

St Mary's Catholic First School, Wool

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113824
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	325895
Inspection date	30 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Peter Clifton

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	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	109
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	Sue Cox
Headteacher	Helen Brown
Date of previous school inspection	10 July 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Folly Lane Wool Wareham BH20 6DS

Age group	4–9
Inspection date	30 April 2009
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Telephone number
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average school. Most children attend from the immediate locality, including families from the military base. Nearly all pupils are of White British origin. An average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, mostly literacy and numeracy needs, although a few have emotional and behavioural needs. The proportion of pupils joining or leaving the school other than at the usual time is above average.

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. Standards are above average and improving, mainly because of the very strong leadership provided by the headteacher. Care, support and guidance and pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils enjoy their time here, their behaviour is outstanding and most attend regularly. Children start well in Reception and make good progress through the rest of the school. Pupils achieve well mainly because of good teaching and their very positive attitudes. There have been a number of successful curriculum developments, for example in reading and writing. These initiatives build on leaders' clear understanding of what needs to be improved and are working because staff support each other and implement change consistently.

A high proportion of parents comment positively about the work of the school. Many are exceptionally pleased with what it offers their children and rightly note the school's warm, friendly atmosphere. They value the helpful and approachable staff. A parent who commented that 'St Mary's is a fantastic school' was typical of many; another reported that 'You get a great feeling when you walk through the door.' Pupils comment similarly. They say they like lessons and feel very safe. One group of pupils agreed that 'this is the best school ever'. Pupils have a clear voice in what they would like to be changed and express their views with much confidence. They very readily take on responsibility, making an important contribution to how the school runs through different groups such as the 'welcome squad'. They have a keen awareness of the benefits of healthy snacks and exercise. Pupils have responded well to initiatives to promote reading. They like being 'reading champions' and value 'white ticket' awards received in assemblies.

Pupils' good spiritual, social and moral development is underpinned strongly by Christian values. The school is a cohesive and harmonious community. The pupils socialise together exceptionally well, showing high regard for each other. However, pupils' cultural development is no more than satisfactory. Their understanding of Britain as a culturally diverse community is not fully developed because they have limited experience of people from different backgrounds. However, pupils' sense of responsibility and willingness to help others are manifest in their charity work raising funds for a variety of causes.

Strong features of the school include the calm working atmosphere in lessons and the positive way in which adults respond to pupils. Teachers plan well for pupils' different needs. Good use of drama and opportunities for pupils to talk about their writing enable them to develop ideas and extend their vocabulary. Teachers' use of 'steps to success' in lessons helps pupils to check how much they have learned. However, strategies to help the pupils set targets for themselves are underdeveloped and consequently some pupils lack confidence in identifying what they need to do next. The curriculum makes learning enjoyable for pupils, with a good balance between the development of basic skills and creative subjects. Good leadership and management have ensured that key issues identified in the previous inspection report have been addressed. Sustained improvement shows that the school is well placed to get even better.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children come into school with skills and knowledge that are generally in line with expectations, although in some years standards on entry are below those expected. The children's learning

environment is safe and stimulating. Good support, care assessment and planning by adults ensure that children achieve well and make good progress towards the early learning goals. The children relate well to adults and cooperate effectively with each other. They confidently take part in whole-school assemblies and join in with other pupils on the 'big playground' when appropriate. There are excellent links with parents, who are actively encouraged to be involved with their children's learning, for example by recording 'wow' moments from discussions they have with their children. The children behave well and are energetic in their play. They have a growing awareness of being healthy. The outside area is used regularly. While temporary shelter is provided during inclement weather, and the children happily don wet weather clothing, the lack of a permanent covered area restricts activities. In the classroom, resources are well organised and in good condition and this helps the children to choose independently. Learning and development are well managed and children are well prepared for the transition to Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the use of targets to enable pupils to support their own learning more effectively.
- Develop the school's contribution to community cohesion more widely to improve pupils' understanding of other cultures and lifestyles.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage to reach at least average standards by the time they enter Year 1. The school's tracking system rightly shows that pupils make good progress through the school. Over the past two years, standards in Year 2 have been above average. The school's most recent assessment shows that pupils currently in Year 2 are on track to reach similar standards overall. Progress in writing has improved and more pupils are now working at the higher Level 3. The performance information for the current Year 4 shows above average standards, with good gains being made from a starting point at the end of Year 2; the strongest progress is in reading and writing, which has improved since 2008. This improvement shows the success of the strategies being used and has particularly helped the boys with reading. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well. Pupils with English as an additional language are making good progress in their understanding of English.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Those pupils with special responsibility wear their distinctive red hats proudly. They take their duties seriously and are pleased to help out around the school. At playtimes, play leaders are on duty and the playground buzzes with activity as the children 'let off steam'. The pupils show a high level of concern for each other and have a strong sense of right and wrong. At the end of play they return sensibly and quietly to lessons ready to work.

