

St Marks Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104469
Local Authority	Knowsley
Inspection number	324056
Inspection dates	24–25 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Jim Crouch

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)	142
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	Fr Vincent McShane
Headteacher	Mrs M Gilbertson
Date of previous school inspection	12 December 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Fir Avenue Halewood Liverpool Merseyside L26 0XR
Telephone number	0151 2888910
Fax number	0151 2888912

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average sized primary school. Many of its pupils come from a community which experiences economic and social disadvantage. Almost all of the pupils are White British: a few are from minority ethnic groups and speak English as an additional language. The proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals and with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well above average. The school is an accredited Healthy School and holds the Activemark. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of a single unit, which provides for Nursery and Reception age children. The school has a breakfast club, which runs from 08.15 to 08.45 each morning.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. It has a warm and caring atmosphere within which its pupils develop into confident and responsible individuals. It promotes equality outstandingly well, and has a very strong community spirit. It is highly valued by parents.

Most children join the school with skills and abilities that are well below those expected for their age. They make good progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly in their personal development, but because of their low starting points, most enter Year 1 with skills that are below national expectations. Pupils achieve well through Key Stages 1 and 2. As a result, standards by Year 6 are broadly average. However, standards in mathematics are not as high as in English or science. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those at an early stage of learning English as an additional language are supported well. Consequently, they make good progress.

Pupils and their parents appreciate the outstanding care, guidance and support they receive. Pupils are friendly and polite and talk with pride about their school. Attendance is broadly average. Pupils feel safe and secure and respond with good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. Their outstanding personal development is clearly illustrated by their keenness to take on responsibilities and contribute to the life of the school. Their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is outstanding. They have a very good awareness of others' needs and are actively involved in community projects and charitable fundraising. Healthy School status adds to pupils' good progress in developing healthy lifestyles.

The quality of teaching is good. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to ensure that all pupils are included and take an active part in lessons. Pupils are eager to learn, persevere well with activities and respond positively to encouragement. A particular strength is the use of good quality resources for information and communication technology. These are constantly in use, for example, in mathematics, addressing individual areas of underperformance in this subject. The curriculum meets the needs of learners and contributes well to their good academic progress and outstanding personal development. For example, by studying a range of faiths and societies and learning a modern foreign language, pupils develop empathy with, and an understanding of, other cultures. Theme weeks, a good range of sporting, musical and creative experiences and school visits increase pupils' enjoyment of school and enrich their learning. The school uses its system for tracking the progress of pupils well to identify and address pupils' individual learning needs.

Leadership and management are good. The school improvement plan is based on a detailed evaluation of the effectiveness of the school. Regular review by staff and governors contributes to improvements in standards and progress. The school works outstandingly well with parents and outside organisations to promote the well-being of pupils. It has successfully addressed issues raised in the last inspection and, under purposeful leadership, gives good value for money and has good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Early Years Foundation Stage is well led and managed. Children mostly join the Nursery with skills that are well below those expected for their age, particularly in communication and language. Despite good progress, very few children attain the nationally expected learning

goals by the end of the Reception Year. Good induction, including home visits, enables the school to quickly identify individual needs and initiate good links with parents. Children quickly learn what is expected of them. As a result, their personal development is outstanding and they start to take responsibility for managing their actions. Working as a team, staff ensure that children are outstandingly well looked after and experience a good balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities. Good use is made of the well-resourced indoor and outside provision with children moving freely between the two areas. Staff are deployed effectively, especially in helping those who may struggle with their learning. Tracking of progress is continuous and individual portfolios provide a detailed record of progress in all areas of development. Teaching is of good quality, with work, play and investigation well designed to stimulate children's interests and learning. For example, a recent activity to celebrate Mothering Sunday led to children writing invitations, making cakes and entertaining parents at a party that was enjoyed by all.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics at Key Stage 2.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are average by Year 6 and achievement is good. Pupils start Year 1 with skills and abilities that are mostly below those expected for their age. Since the last inspection, improvements in the quality of teaching and learning have led to pupils making good progress and reaching broadly average standards at the end of Key Stage 1. Standards attained at the end of Key Stage 2 have remained broadly average overall in recent years although above average in English. This represents good progress from the below average standards attained by these pupils at the end of Year 2. Standards attained in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 are lower than those in English and science mainly because fewer pupils achieve at the higher levels. The school has taken a number of actions to address this, including the use of extra teaching and access to computer based learning. As a result, pupils currently in the school are making better progress towards meeting their targets in mathematics. The school's very effective system for tracking pupils' progress indicates that all groups of learners, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those learning English as an additional language, are making good progress towards their challenging targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils enjoy school very much because, as some say, 'Every one gets on so well with each other whatever your age.' Pupils readily share their feelings and talk about relationships. They behave well and agree that any bullying is addressed immediately. They have a first rate understanding of how to stay safe and know that the 'wish and worry' box is there for them to report any concerns. As a result, they are confident to turn to staff for help. Pupils take excellent account of the feelings of others and have a very strong sense of right and wrong. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Strong links with the church, and a diverse range of speakers and activities, mean that pupils have a very good understanding of faiths and cultures. Most pupils attend well. However, the persistent absence of a small group means attendance remains broadly average. Pupils' good understanding of healthy lifestyles encourages informed choices about healthy food. Many take advantage of the school's breakfast club which

