

St Mary's Catholic Primary

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112898
Local Authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	325714
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Marina Gough

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	445
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	49
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Paul McGinley
Headteacher	Mrs J Marian Bolton
Date of previous school inspection	20 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Cross Street Chesterfield Derbyshire S40 4ST
Telephone number	01246 232170
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's is a large primary school that is situated close to the centre of Chesterfield. Pupils come from a wide and diverse range of backgrounds. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are taught in a Reception class. The school has an average number of pupils who have learning difficulties. The percentage of pupils who join or leave at other than the usual times is similar to that found in other primary schools of this size. The school is working towards the Healthy Schools and Green Eco Awards, and has already achieved the Basic Skills Mark, the Eco-Schools Silver Flag, and an award for its commitment to counter bullying.

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 that has made good progress since its last inspection, especially in raising standards at Key Stage 2. The school knows itself well, and its self-evaluation closely matches the inspection findings. The staff work well as a team and are strongly committed to ensuring further improvement. The school is well led and managed by a dedicated headteacher and a hard-working and supportive governing body.

When children join the school, their attainment is at the level broadly expected for their age, with the exception of communication, language and literacy, where attainment is below the age expectations. Reception children achieve well and attain the early learning goals by the time they transfer to Year 1. They make especially good progress in their communication, language and literacy and in their personal development. Pupils achieve well in Key Stage 1 and by the end of Year 2 school assessments show that their attainment is above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' progress in Key Stage 2 has been broadly satisfactory over the past few years. It is now good following a stable period of staffing and improvements in teaching brought about by a rigorous process of monitoring. National test results over the past few years show that standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. The predicted results for 2008 are higher than in previous years, reflecting the improved progress Key Stage 2 pupils now make. There has been a real improvement in the results in mathematics where the school has concentrated on helping pupils to develop their problem solving skills and to be more independent in their learning.

Teaching and learning are good, and some exciting lessons were observed during the inspection. Activities build well on what the pupils already know and can do and pupils are enthusiastic and responsive. Lessons are often well paced, but at times teachers do not capitalise fully on the pupils' tremendous capacity for organising their own learning and their love of practical activities. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed and sensitively support individuals and groups so that they make good progress.

The pupils' behaviour is excellent. Pupils love coming to school and they say it is a happy place to be. Pupils value the contributions of others and are kind and caring. They know how to keep themselves safe, and are animated when they talk about the Healthy Schools Award the school is working towards and the many ways they contribute to making the school 'eco-friendly'. Pupils make a very good contribution to their own school community and to the local and wider communities. They understand the need for treating others with respect and for building harmonious relationships where diversity is celebrated and differences are accepted.

Pupils receive good levels of care, support and guidance. Excellent relationships between staff and pupils mean that pupils are willing to share their concerns, knowing that they will be dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils who have learning difficulties are very well supported so that they are able to make good progress towards their individual targets.

The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of visits and visiting speakers. However, the recent emphasis on literacy and mathematics has meant that some of the other National Curriculum subjects have become marginalised. The long morning sessions are not utilised to maximum effect and some of the literacy and numeracy lessons are too long, which slows pupils' progress at times.

The leadership of the school is good. The headteacher provides a clear steer to the school's work and successfully develops the skills of subject and team leaders by delegating areas of

responsibility and giving them the freedom to develop their own ideas. Governors have a good range of expertise, and their responsibilities are well met. These features and pupils' achievements point clearly towards a good capacity to sustain improvement in the future.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make a good start to their educational lives in the Reception classes because of the good provision and teaching. Adults work well together to provide a wide range of vibrant learning activities. Children make good progress and achieve well from starting points that are close to national expectations but below in their communication and social skills. By the time children move to Year 1 they have reached the standards expected in all areas of learning. There are regular assessments to measure the children's progress and to plan the next steps of learning. The indoor accommodation is colourful, inviting and well organised, and staff make good use of the attractive outdoor accommodation - even in rainy weather. Tasks are often well matched to the differing abilities of the children and a good balance is struck between activities that are directed by an adult and those that are driven by the children themselves. Relationships and communications with parents are very cordial and effective and parents are kept well informed. Good leadership and management of EYFS ensure that welfare, safety and safeguarding requirements are all met, that good teaching and learning practices are recognised and shared, and that areas for improvement are identified and then tackled rigorously.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make more imaginative use of the long morning sessions and ensure that enough time is allocated to all subjects.
- Increase the opportunities for pupils to become more active and independent learners, especially in Key Stage 2.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Key Stage 1 pupils achieve well and their attainment is above the national averages in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of the Key Stage, providing a firm foundation for future learning. Standards at the end of Key Stage 2, on the basis of test results and the work seen during the inspection, are above the national averages in English, mathematics and science. The school has concentrated well on raising standards over recent years and as a result they have steadily improved. There has been particular improvement in mathematics where there has been a real push to involve pupils more actively in their learning, and a successful focus on developing problem solving skills. Key Stage 2 pupils are now achieving well following a period of consistent staffing. Pupils are benefiting from stronger teaching which focuses more effectively on the use of assessment information as a tool for raising standards.

