

St Marys Roman Catholic Primary School, Littleborough

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105816
Local Authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	324276
Inspection date	31 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Marie Cordey

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)	230
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 Anthony Cragg
Headteacher	Mr DA Kirkpatrick
Date of previous school inspection	14 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Whitelees Road Featherstall Littleborough Lancashire OL15 8DU

Age group	3–11
Inspection date	31 March 2009
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Telephone number
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the pupils' achievement and standards, the quality of teaching and learning, pupils' personal development and well-being and how well the school's leadership promotes care and high standards. Evidence was gathered from: national published assessment data; the school's self-evaluation; assessment records, policies and minutes of meetings; observation of lessons; pupils' work; discussion with pupils, staff, the school improvement partner and the chair of governors; the questionnaires returned by parents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, in its self-evaluation, were not justified. These have been included, where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

This large school draws pupils from a wide variety of backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is below average. The number of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. There have been significant changes in staffing over the past three years and the headteacher has been in post since September 2008. Phase 1 of the building work is now complete. Early Years Foundation Stage provision includes one Reception and one Nursery class. The school has gained the Healthy Schools Award and Activemark status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The new headteacher and governors of this satisfactory school are determined to raise standards and improve the achievement of pupils after a period of disruption caused by building works and significant staffing instability. The school's commitment to the personal development of pupils is appreciated by parents who typically comment, 'All the children seem to help each other and are taught to care for the views and feelings of others,' and, 'This is a lovely school.' Pupils' personal development and well-being are good; they behave well and have positive attitudes to learning. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good: they become reflective, thoughtful and tolerant young people. Pupils enjoy coming to school and their attendance is above average. They know how to eat healthily and keep themselves safe, and enjoy playing a number of sports. The majority of parents are positive about school.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Standards and achievement have been in decline for the past two years, although current above average standards and pupils' satisfactory progress indicate improvement, particularly in English and science for pupils in Year 6. Children join the Nursery class with broadly average skills for their age although their communication and language skills are a little lower. When they join Year 1 their standards are still broadly average and their language skills have caught up with their skills in other areas of learning. Currently, Year 2 pupils are working at broadly average standards and this represents satisfactory achievement. Pupils in Year 6 are set to attain above average standards in English and science and average standards in mathematics. This represents satisfactory progress because when these pupils were in Year 2 their standards were above average. Pupils do not achieve as well as they should in mathematics in this year group which is why the school has put in place successful interventions to improve pupils' progress in other year groups. It is also beginning to halt a decline in standards and achievement begun in 2006. The school has appropriate plans in place to raise standards in mathematics. They have identified that pupils do not achieve as well as they should because they are not given enough opportunities to solve problems, investigate and work out their own strategies; the headteacher has already arranged extra time for mathematics.

The more able pupils in all years now make satisfactory progress overall but there are still some in this group of pupils in all years who do not attain the levels of which they are capable. The achievement of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory. They are identified quickly and provided with focused support by support staff. Nevertheless, planning for a small number of pupils with complex learning needs is not always precise enough to be able to monitor their progress accurately. School leaders have identified the need to accurately pinpoint pupils' starting points and to introduce clear tracking systems to monitor pupils' progress and then set more challenging targets.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory and at times good. Relationships are positive because of the value placed on pupils by staff. In lessons where class presentations take place and where pupils work together in pairs or in groups learning is very good. Planning is generally careful to focus on the individual needs of pupils but some lessons are not closely planned enough to match the needs of all pupils. Some pupils lack sufficient challenge in their subjects because work is at times too easy.

Pupils are keen to welcome visitors and are tolerant and respectful of people from differing backgrounds. Fundraising, parish involvement and international links celebrate the school's

promotion of equality and diversity. Nevertheless, the school is not always providing enough challenge for the more able pupils. Pupils enjoy the chance to take part in extra-curricular activities, particularly in music and sport. They say that they would like more visitors to come into school and wish to take part in more educational visits. The school agrees and has planned more opportunities for pupils to bring their learning to life. The satisfactory curriculum adequately matches the needs of most pupils including those pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They are given a satisfactory preparation for the next stage of their learning.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and provision for pupils' personal development is good. Current requirements for safeguarding pupils are met. The care of pupils is good and they are made to feel safe and secure because of effective systems to look after them. The headteacher's clear analysis of what is needed to improve the school is strongly supported by senior leaders and governors. The school contributes satisfactorily to community cohesion and is in the process of improving this further. Partnerships with the local authority and school improvement partner, the educational welfare officer and language specialists make a good contribution to pupils' good personal development and well-being. The school understands its strengths and weaknesses because of accurate self-evaluation. There are some new governors, including a new chair of governors, and the governing body is becoming more knowledgeable and prepared to challenge the school's performance. There has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection and there is satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory because of sound teaching and leadership. Children settle in quickly and happily because they are safe and looked after appropriately. Some parents would appreciate clearer communication about their child's progress and inspectors agree that systems for identifying and tracking the level of children's skills need to be more precise and rigorous.

Children make expected progress from their average starting points. Achievement is satisfactory. By the time they leave Reception, children are working at expected levels in all areas of their learning. Assessment procedures, however, are not accurate in clearly identifying the average level of skills children have when they join the Nursery classes. Consequently, some of the more able children do not make the progress they should. For instance, children demonstrate the gains they make in learning when they are given the responsibility to select their own activities. These are not assessed often enough to help in planning further activities to move children forward. Opportunities for children to choose to play and learn outdoors are limited by insufficient resources. A lack of fixed, large play equipment and not enough protection from the weather hamper children's physical development and their knowledge and understanding of the world. Teachers and support staff work together productively to provide a wide range of varied and interesting activities. This is appreciated by the children, who thoroughly enjoy the many chances they have to play indoors. They also learn outdoors because staff do their best to improve outdoor provision by moving toys outside and making their own resources to help children play and explore. Teaching assistants provide sensitive, focused support for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities so that they achieve in line with their classmates.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement for all pupils, particularly in mathematics and for the more able pupils.
- Improve the quality of lesson planning so that work is matched more closely to the needs of individual pupils.
- Improve outdoor provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Improve assessment procedures and their use in Years 1 to 6 and in the Early Years Foundation Stage to ensure that pupils' and children's skills are accurately recorded and more challenging activities are set, particularly for the more able pupils and children.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will have a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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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?	3
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	3

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?	3
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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 the very warm welcome you gave us when we came to inspect your school. You were keen to tell us about all the things you do in school and we were very impressed with your good attendance! I know that you have had more than one teacher at times and you have been unsettled by building work. Like you, I am pleased that things are more settled now and the building work has finished. Your school is satisfactory overall. Your behaviour is good and you care for each other well. The standards you reach in your work are above average in English and science by the time you leave school in Year 6 and I want them to continue to get better, especially in mathematics where standards are average. I would like you to have more opportunities to solve problems. I would also like there to be more difficult work to help those of you who are capable of reaching even better standards in your work. Your new headteacher is determined to make the school improve even more. He is planning to invite more visitors into school and to organise more educational visits, which I know you would like. You are sensible, knowledgeable, young people and you are ready to play a big part in making the school even better. Children in the Nursery and Reception classes are helped by you all to settle quickly and make a satisfactory start to school life.

I have asked your teachers and support staff to plan your lessons so that you learn in ways that suit you best. I have also asked the school to check how well you are doing very carefully so that they can then help you to do even better. Finally, I have asked the school to provide more play equipment and rain cover outdoors in the Nursery and Reception classes so that children have more opportunity to play and explore outside.