

St Marie's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104466
Local Authority	Knowsley
Inspection number	324055
Inspection dates	9–10 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Kevin Johnson

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	206
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
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr W Mushrow
Headteacher	Mrs P Cooney
Date of previous school inspection	30 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Bigdale Drive Northwood Kirkby Liverpool Merseyside L33 6XL
Telephone number	0151 477 8480

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	9–10 February 2009
Inspection number	324055

Fax number

0151 477 8481

Age group	3-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average sized school is located in an area where there is significant social need. Almost all pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is very high. A larger than average proportion of pupils has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage comprises either morning or afternoon Nursery sessions followed by a full time Reception class. Healthy Schools, Activemark and Artsmark awards have been achieved and the school has gained extended school status. There is a breakfast club on site.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Marie's is a good school with some outstanding features and is very much at the heart of its local community.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Their behaviour is exemplary as are their politeness and good manners. Attendance is good and pupils enjoy their lessons tremendously because, as they explain, 'We always have interesting things to do.' Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Relationships are excellent and pupils are extremely mindful of others in the playground, and in lessons, where they frequently help each other with their work. They have a good knowledge of faiths and cultures other than their own. Pupils are proud of their Healthy Schools award and understand how a sensible diet and lots of activity contribute to their health and well-being. Staff are especially watchful in the way they care for and support pupils and ensure that they are properly safeguarded. Consequently, pupils feel safe and are very happy to be in school. Pupils contribute extremely well to the smooth running of their school. There is a very active school council as well as play-leaders and prefects, who ensure justice and fair play. Designing, making and retailing artefacts at the Christmas fair is just one of the many ways in which pupils develop enterprise skills. These activities help them become independent and add experience in helping secure their future economic well-being.

The quality of teaching and learning is good and accounts for pupils achieving well and making good progress during their time at the school. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage get off to a good start. From their very low levels of skill and understanding when they enter the Nursery, good teaching results in most children working within the early learning goals by the time they leave Reception. Teachers build well on this earlier success and pupils' progress continues to pick up in Years 1 and 2, especially in reading and writing where standards are close to those expected for their age. The standards pupils reach at the end of Year 6 are broadly in line with those expected for their age but the proportion securing the higher level in mathematics falls short of that expectation. Mathematics has been identified as a whole-school priority for improvement. The curriculum is well planned. It is enriched by an exceptional range of after-school sports and other clubs to help pupils nurture their various interests. This helps pupils to value their time in school and to take a wider view of what the world has to offer.

The school is led and managed well. The headteacher has established an effective team who work tirelessly to bring about improvements. Leaders check the school's performance effectively and are quick to put in place systems to move the school forward. They embraced the support given by local authority consultants and the resultant staff training has enhanced teachers' subject knowledge and teaching skills. This has helped improve pupils' achievement and standards, particularly in writing. An appropriate and well focused school improvement plan has been agreed. Leaders know the school well and self-evaluation is good. Given the past record of improvement and current strengths there is good capacity for the school to improve further, and it provides good value for money. Governors are well informed and make an effective contribution to school improvement. St Marie's is a welcoming and inclusive school which, overall, promotes equality well. The school responds well to the needs of the local community, offering valuable support to families and local groups. However, leaders recognise that more can be done to reach out to communities beyond the local area to develop further pupils' understanding of living in a culturally diverse society.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is effective and well led and managed. They make good progress in their learning and development because of well planned activities that challenge them and make learning fun. When children start in the Nursery class their skills are very low in all areas of learning when compared with expectations for their age. By the end of Reception, children are happy, confident learners. Although still below the nationally expected levels overall, many are working within the early learning goals. Planning sometimes starts from the children themselves. For example, the delight of having new shoes to start the new term inspired a Reception class project on traditional stories such as 'The Elves and the Shoemaker'. This gave the children the opportunity to develop their language and creative skills across all areas of their learning. Daily lessons on letters and sounds have a good impact in raising confidence and encouraging children to attempt reading and writing more often. There is a very strong focus on developing children's personal, social and emotional skills from the moment they enter Nursery. Staff work hard to ensure children develop a sense of curiosity, as well as skills such as listening and sharing to help them learn more effectively. Staff ensure that children's introduction to the Early Years Foundation Stage is as smooth as possible so they quickly settle into daily routines. All welfare requirements are fully met. There are very good relationships with parents and carers who are well informed about their children's progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics and increase the number of pupils who reach the higher levels.
- Take effective steps to promote wider community links to develop pupils' understanding of living in a culturally diverse society.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Results in the 2007 national tests showed standards at both key stages to be below the national average. Despite a general rising trend at Key Stage 1, unvalidated teacher assessments for 2008 still show just below average standards. There is a much improved picture at Key Stage 2, however, where school assessments and 2008 provisional national test results show that standards rose dramatically, especially in English. Overall standards, subject to validation, are now in line with the national expectation. Given children's starting points on entering Nursery, this represents good overall achievement. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well. Their work is planned to match their particular needs and they benefit from the additional support they receive in the classroom.

