

St Mary Magdalene Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114565
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	319456
Inspection dates	24–25 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Sheila Browning

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	224
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	J Dance
Headteacher	Patricia Longmire
Date of previous school inspection	21 June 2007
School address	Hastings Road Bexhill-on-Sea TN40 2ND
Telephone number	01424 735810
Fax number	01424 733664

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly above average but varies widely from year group to year group. Most pupils are of White British heritage with increasing numbers of pupils coming into school from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds. Before the present headteacher's appointment in September 2007, the school experienced considerable disruption to staffing, leadership and management. When the school was inspected in June 2007, it was found to be in need of significant improvement and given a Notice to Improve.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 3 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

This is a satisfactory school. The school has set about tackling its weaknesses with a shared determination. The recent improvements show the strong commitment of the staff and governors to act on advice given by the local authority. The appointment of the headteacher and senior management team has triggered the drive for change set against a period of uncertain leadership. Parents comment that 'the school is vastly improved'. The majority of them appreciate the school's efforts in coming through a difficult period, but a very small minority are critical of aspects of the school's performance and would welcome more involvement in the school.

At the time of the previous inspection, standards were inadequate. Since then the school has worked hard, and with some success, to reduce the legacy of underperformance and standards are now average. However, standards especially in writing, mathematics and science remain too low. Children get off to a satisfactory start in the Reception Year from their starting points with the skills expected for children of a similar age to reach broadly average standards at the start of Year 1. By the end of Year 2, standards are average in English, mathematics and science. Standards are average in Year 6, but this reflects good progress for those pupils where there was a legacy of past underachievement. Although pupils' achievement is satisfactory across the school, there are still pockets where this is less so. There are examples of good progress in some year groups, particularly in mathematics and writing, because of the focus on improving these subjects. Although matching work to pupils' level of ability is not always a strong feature of teaching. The progress of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is consistently good.

A main reason why pupils make satisfactory gains in their learning is that teaching and the curriculum are now satisfactory and there are pockets of more exciting and motivating teaching. New assessment procedures and better checking of pupils' progress help identify any underperformance. Older pupils know their targets and understand how to improve their learning. Whilst pupils are well cared for and supported, some pupils do not always find learning exciting if the teaching does not involve them enough in lesson activities. Parents say they like 'the religious values, warmth and atmosphere of the school'. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is good but overall personal development is satisfactory. This is because some pupils do not enjoy their learning as much as they could. Pupils enjoy developing a healthy lifestyle and talk enthusiastically about the enrichments offered through sport, music and environmental activities. Resources have greatly improved, and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) is helping pupils to improve their skills. Teachers are becoming increasingly skilled in managing the behaviour of challenging pupils and pupils' behaviour is satisfactory. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection.

The headteacher leads the school well and is developing a supportive, and increasingly accountable, team who has a good focus on improving standards. Nevertheless, leadership and management are satisfactory overall because middle leaders do not yet have a strong enough impact on improving school performance. Governors are better trained and informed about the school's work and are more effective in checking school improvement. The school realises there is still much to do. Senior leaders are not complacent for the future and have a satisfactory capacity to bring about improvements.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children make satisfactory progress from their starting points. By the end of Reception, they are on track to meet national expectations in most areas of learning, except for linking sounds and letters and mathematical development. Although staff plan a suitable range of activities, learning is constrained by the learning environment and the tendency for adults to do things for the children rather than let them develop their independent skills. Consequently, some children lack confidence in social situations. The school has plans to develop a more stimulating environment. Children have satisfactory opportunities to learn through practical experiences. Staff work well together and the children are well cared for, but opportunities for more exciting and participative learning are sometimes missed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing, mathematics and science throughout the school and increase the amount of good teaching to ensure work is matched more closely to pupils' prior attainment.
- Strengthen the roles of subject leaders so they have a greater impact on raising standards in their subjects.
- Involve parents more in their children's learning and the school's future development.

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 are now average. They are average in both Year 2 and Year 6 and are much improved from the previous year. Most pupils make satisfactory progress across the school, but there are pockets of uneven progress that reflect the varying quality of teaching. Standards, especially in writing, mathematics and science, remain too low. The school has worked hard to secure some continuity in pupils' learning and this, with improved resources especially in ICT, is helping pupils to improve their rate of progress. The school's ongoing focus on improving pupils' achievement in mathematics and writing is beginning to have a positive impact. An example of its success is the accelerated progress in Year 6 over the year. However, in Year 5, despite much support, pupils' progress has been affected by the high turnover of teachers. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well because of the support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils show a good awareness of how to lead a healthy lifestyle as seen, for example, in their enjoyment of sport. The school's Activemark award reflects the wide range of sporting activities in which pupils participate. To make playtimes more interesting, Year 5 pupils are training as playground leaders. Pupils say that this and the use of play equipment have made playtimes more interesting. Pupils understand how to stay safe. They are very involved in the school and local community, as members of the school and class councils, guardian angels and the eco-committee. Better use of ICT has led to more opportunities for pupils to be involved in their learning. Improvements to standards in basic literacy and numeracy skills ensure pupils are suitably prepared for their future lives. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural

