

# St Mary's The Mount Catholic Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	104232
<b>Local Authority</b>	Walsall
<b>Inspection number</b>	323995
<b>Inspection dates</b>	2–3 February 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Judi Bedawi

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.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	236
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	P Taylor
<b>Headteacher</b>	Catherine Amos
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 February 2006
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Jesson Road Walsall WS1 3AY
<b>Telephone number</b>	01922 720711
<b>Fax number</b>	01922 622052

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<b>Age group</b>	3–11
<b>Inspection dates</b>	2–3 February 2009
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

St Mary's The Mount is an average size, one-form entry, urban Roman Catholic primary school. It is oversubscribed, with low mobility. The Early Years Foundation Stage is for children from three years old, with part-time nursery provision and a Reception class. In recent years attainment on entry to the Nursery has been broadly in line with expectations for children of the same age. Currently attainment on entry is below age-related expectations because of the school's changing intake, reflecting a wider spectrum of skills and needs. The school has just set up a weekly parent and toddler group. Most pupils are White British. An increasing number are from minority ethnic backgrounds, with around 5% at an early stage of acquiring English language skills. The governing body manages extended day childcare provision for breakfast and after-school clubs, with 87 pupils registered. The school has the After School Clubs Aiming Higher silver award, the Healthy Schools, the Artsmark Gold and Investors in People awards.

## 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 The Mount is a good school. It provides a good quality of education for all its pupils, which is due in no small part to the outstanding headteacher, who leads very visibly with a finger firmly on the school's pulse. This enables all staff, including the able leaders and managers, to remain fully focused on the drive to further raise the good standards and achievement. The governing body fulfils its role well, offering thoughtful support but ready to challenge senior leaders. The way that the school reaches out to other cultures and faiths is noteworthy.

Pupils' personal and spiritual development is excellent. They love school and even during heavy snowfall, attendance is excellent. Pupils are enthusiastic learners, enthralled by challenges. Their relationships, behaviour and attitudes are excellent, with real tolerance and empathy for others, demonstrated particularly well in discussions about diversity. As a result, pupils feel extremely safe and bullying is not a concern. They adopt healthy lifestyles and enjoy sport. Pupils are very proud of their vibrant school community, contributing strongly to its effectiveness through the school council. They are well prepared for moving on, but this could be enhanced with more opportunities for independent learning from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards.

Pupils make good progress as they move through the school no matter what their individual ability, background or circumstances. Good use is made of data to accurately analyse performance and attainment, so strengths and development areas are clearly identified. For example, in September, writing became a whole-school focus because achievement was not as good in the previous year. There is already good improvement. Good intervention strategies are used to support targeted groups and raise their achievement. As a result, standards are above national averages by the end of Year 2 and at the end of Year 6.

Teaching is good, with good impact on pupils' progress. Teamwork between teachers and their assistants is a significant strength. Teachers sometimes talk for too long in lessons, which slows the rate of pupils' learning. Teachers are good at assessing progress, but marking to show pupils how to improve, so they work with better independence, is inconsistent. The curriculum provides well for pupils' needs, with good focus on improving subject areas. Provision for enrichment and extended day activities is excellent, with numerous activities, such as the school orchestra, helping pupils improve their cultural development. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, provision has still to embed to provide a better balance between play and learning and to reflect children's wider needs. Topics do not routinely include activities related to all areas of learning so that children can develop their skills and make amazing discoveries for themselves.

Pastoral care, support and the guidance offered to pupils, including tracking progress, is outstanding. The safeguarding of pupils meets current government requirements. Community cohesion is good. Almost all parents value the school's work. These comments reflect their views: 'The staff are extremely hard working and caring'; 'The headteacher is wonderful!' and 'Children are happy and thrive in every way.'

The school is moving on at a good pace and is well placed to secure further improvements.

## Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

### Grade: 2

Children settle happily in their bright, well-resourced, welcoming environment. They feel secure because the staff take time to get to know them well and to gain the involvement of their

families. Children quickly grow in confidence, enjoying known routines and acting as 'special helpers'. As a result, their personal development is outstanding. They increasingly play and learn together, sensibly taking turns, sharing activities and behaving exceptionally well, relishing praise and encouragement for doing their best. They are proud of their efforts; one child positively glowed as she counted up to five. Activities are planned effectively, taking good account of children's individual needs, including learning difficulties and early acquisition of English language skills. However, the balance of teacher-led and child-initiated learning through play does not yet ensure that children choose for themselves and fully explore all areas of learning within the topic-based curriculum. Teaching and good teacher assistant support build securely on children's prior social, language and number skills so that they make good progress relative to their starting points as they move through the Early Years Foundation Stage into Year 1. Children are nurtured exceptionally well; relationships are excellent, as is welfare provision. The Early Years Foundation Stage is effectively led and managed, particularly in monitoring and tracking progress, overseen by the headteacher. Outdoor provision has been improved well with more effective use of outside facilities. Children really enjoyed playing, albeit briefly, in the snow.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, ensure better balance between play and learning so that children are stimulated and challenged and able to explore and discover for themselves.
- Develop the momentum of teaching through sharper explanations and lesson pace allied to consistently informative marking so that pupils work more independently and their learning accelerates.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Children currently enter Nursery with skill levels below those expected for their age in most areas of learning, reflecting wider needs and the changing school intake. This follows several years of attainment on entry being broadly in line with age-related expectations. Despite needing to develop skills in communication and language, children make good gains relative to their various starting points as they move through the Early Years Foundation Stage so that most are at expected levels on entry to Year 1. They continue to make good progress, with standards above the national average in both Key Stage 1 and 2. This is because data analysis, tracking and monitoring are good, providing an accurate overview of progress and trends. The school has identified and is addressing dips in the attainment of higher achieving pupils at both Key Stage 1 and 2, using good booster and intervention strategies. There is similar success in the good progress seen in the whole-school writing focus, with presentation of work being notable. Resources and books of interest to boys have developed their involvement well. There is no significant difference in the achievement of pupils with learning difficulties or those who have little or no knowledge of English because of skilled one-to-one support and the involvement of parents and volunteers with relevant community language expertise.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils really love school and the sense of belonging to a large 'family'. This is reflected in their excellent attendance. They learn with enthusiasm, work hard and relish challenges, eagerly devouring new information. Pupils particularly enjoy using computers and seeing their work