Current assessments and inspection evidence indicate improving standards in reading and writing across the whole school. Standards reached by pupils in Year 2 are currently much closer to that expected for their age. However, there is still work to be done in mathematics, particularly the attainment of the more able pupils in both key stages.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils are very proud of their school. They are friendly and welcoming and treat one another respectfully. They show great enthusiasm for lessons and activities outside the classroom,

particularly sports. Healthy lifestyles are very much a part of their every day life. Pupils' attendance is good and the weekly acclaim for the best class attendance vigorously pursued. Pupils have strong views about the unpleasant effects of bullying and racism. They are determined that neither will exist in their school. They respect the values of different faiths and cultures and are aware of the importance of cultural harmony to people's general well-being. The school council allows pupils a strong voice in school affairs. Recently, they were involved in the appointment of a new member of staff. Pupils work very effectively with other schools, business and community groups to gain the life skills they need to be active members of a community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Well planned and organised lessons contribute effectively to the good teaching and learning. Resources are used creatively to promote learning, especially the use of electronic whiteboards to keep pupils alert and interested. Teachers' subject knowledge is good which means that lessons are taught confidently with good pace and high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Staff use a variety of teaching methods. For example, short, sharp tasks using small whiteboards, discussion with a partner to solve a problem or to test each other's word skills. This helps make lessons interesting and keeps pupils engaged and focused on their learning. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. Pupils feel valued and, as a result, are more willing to try hard. Teaching assistants generally make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning, but occasionally they are only effective during practical activities because they do not have a clear role during whole-class teaching sessions. Teachers mark pupils' writing well but they do not apply the same rigour across all subjects. This is noticeable in mathematics, where less guidance is given to pupils about how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy the practical activities which help them to learn and to achieve well. The strong emphasis on literacy, mathematics and information and communication technology means that pupils acquire sound basic skills which they increasingly apply across other subjects to make learning more purposeful. The introduction of French and the work done with groups outside school bring added interest and new challenges. The provision of after-school clubs is an outstanding feature of the curriculum. Provision for pupils' personal, social, health education and citizenship is well established. The strong contribution from outside agencies, such as medical and emergency services, ensures that pupils are aware of potential hazards they may face. By the time they leave the school they are well prepared to make informed choices about their personal well-being.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The pastoral care provided contributes well to the very positive ethos that permeates throughout the school. Parents agree overwhelmingly that their children are well cared for. Some comment very positively about how important families are to the school and also warmly appreciate the help and support offered to them. For example, the breakfast club encourages pupils to attend

school and to arrive on time. Parents feel well informed about their children's progress. The most vulnerable pupils benefit very well from the sensitive help and guidance received from caring staff members. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are in place and meet government requirements. Pupils receive effective guidance with regard to behavioural and relationship issues with others. The school does all that it can to ensure pupils attend regularly. Staff work well with the families of persistent absentees, which is helping improve the attendance of these pupils. There are good systems in place to check on pupils' academic progress and to set learning targets. Pupils know these targets well and help to measure their own progress by assessing each other's work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher's leadership provides clear direction for the school. She is ably supported by senior leaders who fulfil a crucial role in helping to evaluate the school's effectiveness. All leaders are kept up to date with local and national initiatives. This helps the school's future planning, informs professional development and has been instrumental in raising standards and achievement. Checks on pupils' academic progress are rigorous. The school exceeded the academic targets it set for 2008 and has raised its sights by setting even more challenging targets for future years. The school links effectively with other schools and local businesses to provide pupils with good learning opportunities. There are curricular links with the local high school which enable pupils to gain business and enterprise skills. The school fosters links with the local community exceptionally well. For example, the school offers family learning for parents and carers. Groups of senior citizens use the school to run their art classes and the school recently welcomed a group of disaffected teenagers who gained their accreditation as sports coaches by working with St Marie's pupils. Nevertheless, the school acknowledges that its efforts to promote global aspects of community cohesion are limited. The school has made good progress since the previous inspection in improving the provision for literacy and consolidating its extended school status. Governors are watchful over the school's progress and fulfil their role as critical friend well.

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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?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
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	3
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	2
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

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?	2

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	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?	3
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**

I would like to thank you very much on behalf of the other inspector and myself for the warm welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. It was a real pleasure to talk to you about your school because you are so polite and well behaved. We noticed how happy you all are and how much you enjoy coming to school. Your attendance is getting better and that is very important, so do make every effort to keep that up.

St Marie's is a good school. You achieve well because your teachers do such a good job. I agree with you when you say your lessons are fun because I enjoyed them too. The grown-ups in school take good care of you and help you to be the thoughtful and caring children that you are. Your headteacher leads the school well and is very proud of you all. However, although you make good progress overall, the standards you reach in mathematics could be higher.

Your parents, governors and teachers want to see your school improve as much as possible. To make that happen I have asked your teachers to help you do better in mathematics, especially those of you who are capable of reaching the higher levels. I have also asked if more can be done to help you understand about people who live in other areas of Britain and overseas who have different beliefs and cultures from your own.

Best wishes and good luck to all of you.