage is sound. Although teaching is now satisfactory, there are still inconsistencies. For example, activities are not always sufficiently well matched to pupils' learning needs to ensure good progress is made. Teachers lack confidence in teaching mathematics. The planning for mathematics does not provide a cohesive structure that builds from year to year. As a result there are gaps in pupils' knowledge that slow their understanding and progress. Other aspects of the curriculum are satisfactory and a range of additional activities and after school clubs enhances pupils' learning.

The strong Catholic ethos of the school underpins the good pastoral care of all pupils. Relationships are good and staff and pupils show good levels of consideration and support for each other. There is good provision for pupils' spiritual moral, social and cultural development. Behaviour throughout the school is also good and pupils say they feel safe and secure. Other aspects of pupils' personal development are not as strong, for example, pupils' ability to make choices about eating healthily is satisfactory. Attendance is well below the national average with a small but significant group of pupils not attending regularly. The school has made some progress in working with parents to reduce pupil absence, but it is not yet having sufficient effect. Although personal care and support are good, strategies for pupils' academic support and guidance are not as effective as they could be.

Significant improvements have been made in curriculum planning and in ensuring there is an appropriate balance in teaching. Teachers are more aware of the progress pupils need to make and there is a real sense of commitment to raising standards. Very few have had the training in or experience of managing a subject and this means that the headteacher and deputy headteacher are alone in maintaining leadership and management of the school. Evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is accurate but primarily made by these senior leaders. The speed and effectiveness of change already made show the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children in Reception settle quickly to the various routines and start to develop effective social skills and interest in learning. Children make satisfactory progress but most do not attain the

standards expected when they transfer into Year 1. There is an appropriate balance of adult-led tasks and opportunities for children to explore and experiment that satisfactorily promote children's skills and knowledge. Good relationships and sensitive teaching motivates children's desire to do well. Opportunities to extend children's speaking skills and to further develop their knowledge in free choice activities, however, are sometimes missed. The outside area is used well to extend children's skills of working independently and for them to consolidate tasks they have tried with the class teacher. The teaching assistant skilfully supports those with learning difficulties. Children's progress is assessed regularly so that next steps are identified effectively. The overall amount of progress children make in the foundation stage is not yet carefully evaluated but despite this strengths and weaknesses in learning are clearly identified so further improvements can be made.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teachers' mathematical subject knowledge is secure and that the mathematics curriculum provides a well planned succession of activities so pupils' achieve well.
- Improve teaching by providing activities that successfully build on what pupils already know and challenge their knowledge and understanding.
- Provide management training and support for co-ordinators so they are able to evaluate the provision in their subjects and understand how they can be improved.
- Work with parents to improve pupils' attendance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Children have a narrower range of experiences and skills than is usual for their age when they start in Reception. Language skills and mathematical knowledge are well below average. Standards in Years 1 and 2 have declined over the last three years to significantly below average. Assessment of pupils' standards is now more accurate and this gives a more secure view of pupils' attainment. These more accurate assessments show that there has been inadequate progress in the past and that only recently progress in lessons has improved and is now satisfactory. Standards in Year 6 are also not high enough. In the 2007 tests, standards in mathematics and science were below average although better in English and pupils' progress across the key stage was inadequate. Standards in science are rising as teachers put a greater emphasis on developing pupils' investigational skills. Attainment in mathematics is also improving but standards are still well below average. Pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are making better progress but it is not yet enough to make up for inadequate achievement in the past and so it remains inadequate overall. Those in the early stages of learning English make satisfactory progress in English but not in mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development is satisfactory with some strengths. The school's Catholic ethos of respect and care helps pupils work and play together in harmony. There are no racial tensions in the school. Pupils have a good understanding of the cultural diversity in their school. Pupils show mature attitudes to their work. Even when lessons lack interest they usually try hard. Pupils say they enjoy school and like their teachers. They recognise that some pupils find it difficult to behave, but have no concerns about bullying. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe but they are not as confident in making positive choices about healthy eating.