displayed on the Learning Platform programme. Their behaviour is exemplary so they feel very secure. If they need to talk there is always a known adult ready to listen.

They offer a warm welcome to visitors, and are proud of their school and of their work. Achievement at all levels is joyously shared and celebrated. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, characterised by tolerance to others and perceptive views on diversity, imagining how it would feel to live in a country if they had no understanding of its language or culture. One pupil said, 'You might feel very alone.' Pupils enjoy learning about other faiths and cultures and visiting different places of worship. Their expectations of responsibility and care for others are of high calibre. Older pupils happily organise playtime games for younger ones. School council members debate issues thoroughly before making mature decisions.

The excellent range of sporting activities and clubs and delicious healthy lunchtime choices contribute exceptionally well to pupils' adoption of sensible lifestyles. Pupils are involved well in local community events. The orchestra performs in the town and elderly residents are invited to school plays. Fundraising helps to develop understanding of the wider world beyond pupils' experiences. Opportunities for pupils to organise their learning independently are not as well developed. Pupils leave school with some sadness but confident and well prepared for their futures.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The quality of teamwork between teachers and their skilled teaching assistants is a real strength, impacting positively on good progress and pupils' enjoyment. Teachers plan and assess work effectively to meet pupils' needs, but informative marking is inconsistent across the school. As a result, pupils do not always know how to improve their work independently. Teachers' subject knowledge is impressive, with good questioning that encourages pupils' thinking skills well. However, too often, teachers take far too long in explaining work or just talking, so that pupils have less time to learn and the lesson pace slows. Relationships are positive, with strong mutual respect.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

All subjects are covered, effectively meeting pupils' needs. Art, literacy and history are often linked well to hold pupils' interest. The school realises this could be further extended to develop pupils' creativity in recording their work. Music is a well-developed subject and many pupils learn to play instruments. ICT is not used consistently to help pupils fully develop skills and knowledge across the curriculum. Otherwise, there is good focus across different subjects on the improvement of skills and knowledge. Enrichment activities are excellent, with an extensive range of extra-curricular clubs and visits, such as the Alton Castle residential retreat. Professional artists and other visitors positively extend pupils' experiences, helping to uncover new talents. This contributes extremely well to pupils' personal development. Breakfast and after-school extended day provision is outstanding because it links closely to learning, including homework, and offers pupils many new interests. Children of all ages attend. It is greatly valued by parents.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils are exceptionally well cared for within a calm, purposeful environment, which enables them to thrive personally and academically. The quality of care extends to families, with prompt access to external agency support available as needed. Attendance is well above the national average, but any unexpected absence is thoroughly investigated. Procedures for academic guidance are impressive. Individual progress is thoroughly and regularly tracked to quickly identify those doing better or less well than predicted. Pupils mostly know their targets and there is good practice in pupils' evaluation of their own learning in topics and through writing reviews of books they have read.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher works closely with her senior leaders and middle managers, involving them fully in the process of monitoring, evaluating and reviewing school performance. This provides a clear focus on raising standards and achievement at all levels. New initiatives and strategies are readily adopted so that the school never stands still. The questioning governing body offers a wide range of skills and experience to improve and extend the school's effectiveness. The school's evaluation and knowledge of itself is good. Analysis and use of achievement data and identification of areas for improvement are sharply honed. The school development plan is a good working document and includes diversity action plans. Staff are encouraged to undertake training to enhance their skills to benefit pupils' learning. Attention to equality and diversity is good and well reflected in school policy and practice. Community cohesion is good, with an audit of provision in place. Partnerships are also good. However, the school is keen to further develop parental involvement and more links with other schools. Finances are carefully used and managed.

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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?	2
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 <sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	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

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 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	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

**Annex B**

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

4 February 2009

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of St Mary's The Mount Catholic School, Walsall WS1 3AY

You gave us both such a warm welcome when we visited your friendly school recently. You really helped us a lot by telling us so much about your school, so thank you. We were pleased to see that you are happy and enjoy learning.

We think that you go to a good school and that your excellent headteacher is making sure that you always enjoy working as hard as you can. Your teachers do a good job in helping you to learn, so the progress you make and the standards you reach are good. We were very impressed by your excellent attendance and behaviour and the way that you always help each other. You say that you love your school and we believe you.

There are two things we have suggested to your school that they should improve.

- We want you younger children to have even more fun in play and learning, with more chances to choose different things to do and find out more for yourselves.
- We are asking your teachers to give you more time in lessons for learning rather than listening, and to use marking to tell you how to improve your work.

We know that you will happily help your teachers with these challenges.

Yours sincerely

Judi Bedawi

Lead inspector