

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124348
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314898
Inspection date	15 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Merchant

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	99
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Haywood
Headteacher	Deborah Cachia
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2004
School address	Wharf Lane Brewood Stafford ST19 9BG
Telephone number	01902 850261
Fax number	01902 851994

Age group	4-11
Inspection date	15 May 2008
Inspection number	314898

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is much smaller than average. The very large majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The previous headteacher left the school in December 2007. The governing body have had difficulty in filling this post and the school is led by an acting headteacher.

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 is a welcoming school that provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the work of the school and have great confidence in the acting headteacher. One parent typically says that since the acting headteacher arrived, the school has become 'stronger and more secure.' Parents especially like the celebration assemblies they are invited to and say that St Mary's 'educates the whole child.'

Pastoral care for pupils is good. This results in their good personal development and well-being. Within its Catholic ethos, the school focuses on developing and nurturing every single child as an individual. As a result, pupils quickly learn how to get on well with each other and the adults who work with them. Pupils' behaviour is good and they feel safe and valued. They develop positive attitudes to learning and most enjoy what is on offer. Physical education (PE) lessons and the after school clubs promote an appreciation of the need to keep fit. Consequently, pupils develop a good awareness of why they should take regular exercise. Pupils also have a good idea of what is needed to eat healthily as they sensibly select from a good range of healthy options at lunchtime. Their awareness of different cultures in the diverse society in which we live is not as well developed.

Standards attained are average, pupils' achievement is satisfactory and they make satisfactory progress through the school. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well and also make satisfactory progress. Fewer pupils than average gain the higher levels in national tests because teachers do not always know what pupils have already achieved owing to inadequacies in assessment. In the Foundation Stage, children get off to a good start and make good progress. This is largely because of thorough planning by teachers, which takes into account the wide range of needs of these young learners. The main school has been slow to use assessment data to check pupils' progress and make sure all do as well as they can. Consequently, standards have declined over the past four years and the progress pupils make has slowed. However, the acting headteacher has had a big impact in the short time that she has been in the school. Work seen during the inspection shows standards have improved greatly over those of previous years.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable and they use the links established in the curriculum well to enable pupils to practise their writing skills in other subjects. They mark books diligently and take time to write helpful comments on pupils' work. Pupils say that this enables them to make improvements. Teachers and teaching assistants develop good relationships with the pupils. As a result, attitudes to learning are good. However, assessment is not always used well to plan activities to match the needs and abilities of all pupils. At times, questioning during class discussions is not precisely linked to the abilities and specific needs of all pupils, which means that too many are not taking part.

The acting headteacher, very ably supported and challenged by a new chair of governors, has energised and empowered the teaching staff and there is a very real sense of team working and camaraderie, which bodes well for the future. Together they are embarking on a range of initiatives to move the school forward, some of which are already having an impact on how well pupils do in class. Management structures put in place, along with the progress recently made, show that the school has satisfactory capacity to improve further. Improvement since the previous inspection, however, has been inadequate and the school's self-evaluation is not as rigorous as it should be.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children's attainment on entry is broadly in line with expectations for their age. They are helped to settle quickly into life in the Reception class, so progress in the Foundation Stage is good and children are working at above average levels by the time they start in Year 1. The Foundation Stage is well led and managed; staff know the children's needs and teach them well. Children are offered many interesting, stimulating activities because the curriculum is planned well. They are able to gain a good understanding of how to apply their knowledge and skills in different areas of learning. Staff make regular observations of children's progress to ensure that tasks are matched well to their abilities. This results in good development of skills in mathematics, writing and information and communication technology (ICT). Children thrive and learn in a secure, happy environment. The school recognises the need to develop the outdoor learning area, which has not been fully exploited as a resource to develop and extend children's knowledge and skills across all areas of learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make self-evaluation an accurate and rigorous process at the heart of the improvement of teaching and learning.
- Ensure that more pupils make better and more consistent progress in relation to their capabilities, particularly pupils of higher ability.
- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that assessment is used more carefully in all classes to match work more accurately to pupils' abilities and their specific needs.
- Develop the system used to track pupils' progress so that it clearly identifies how well individuals are doing.

