

St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Balderstone

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105804
Local Authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	324273
Inspection date	20 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Colin Smith

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 controlled
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	212
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	Ms Eileen O'Neill
Headteacher	Mrs Shelley Birchenough
Date of previous school inspection	10 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Oldham Road Rochdale Lancashire OL11 2HB
Telephone number	01706 648 125

Age group	5–11
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Fax number

01706 750 624

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The following issues were investigated: pupils' achievement, particularly in writing and mathematics; teachers' use of assessment in setting challenges and targets according to pupils' different learning needs and the extent to which leaders check the work of the school to raise standards. Evidence was gathered from observation of lessons, pupils' work, discussions with staff, governors and pupils and a scrutiny of school documents and questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors 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 where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is average in size and serves a largely disadvantaged community. The proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals and with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well above average. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A small number are of other White, African, Pakistani or mixed race backgrounds. Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision is made for children aged from four to five and the school provides a before- and after-school club on site for children aged four to 11. A number of staff changes have taken place recently. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and three class teachers have all been appointed within the last school year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

New leaders and teachers have quickly gained the confidence of existing members of staff to form a strong team, vitally important for a school where a high proportion of pupils require additional learning and emotional support. Excellent links with outside agencies enable school staff to ensure that pupils are safeguarded and that barriers to learning are effectively dismantled. This enables pupils to achieve well, academically and personally, marking out St Mary's as a successful school that provides good value for money. Procedures for safeguarding are in place. The school is held in high regard by the vast majority of parents and comments such as, 'Staff are committed to getting the best out of every child,' typify their views. Parents are also appreciative of the well organised additional childcare provided before and after school.

Good care, support and guidance are at the heart of pupils' good personal development. Time spent on helping pupils to become good citizens is amply rewarded by their good behaviour, sense of responsibility and eagerness to contribute to the school community, for example as playground leaders. They develop understanding and respect for each other, disapprove of any form of bullying or racism and show a good awareness of cultural diversity. Through science and personal, social and health education, they acquire an excellent awareness of safe and healthy lifestyles. A good and rich curriculum, including valuable additional activities, makes a significant contribution to their enjoyment of school. In response to the school's effective reward systems, attendance is now in line with the national average and improving. St Mary's pupils are being well prepared for the future.

Pupils' achievement is good. From a low starting point on entering school, they usually achieve the standards expected by the end of Year 6. Pupils make good progress in Years 1 and 2, where standards are rising and currently average in reading, writing and mathematics. Achievement from Years 3 to 6 is good and has been exceptionally high in recent years. By the end of Year 6, standards are average overall, although higher in reading and science than in mathematics and writing. Pupils' good investigation skills enable them to achieve well in science. Their good achievement in reading springs from the attention paid to accuracy and understanding. In mathematics, however, although pupils develop secure calculation skills, they struggle to use and apply them to solve problems. The curriculum has been adapted to strengthen these skills but senior staff know there is still more to do. Improving pupils' writing skills, which are below average, is the current priority. Pupils are learning how to plan their written work, use descriptive language and check their spelling and punctuation. However, in some classes, the time spent practising writing is insufficient for pupils to develop fluently, accuracy and flair.

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Relationships between pupils and teachers are first class. This is why lessons are calm and purposeful and pupils give of their best. Teachers use assessment information effectively to provide activities that are well matched to pupils' different learning needs. Pupils who require additional help are well supported and supplementary challenges are provided for the more able pupils, to ensure that both groups make good progress. Lessons usually move along briskly, keeping pupils alert and interested. However, there are occasions when teachers spend too long talking to pupils. This results in insufficient time for them to improve their skills, particularly in writing. Information and communication technology (ICT) makes a major contribution to pupils' learning. Using laptops and large screens sharpens their reading and calculation skills and helps them to understand complex ideas, such as how to construct a poem. Pupils' completed work is carefully marked with targets to ensure that they know how to improve.

The quality of leadership and management is good. The needs of individual pupils are paramount, all are included and equality is extremely well promoted. Checks on the work of the school are particularly rigorous. Teachers' plans are examined, lessons are observed, pupils' work is scrutinised and assessments of their progress are carefully analysed. Leaders use the information well to make an accurate diagnosis of the school's strengths and weaknesses and to target specific areas for improvement. The headteacher has involved teachers and support staff successfully in achieving common goals. This gives the school its good capacity for improvement. This is evident in the development of the before- and after-school clubs which, despite the limited space and equipment, provide good care. The contribution made by governors is satisfactory. Many governors give freely of their time to support the school, but the headteacher is right in requiring them to strengthen their role in holding the school to account. The school has many valuable links with the local and wider community but is only just beginning to formulate its policy to promote community cohesion.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Many children enter school with knowledge and skills below those expected for their age and often well below in language and literacy. Children make satisfactory progress overall in the Reception class and make particularly good gains in their personal development and aspects of literacy. By the end of the Reception year, their attainment in personal development and reading broadly matches that expected for their age. However, a significant proportion of children are unable to reach all the learning goals expected. Reception staff are highly successful in establishing a very caring and safe environment in which children learn to behave and cooperate. Although children are encouraged to choose from a satisfactory range of activities, their curiosity is not highly stimulated because of the very limited outdoor provision, confined interior space and dated equipment. For example, the construction area occupies a narrow strip between cupboards, which restricts creativity. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and are particularly effective in helping children to acquire important literacy skills. Children's responses are carefully observed and recorded to measure their progress, but the information gained is not yet used fully enough to plan the next learning steps. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Not all the EYFS staff are equally experienced in working with this age group, but additional training and support from the local authority is helping staff to implement the EYFS Framework effectively and to make more accurate assessments of children's learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' capacity to write fluently and accurately.
- Improve pupils' mathematical problem-solving skills.
- Improve provision in the EYFS, particularly the way in which assessment is used to plan the next learning steps.

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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?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
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?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
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	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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	1
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	3
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**

Thank you for your friendly greeting and for answering questions so politely. I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to your school.

Your school is a good one, just as you described. I can understand why you said you like your teachers. They work hard to make your lessons interesting and provide work at just the right level to help you to learn successfully. This is why most of you achieve well to reach the standards expected. Although the indoor and outdoor space and equipment are very limited for the youngest children, they settle into school quickly and make satisfactory progress.

I noticed how well teachers and support staff look after you, keep you safe and make special efforts to provide lots of extra activities, in and out of school. You told me that was why you enjoyed school. Your way of saying thank you appears to be by behaving sensibly and cooperatively and helping each other.

Above all, your headteacher and other members of staff lead your school well. They are constantly trying to improve the school further by checking everything that happens and introducing new methods and ideas. They truly value your efforts by creating colourful and interesting displays of your work around school.

To help your school to improve even further, I have asked for three things to be done.

- To ensure that you have enough opportunities to practise and improve your writing in every class. You can help by trying to reach your targets.
- To focus more on helping you to use your calculation skills to solve mathematical problems.
- For teachers to use better what they know about Reception children's learning so that they can help them to take the next steps.