They enjoy taking responsibility and carry out their roles well. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 are very proficient in showing people around the school, as was clearly evident when inspectors were given 'the tour'. Pupils make a good contribution to the local community, and the choir, for example, is well known for its many performances. Pupils' basic skills are improving in English but not in mathematics.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers are more aware of the standards pupils should reach for their age and have higher expectations for their progress. As a result teaching is satisfactory. However, not all teachers ensure that activities build successfully on what pupils have already learnt. Lessons are not always sufficiently challenging so pupils' learning in lessons remains satisfactory rather than good. There has been a successful focus on sharing the aims of the lesson with pupils and giving them guidance on what they need to do to be successful, which is increasing pupils' understanding. Some lessons are mundane and lack the pace to stimulate pupils' good interest but nevertheless pupils behave well and try to do their best. Mathematics remains the weakest subject. Teachers' subject knowledge is not sufficiently secure which makes it difficult to extend pupils' understanding. The teaching of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good in withdrawal sessions, but not always sufficiently well maintained back in class. Pupils in the early stages of learning English are supported satisfactorily. Teaching assistants often show effective skills and sensitive support for all pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The recent improvements in planning ensure a broad and balanced curriculum, which has many additional activities to stimulate interest. Links with other schools and colleges have improved the range of activities available especially, in physical education, and after school clubs have been reintroduced. The teaching of science is improving, which is promoting pupils' skills of experimentation and understanding. There has not been the same focus on mathematics. In the past there was a lack of coherent planning that ensured all aspects of the mathematics curriculum were taught progressively. This has resulted in gaps in pupils' learning. The curriculum has been satisfactorily adapted to meet the needs of those new to learning English. Effective progress has also been made to the provision of information and communication technology (ICT) which now satisfactorily supports pupils' learning in other subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school responds sensitively to pupils' specific difficulties and a range of strategies are used to enable them to attend school, feel safe and secure and settle to learning. There is a small group of pupils who have significant emotional and social difficulties, which create significant difficulties in their behaviour. The impact of these problems are managed well. Procedures for child protection are robust and those for safeguarding pupils are working well. The school works well with a variety of agencies to support pupils' development and in the effort to promote regular attendance.

Academic support and guidance are fairly new. Tracking of pupils' progress has been successfully developed and is used effectively to identify those who need additional support. Targets for pupils' next stages of learning have also been introduced. However, the use of these targets to support pupils' understanding of how to improve is not sufficiently effective to ensure pupils make the progress of which they are capable.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

A period of difficulties and change has gone alongside the school's slide into poor progress. This decline has been halted by the appointment of the new headteacher who has a clear view of what is needed for the school to improve. Her resolve and strength of purpose are shared by the deputy headteacher and together they are leading the school forward. They have only been in post for a short time but already their hard work and effective strategies are having a positive impact. The senior leaders have a secure recognition of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and have set challenging targets for future standards. The governors say that there is now a real sense of teamwork across the school and staff morale has been restored as progress is being made. Governors are very supportive of the headteacher and staff, and carry out a range of informal monitoring. They are kept well informed but are not yet sufficiently involved in planning for the future.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	4
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	4

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	4
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Children

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Northampton, NN5 7HX

Thank you for making us so welcome and answering our questions when we visited you. I am writing to tell you what we found out about your school on our visit. The school is making lots of improvements but there are still some very important things that need to get better before you have a satisfactory education. The school has been given a Notice to Improve.

These are the things we liked about your school.

- You try hard to do your best and your standards are improving
- Your teachers are finding ways to help you understand how you are getting on and how to improve.
- Most of you behave well and are kind to one another.
- You know how to keep safe and enjoy taking responsibility.
- Your headteacher has a good understanding of how to make your school better and the staff and governors are helping her.

Here are the things we have asked the staff and governors to improve.

- Help you make better progress in mathematics by ensuring that you are taught all the things you need to know systematically.
- Make sure all teaching is good and your activities build successfully on what you have already learnt so you make good progress.
- Make sure all the subjects are led and managed well.
- Make sure all pupils attend regularly.

Thank you again for being so polite and thoughtful and remember you can do your bit by continuing to work hard.

Hazel Callaghan Lead inspector

10 December 2007

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Lead inspector