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

Standards in the assessments at the end of Year 2 in 2007 were broadly average, but a relatively low proportion of pupils gained the higher levels. Overall, pupils are making satisfactory progress through Years 1 and 2. This satisfactory progress continues in Years 3 to 6 and, by the time they leave, pupils' standards are average and their achievement is satisfactory through the school. There is little difference in the progress made by different groups of pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to others. Fewer pupils gained the higher levels in mathematics and science in the national tests in Year 6 in 2007 compared with English, so standards in these subjects were lower than those in English. There was a steady decline in both standards and achievement in 2005 and 2006 in Year 6, only partially reversed in 2007, because the school had not tracked pupils' progress carefully enough. This is being put right and effective systems to set targets for pupils and check that they are working towards them are now in place. Work seen during the inspection shows that standards are rising and more able pupils are doing better.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils is good. Pupils work and play together well, they enjoy their education and are happy and proud members of the school community. As one pupil said, 'It is more like a family here than a school.' Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good and is greatly underpinned by the school's Catholic ethos. Pupils know right from wrong and are considerate and friendly. They feel safe, saying very little bullying goes on and if they have a problem they know who to turn to. However, the school recognises that pupils are not being prepared well enough for living in a multi-ethnic society and the rich and varied cultures of other backgrounds are not visibly celebrated. Pupils develop a good awareness of healthy lifestyles and they greatly enjoy the school's healthy lunchtime menu and the fruit scheme. Pupils' opinions on important matters are actively sought through the school council and their views have made a difference. For example, they have contributed imaginative ideas on how to improve wet playtimes. Pupils take a lead in organising a variety of events in the local village and have raised considerable amounts of money for their chosen causes. They are well prepared socially for their future lives and the next stages in their education although this preparation does not extend to their development of basic skills, which is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory. Teachers are knowledgeable and classrooms are well ordered and calm. Lessons are typified by good relationships, mutual respect, humour and warmth. Teachers are good at telling pupils exactly what they are expected to do in lessons and this helps them make sense of their learning. Teaching assistants are well prepared and contribute well to the learning of the individuals they work with. In most lessons, pupils experience a range of approaches and this helps to sustain their interest, so that they quickly acquire new knowledge and skills. In an outstanding Years 1 and 2 literacy lesson, the sheer joy and total engagement of the pupils reflected the boundless enthusiasm of the teacher. However, this was an exception and too much teaching is still satisfactory. Assessment information is not used to plan activities to meet pupils' different needs effectively, so pupils are given activities that are either not challenging enough or too hard, and their learning is then restricted. This often applies to the more able pupils and sometimes to those who have difficulty acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The satisfactory curriculum promotes pupils' personal, social and health education effectively in all activities and, as a result, all pupils get on well with each other. The provision for literacy and numeracy is good but ICT is not used consistently to enhance learning across a range of subjects. The school has good plans to put this right. Literacy skills are consistently and carefully developed across other subjects. This greatly aids pupils' progress and attainment in writing. There are good opportunities for pupils to enjoy PE, music and the arts and there are good examples of pupils' artwork on display around the school. A wide range of out of school activities, which are very well supported by pupils, enhance the curriculum. Pupils in all classes thoroughly enjoy the school visits that support learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. A real strength in this aspect of provision is the way that pupils' personal and social needs are fostered in all that they do. Procedures for safeguarding pupils' welfare and health and safety are robust and regularly reviewed. The quality of the academic guidance that pupils receive, until recently, has been inadequate and this is the major reason why standards have fallen. Recent initiatives to set realistic and challenging targets for pupils in Year 6 and to monitor carefully the progress pupils make towards these targets are having an immediate effect. However, these procedures have not been extended to other year groups, although there are plans for this to happen.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Until recently, key actions to ensure continuous improvement had been neglected and the school has not made enough progress since it was last inspected in 2004. The fact that, although standards have fallen, most pupils continue to make satisfactory progress and develop well personally is a testimony to the energy and skills of the teaching staff. The acting headteacher has had a big and immediate impact on the school. Well supported by the governing body, she has empowered staff and given them a realistic picture of how well the school is doing and what it needs to do to improve. She has encouraged and enabled staff to take real responsibility for their respective areas and they have responded with enthusiasm and initiative. There is now a very real sense of teamwork and collaboration in the school and a clear sense of direction.

