

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101662
Local Authority	Bromley
Inspection number	323504
Inspection date	23 September 2008
Reporting inspector	David Whatson

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	429
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	61
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Elizabeth Jones
Headteacher	Mrs Isobel Vassallo
Date of previous school inspection	12 September 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Westgate Road Beckenham BR3 5DE
Telephone number	020 8650 2355
Fax number	020 8663 4845

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. They evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and the Early Years Foundation Stage, and investigated the following issues:

- How much progress have boys and the more able made in writing in the last year compared to the previous year?
- The quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' progress?
- The effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels at sustaining improvements in standards and progress.

The inspectors gathered evidence from performance data, observations of teaching and the work produced by pupils, 129 parents' questionnaires and discussions with pupils, representatives of the governing body, and some members of staff also contributed to the judgements.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspection found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included in this report.

Description of the school

St Mary's is larger than most primary schools. All the pupils that attend this oversubscribed school are Catholics. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) comprises two Reception classes. Very few pupils take free school meals. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and nearly all speak English as their first language. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is broadly average. Most of these pupils have either specific learning difficulties or autism. There are fewer pupils with statements of special educational needs than found nationally. The school has received the Challenge Award, the Artsmark and has Healthy School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Mary's is a good school and pupils achieve well as a result of the good provision. In one of the many ringing endorsements, one parent wrote, 'St Mary's is a happy, loving and caring school. High Standards and expectations are a strength.' Another wrote, 'The Catholic ethos of the school promotes a great sense of community which involves all the family, resulting in great friendships.' This very strong sense of community underpins the outstanding care, guidance and support and contributes significantly to pupils' excellent personal development.

Teaching and learning are good and sometimes outstanding. This is also the pattern in national assessments at the end of Year 2 and tests at the end of Year 6. Standards are generally above average but peaked in 2008 to be exceptionally high. In particular, standards in reading, writing and mathematics in Year 2 have been steadily rising. At Key Stage 2, there is variation between year groups and between subjects. In 2008, pupils' attainment was exceptionally high in English and mathematics but not in science. In English, pupils' performance in reading across the school has been particularly impressive. However, the school has correctly identified that this is not matched by pupils' performance in writing, especially by boys and the most able. The school's own monitoring shows weaknesses in the pupils' writing and quality of presentation and that pupils currently in Year 6 are on track to obtain above average standards again but not quite the heights of 2008.

Pupils are usually very enthusiastic in lessons. Many of the strengths in teaching, accurately identified by the headteacher, were evident during the inspection. For instance, lessons are well planned and teachers are often good at providing activities that excite and interest their pupils. Many have high expectations of what their pupils can achieve. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning, especially when working with groups. Teachers are very good role models. Throughout a lesson, they make repeated references to the lesson's objective and this helps pupils maintain their focus. Occasionally pupils' enthusiasm wanes and the pace of the lessons is slow, when teachers spend too long talking and do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to explain their thinking and knowledge. The headteacher is working hard to increase the proportion of excellent teaching. The quality of marking is improving but it is not yet consistent or precise enough, especially in writing, for pupils to know exactly what they must do to improve.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Their behaviour is excellent, and they are especially considerate towards one another, saying they feel free from bullying and harassment. One pupil said, 'friendship and caring are very important - you don't then feel sad or lonely here'. Pupils really love school and their attendance is excellent. Pupils not only have an exceptional understanding of the need to stay healthy (as one pupil put it, 'It helps you learn'), but also how to stay healthy through exercise, sport and healthy eating. Through the effective implementation of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning programme (SEAL), and additional support for the more vulnerable, pupils have a thorough understanding of how to keep safe and be happy. Pupils are given a very good grounding in citizenship. They are closely involved with the local community and readily accept school-based responsibilities such as tending the school's allotment and being representatives on the influential school council. Pupils' understanding of different faiths and cultures is developing. Since the last inspection the school has attempted to diversify its curriculum with some success. For instance, they are establishing contacts with a school in Paris and pupils have studied Hinduism and

Judaism. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to gain a broader view of life in different parts of this country.