development is good, though multicultural awareness is satisfactory. Children's personal development is adequate in Reception. Attendance is good and there have been no exclusions. The school is much calmer and harmonious and behaviour is satisfactory. The minority of pupils who find it hard to behave are well supported to minimise any disruption to other pupils' learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory, but there are strengths in the upper age groups. Whilst effective teaching methods are mostly used, pupils' learning can be limited by less exciting teaching and the gaps in their knowledge. Lesson planning is satisfactory and most teachers maintain good order and sustain good relationships with pupils. Good teaching engages pupils enthusiastically and forges creative links between subjects. Year 6 pupils, stimulated by writing about the rainforest, made small creatures, created an environment, and used ICT to record an animated sequence. The best learning takes place when pupils have practical learning experiences. Teaching across the school is not always well matched to pupils' learning needs. Teachers use targets well in English and mathematics, but marking is not always used effectively to help pupils improve their work. Support for those with learning disabilities and/or disabilities is good. Opportunities are sometimes missed to celebrate pupils' achievements in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Personal, social and health education support pupils' personal development satisfactorily. The whole school focus on improving writing and mathematics has led to a rise in standards particularly for pupils in Year 6. Improvements to the curriculum are also seen in better resources and improved use of ICT. French is taught in Years 1 to 6 and German in Year 6, which helps pupils to enjoy learning about different languages and cultures. Pupils select from a range of popular activities including a before school club and a nurture club which supports their personal development well. Changes to the curriculum are helping pupils to make up lost ground in their learning, but the school is aware there is more work to be done in making learning much more enjoyable for pupils. Reception children have an adequate range of learning activities, although opportunities for independent learning are underdeveloped.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Good attention is given to pupils' personal welfare and pastoral care. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are robust and pupils say they feel safe. Procedures are good for identifying vulnerable pupils and for supporting those with particular learning needs. The strong links with outside agencies and local schools benefit pupils and their families. Academic guidance has some strengths in English and mathematics but is undeveloped in other subjects. Teachers are becoming increasingly skilled at assessing and checking pupils' ability levels which has led to improved standards. Older pupils know their targets in English and mathematics, but younger ones are less clear. The school is aware of the variability in the quality of marking. Transition arrangements to secondary school are effective, and the school is set to improve its transition arrangements within year groups.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The recently appointed headteacher has lost no time in setting priorities to improve the school and raise standards. She has developed a loyal and increasingly skilled team who share her determination for school improvement. Parents support the school and appreciate that it has gone through a difficult time. A very small minority, however, do not feel as well informed and involved as they would like to be. The school runs smoothly and systems are well established. A good example is the tracking system that now helps identify weaknesses in pupil performance and tailors support for individuals accordingly. Middle managers take more responsibility for the school's performance, but their work is still developing. Subject leaders are not yet proactive enough in checking provision and outcomes in their subjects. The governing body is now effective in understanding the needs of the school and monitors its performance more closely. The local authority has an agreed action plan, which is effectively improving the school's day to day provision, but which is insufficient for longer term school improvement. The school is reducing its deficit budget through careful spending plans. Its self-evaluation is broadly accurate but occasionally modest in its analysis. The school is now satisfactorily placed to improve in 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?	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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
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	2

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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	3
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	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

25 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary Magdalene Catholic Primary School, Bexhill-on-Sea TN40 2ND

Thank you for helping us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking with you, looking at your work, and seeing you in lessons. We think St Mary Magdalene is a satisfactory and improving school where teaching is satisfactory.

Here are some important things about your school.

- Some of you make good progress, especially in writing and mathematics.
- You told us that you know how to lead safe, healthy lives and that you are proud to be councillors, play leaders and guardian angels.
- Your behaviour is much better now. Keep it up!
- Your attendance is good and staff take good care of you.
- You use ICT very well in your subjects and you told us how much the resources had improved recently.
- You like learning languages and all the extra clubs the school offers.
- Your new headteacher and governors are making sure the school is now better.

Here are some things that the school has been asked to improve.

- Help you to always do your very best in writing, mathematics and science and make sure that teaching is always good and is closely matched to your needs.
- Help those teachers who are subject leaders to check on the work you are doing so that all pupils are doing as well as they possibly can.
- Involve your parents more in your learning and in the school's future development.

You can also help by always working hard and doing your best.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Browning Lead inspector