Much remains to be done. The school's evaluation of its performance, much of which pre-dates the acting headteacher's appointment, although correctly identifying its main strengths and weaknesses, lacks both quantitative and qualitative measures and offers little supporting evidence for its assertions. The use of assessment information to set individual targets for pupils and systems to track carefully their progress have only recently been put into place. The management responsibilities of individual teachers have not been developed well and so the monitoring of teaching and learning and of standards is not as rigorous as it should be. The acting headteacher and, importantly, the re-constructed governing body know this and steps have already been taken to redress most of these shortcomings and standards have already improved.

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

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
--	-----------------------

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	No
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	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	3
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	2
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?	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

16 May 2008

Dear pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Brewood, ST19 9BG

I would like to thank all of you very much for the kindness and consideration you showed to my colleague and me when we came to visit your school recently. We really enjoyed ourselves. We think you go to a satisfactory school with some things that are good. You told us many interesting things about your school which was very helpful. When we watched your lessons some of you showed us your books. We saw how well your teachers mark them and you told us that their comments helped you to improve and to meet your targets.

Here are some of the good things about your school.

- You behave well and you get on well with your fellow pupils. St Mary's is a well ordered school and you look after each other well.
- Teaching is satisfactory and sometimes good and your teachers are very concerned to make sure that you do as well as you can.
- By the time you are in Year 6, you reach standards that are similar to those of pupils in other schools.
- You learn lots about keeping yourselves safe and leading a healthy lifestyle.
- Your acting headteacher and your teachers know exactly how to make St Mary's an even better school.

What we have asked your school to do now.

- Make sure that your headteacher and teachers check thoroughly how well the school is doing so that they can improve it further.
- Make sure that you all make the same progress, particularly those of you who find your work easier.
- Make sure that when teachers plan activities for you they do not make them too easy or too hard but just right, so that you all do well.
- Improve the way teachers check how well you are all doing so that they can easily see exactly how much progress you are making.

I hope that you all continue to work hard and do well at St Mary's.

Best wishes

Michael Merchant Lead inspector

16 May 2008

Dear pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Brewood, ST19 9BG

I would like to thank all of you very much for the kindness and consideration you showed to my colleague and me when we came to visit your school recently. We really enjoyed ourselves. We think you go to a satisfactory school with some things that are good. You told us many interesting things about your school which was very helpful. When we watched your lessons some of you showed us your books. We saw how well your teachers mark them and you told us that their comments helped you to improve and to meet your targets.

Here are some of the good things about your school.

- You behave well and you get on well with your fellow pupils. St Mary's is a well ordered school and you look after each other well.
- Teaching is satisfactory and sometimes good and your teachers are very concerned to make sure that you do as well as you can.
- By the time you are in Year 6, you reach standards that are similar to those of pupils in other schools.
- You learn lots about keeping yourselves safe and leading a healthy lifestyle.
- Your acting headteacher and your teachers know exactly how to make St Mary's an even better school.

What we have asked your school to do now.

- Make sure that your headteacher and teachers check thoroughly how well the school is doing so that they can improve it further.
- Make sure that you all make the same progress, particularly those of you who find your work easier.
- Make sure that when teachers plan activities for you they do not make them too easy or too hard but just right, so that you all do well.
- Improve the way teachers check how well you are all doing so that they can easily see exactly how much progress you are making.

I hope that you all continue to work hard and do well at St Mary's.

Best wishes

Michael Merchant
Lead inspector