sets them up well for the day. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the community, for example, through their willingness to take on extra responsibilities. These include representing the school in activities such as the pupils' parliament. Their generous fundraising demonstrates their commitment to supporting others in the wider community. Improving standards of literacy and numeracy, very good computer skills and good opportunities to develop enterprise mean that pupils are well prepared for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good and relationships between staff and pupils are very good. Teachers use their good subject knowledge well to make lessons informative and enjoyable and therefore engage and motivate pupils. Learning is frequently put into everyday contexts. For example, a numeracy lesson on doubling and halving numbers was taught through the example of a shop's half-price sale. Teachers use interactive whiteboards well to explain difficult concepts and to move lessons on at a good pace. Other resources are chosen well and used to good effect. Teachers and teaching assistants make good use of praise and rewards and pupils are keen to contribute to lessons because they know their ideas are valued. Some lessons are outstanding. In these, the teaching is tightly structured to match the needs of all pupils. Lessons are stimulating and challenging; as a result, pupils thrive and make exceptionally good progress. In the few less effective lessons, an over-emphasis on teacher-led whole-class activities does not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to develop and practise their own ideas and understanding. In these lessons progress slows.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provides stimulus and challenge, and at the same time ensures a strong emphasis on developing basic skills. The recent introduction of a new curriculum has enabled the school to establish coherent links between subjects and provide more opportunities for pupils to learn about the world in which they live. It supports well the development of literacy, numeracy and other skills and pupils say it has increased their enjoyment of learning. The school's innovative approach to lunchtime arrangements has enabled it to introduce 'Zone Park'. This provides a daily half hour of physical and sporting activity for all pupils to further promote their health and fitness. The good range of popular after-school activities extends pupils' learning and develops their health and fitness. Educational visits, including a residential course for pupils in Year 6, add to pupils' enjoyment and their personal development. Pupils have good opportunities to develop enterprise skills through, for example, manufacturing and marketing slippers. A broad ranging programme of visiting speakers and groups provides further enrichment and very effectively promotes pupils' health and safety.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Parents recognise and value the outstanding levels of care and support the school provides for their children. All staff are very conscious of their duty of care. Child protection and safeguarding procedures meet government requirements. Pupils who join the school other than at the usual time say they settle in very quickly because of the very good arrangements made by the school.

Parents, staff and pupils particularly value the contribution made by the learning mentor. This includes running the breakfast club and supporting pupils facing particular difficulties, through individual and group work and home visits. Teaching assistants play a major role in supporting learners through extra teaching. The school makes good use of rewards to celebrate good progress and these are much valued by pupils. The school provides good support to improve pupils' attendance. However, despite this, a small number of children are persistently absent. Careful tracking of pupils' progress leads to early identification of those with additional needs, followed by very effective arrangements to help them progress. Pupils contribute to setting their own learning targets in English and mathematics and are very well informed of what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school's determination to do the best for all its pupils, including those that experience significant barriers to learning, is reflected in the good progress that pupils make. The school's contribution to community cohesion is good. It knows and serves its local community very well. It works well with a number of partner schools and organisations and makes good use of visitors to extend pupils' understanding of a very broad range of beliefs and cultures. This good practice is being extended through the introduction of the new curriculum. Senior leaders have created a strong sense of common purpose. A well-planned approach to developing the confidence and competence of teachers and teaching assistants means that the resources of the school are used well. All staff play a part in planning school improvement and work collaboratively to review existing practice and to raise standards. Governance is good. Governors know the school well and work closely with other school leaders to improve provision. They are well informed to effectively monitor and challenge the work of the school.

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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	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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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	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	1
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**

Inspection of St Mark's Catholic Primary School, Liverpool, L26 0XR

I came to your school recently to find out how well you are learning. Everyone made me feel welcome and helped me to find out about your school. Your school gives you a good education from the day that you start in the Nursery class. Your personal development is outstanding and you thoroughly enjoy school. You all make a very good contribution to the life of the school and clearly know how to live very healthily. You show very good awareness of the needs of others in many ways, including through your charity work. Your school works outstandingly well with other organisations to promote your well-being. The staff and governors help you to enjoy your education by developing a good curriculum with lots of extra activities and visits. The school makes sure you all have equal opportunities to learn. You are looked after very well and because the teaching is good, you make good progress.

There is one important way in which your school could be better. I have asked your school to make sure that pupils in Key Stage 2 attain higher standards in mathematics.

Of course, you also have an important part to play in helping your school to carry on improving. You can do this by continuing to be as positive about learning as you are now and by trying to improve all aspects of your work and particularly for the older pupils, your mathematics.