Throughout the school, provision for higher attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties is good. As a result these pupils achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development contributes much to the school's success. Pupils enjoy school and are highly motivated learners. Their attendance is above the national average. Pupils have

excellent relationships with their teachers, other adults and one another so that they learn as a cohesive community. Behaviour is usually exemplary. Pupils say that bullying is very rare and that occasional incidents are effectively dealt with by staff. They have a good understanding of how to keep fit and healthy and manage risks in their lives well. They readily embrace the shared values of the school community and have a strong awareness of fair play. They show good respect for differing faiths and traditions. Pupils make a telling contribution to the school community through their roles as prefects, buddies, playground pals and through participation in the influential school and eco councils. Although pupils' independent learning and enterprise skills are not well honed enough, there is little doubt that they leave school well prepared for the next challenges in their lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

In the EYFS and Key Stage 1, good emphasis is placed on the pupils taking an active role in their learning. The pupils show high levels of independence and confidence and respond very positively to new challenges. Lessons are well paced so that there is ample opportunity for pupils to complete their tasks. Teaching is often lively and animated and the pupils are fired up with enthusiasm for learning. Pupils' progress is consistently good.

In Key Stage 2, a large proportion of the teaching is imaginative and vivacious but some lacks excitement. As a result, learning and progress are variable. Where teaching is at its best, introductions are kept short, and pupils are challenged to their potential by open-ended and persistent questioning that really stretches their thinking. Activities are often practical and fully engage the pupils' attention and interest. Where teaching is less dynamic, introductions are sometimes overlong and pupils do not have enough opportunities to contribute their own ideas or to take ownership of their learning.

The use of assessment information is a real strength of teaching throughout the school. Careful analysis of assessments helps teachers to track the progress and attainment of individuals and to take action where necessary. Throughout the school, teaching assistants make a very positive contribution to learning by providing support to groups and individuals.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets national requirements but some literacy and numeracy lessons are overlong and there is not enough variety of learning for pupils in the long morning sessions. There are not enough links between subjects, especially in Key Stage 2, and there are missed opportunities for pupils to use and apply their basic skills of literacy and numeracy in other subject areas. The school has made good improvement since the last inspection in promoting the use of information and communication technology across the curriculum. The school makes good provision for personal, social and health education, and activities make a good contribution to the pupils' understanding of their role within the local and wider communities. A good range of enrichment activities, including extra-curricular activities, educational visits and visitors to school provides opportunities to extend pupils' learning in a range of subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This is a very caring school where the well-being, health and safety of pupils are a shared concern of governors and staff. Child protection procedures are well documented and are clearly understood by staff. The school meets statutory requirements in this aspect of its work. Very good links with a variety of external agencies enable individual pupils to receive additional support when required. The school makes good provision for pupils who have learning difficulties and goes to a lot of trouble to involve both parents and pupils in the setting of targets for individual education plans. Pupils receive satisfactory levels of academic support to help them to understand how to improve their performance still further.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The senior leaders and governors are committed to improving standards and the pupils' personal development. The school improvement plan contains appropriate targets for future development, but is over ambitious in terms of the number of priorities set. Governors are working on making the plan more manageable by reducing and prioritising the targets. Managers at all levels have a clear understanding of the strengths and weakness in their areas of responsibility. The school sets challenging targets for raising standards and has succeeded in meeting them. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements are securely in place and the findings are used to inform whole school improvement. Parents think very highly of the school and appreciate what it has to offer to their children. The governing body is very supportive and has a good idea what the school's strengths and weaknesses are. Governors understand their role as 'critical friend' to the school. The school makes a valuable contribution to community cohesion. It is deeply engaged with its Catholic community and with the local and global communities through its many church links.

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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	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

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	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?	3
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?	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**

8 October 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Chesterfield, S40 4ST

You will probably remember that we visited your school not too long ago and I am now writing to let you know what we found out. Before I do, I would first like to say thank you for making us feel so welcome. I have told your teachers how polite and helpful you were and everywhere we went, we were met with smiling faces. Through our discussions, it was good to hear how much you enjoy school and all the different activities you take part in. It was good to hear about how safe you feel in school, that bullying is not an issue and that there is always someone to talk to if you are worried.

We found many good things about St Mary's and I have to say that I agree with you and your headteacher that it is a good school. Teachers and other staff help you to make good progress and achieve well. The visits, visitors and the after school clubs all add to your enjoyment. The school is good at helping you to keep safe and healthy and goes the extra mile in making sure you are safe and well supported. Your headteacher does a good job in managing the school, and together with all the teachers, staff and governors they form a strong team who are determined to provide you with a good quality of education.

There is another strength of the school that I have not mentioned yet. That is you, the children. Your behaviour is excellent and you are keen and eager to learn. You get on very well with each other and you contribute a great deal to the school and local community. You know a lot about keeping healthy and safe. Well done!

Even good schools like yours can get better. I have asked the headteacher and the teachers to make the curriculum more interesting and exciting for you and to help you become accomplished independent learners. I know that all of the staff and governors want the school to be even more successful, and I know you will continue to work hard, behave well and remember that you have a part to play in how well you achieve! I wish you every success in your future. It was a pleasure to meet you.

Best wishes

Marina Gough

Lead inspector