There is outstanding care, guidance and support of pupils. Procedures to promote pupils' welfare are robust and pastoral care is exemplary. A parent echoed the views of many others when she wrote, 'The enthusiasm, support and encouragement the children receive from their teachers is great'. Staff know pupils extremely well and treat them as individuals. The assessment and tracking of pupils' performance is meticulously carried out each term. Teachers very quickly identify those pupils at risk of falling behind. The very effective interventions for pupils with LDD enables them to make good progress too. Staff have worked hard since the last inspection to develop provision for the most able pupils. The school's recent award from the National Association for Able Children in Education recognises this and praises the school's identification and provision for gifted and talented pupils.

The school's ongoing commitment to developing the curriculum contributes to the pupils' good progress by increasing their motivation and enjoyment of learning. Staff are in the process of devising a well balanced curriculum that is matched to pupils' interests and abilities and is focused on developing pupils skills. It is enhanced by a very good range of popular additional activities.

The driving force behind the school's success is the good quality leadership. The headteacher gives a very clear direction for the work of the school. She receives the full support from the committed and highly professional staff and governors. As one parent wrote, 'This is a beautiful school with strong leadership and committed staff'. As a result of effective systems of monitoring and leaders' clear evaluation of strengths and areas to develop, the school is on an upward path. The school's motto is 'Onwards and Upwards'. Currently, the team is rightly focused on raising standards in writing and science. Subject leaders have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities and monitor most aspects well. Governors ask very searching questions and make use of their considerable expertise to benefit the school.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The quality of care in the Reception classes is summed up by one parent who wrote, 'My child has just started and has settled extremely well... she appears happy and confident because of the individual care and attention to individuality shown by all staff.' When they start Reception, most children are working at the expected level for their age. Because of good progress, their skills and knowledge are above the expected level by the time they start Year 1. Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Relationships are excellent and children are confident, polite and cooperative and quickly get used to new routines. Teaching and learning are good. Children enjoy choosing from an interesting range of activities indoors and in the new outdoor area. There is a good level of teacher-directed learning. Although children's language development has been a focus and has improved, it remains lower than other areas of learning. Staff frequently assess children's work and this is becoming increasingly accurate. However, there are still some inconsistencies, especially in writing assessments, between classes. The school has received effective and valued support from the local authority since the last inspection. Leadership and management are now good and consequently children's performance is rising.

What the school should do to improve further

- From the earliest age, raise standards in writing by improving pupils' presentation and by staff and pupils making greater use of specific targets that detail exactly what they need to do next to improve their work.
- Provide more opportunities to promote a greater understanding and awareness of the diversity and similarities within modern British culture.

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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?	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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

Leadership and management

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	1
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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

06 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Beckenham, BR3 5DE

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when my colleague and I recently visited your school. We enjoyed talking with several of you and being in some of your lessons. It was interesting to see how much you learn and grow up in your time at St Mary's.

We agree with many of your parents that you go to a good school. There is so much that we like but I cannot mention everything here. This is what we think are the most important things.

- You make good progress. By the time you leave at the end of Year 6, you are much better at English, mathematics and science than pupils in most other schools. You should be very proud of all of this.
- You are very friendly and welcoming and your behaviour is excellent.
- You learn well because your lessons are good and adults give you a lot of support and help.
- Your teachers are good at planning many exciting things that make you think, work hard and enjoy learning.
- All of the adults in your school make sure that you are exceptionally well looked after.
- The people who help run your school do a good job in making sure that you get a good education, especially your headteacher.

Even in a good school like yours, there is always something that could be better. I have suggested two things that I think will make a real difference.

- Firstly, raise standards in writing. This can be done by you improving your handwriting and presentation and by you and your teachers making better use of targets and marking so you know exactly how to improve.
- Secondly, provide you with more opportunities so that you can understand the similarities and differences within modern British culture.

I hope you continue to enjoy St Mary's.

Yours sincerely

David Whatson

Lead Inspector