Pupils talk with enthusiasm about the many opportunities they have to learn outside lessons, for example, in the garden or the additional sporting activities. Many turn up regularly to take part. Work in the gardens, for example, is helping pupils to develop their understanding about the environment. Pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) confidently. They work well together in teams, taking on different roles when required. This, together with good basic literacy and numeracy skills, ensures they are well placed to face future challenges.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teaching and well-planned learning activities ensure that pupils are challenged to do well. Teachers promote positive relationships and manage pupils very effectively and as a result motivation is high. Pupils respond quickly to instructions. They also enjoy group work, cooperating with each other and taking on different responsibilities to complete tasks. Teachers only rarely need to intervene to gain the attention of the pupils. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution helping pupils learn in small groups and with basic literacy skills. Teachers use interactive whiteboards well to reinforce key points. With occasional exceptions, lessons move briskly. Teachers are beginning to find ways of helping pupils assess their own work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum contributes well to pupils' overall good achievement. Adaptations made to improve writing and encourage boys' reading have been very successful. Intervention strategies to boost pupils' basic skills are well established and promoting good progress for nearly all those pupils who take part. Assemblies are used well to promote pupils' spiritual development and show how they can help each other. The development of new topics, for example in history, is enhancing pupils' experience, and a number of different subject areas are being drawn together effectively. Pupils regularly use ICT in their work and the many additional clubs, visits and trips help to extend their experience. While the school's pastoral curriculum provides very strong support for pupils to thrive socially, there are currently too few opportunities for the pupils to gain an understanding of the diversity of cultures within the United Kingdom.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides a very safe learning environment for all pupils. Safeguarding and child protection procedures meet current government requirements. Attendance is carefully monitored. There are good arrangements in place to ensure the safe use of the Internet and to ensure that those with English as an additional language settle quickly and happily. Good use of external agencies and the regular tracking of progress ensure that provision is carefully adjusted to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who are supported well. Pupils have targets for literacy and numeracy which most of them know. Marking is regular and helpful, with the 'tickled pink' comments acknowledging what has been achieved and the 'growing green' comments identifying next steps. However, there is not enough information provided to help pupils gauge for themselves how to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has forged a cohesive team of staff and governors. Subject leaders monitor learning across the school by watching lessons, looking at samples of work and gathering the views of pupils. Leaders have a clear view about how well the school is doing and what to tackle next. Governors are exceptionally well informed because they visit regularly, often help in the

school and are ready to challenge the work of the school. Plans for improvement are appropriate and are implemented consistently by staff. Pupils' performance is carefully tracked and, where appropriate, individual targets are raised. This sustains a high level of challenge. Links with parents are outstanding and they make a considerable contribution to the work of the school by coming in to help.

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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?	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	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	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**

1 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic First School, Wool BH20 6DS

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking with you and were very impressed with your friendliness and how confidently you expressed your opinions. The valuable information you gave us was a great help. Your school cares for you well and gives you a good education. Teaching and the curriculum are good and help you to make good progress and achieve well. The leadership of your school is good. We were impressed by your very positive attitudes to learning. Your behaviour is outstanding and you attend regularly.

In particular:

- you make a good start in Reception
- your headteacher and other adults ensure that the school is a happy and welcoming place
- you develop skills which provide you with a good start to your future life
- your teachers provide you with challenging activities to help you to learn
- you know how to keep safe
- the curriculum provides a good range of experiences which is helping you to enjoy school
- changes have been made that are helping you to improve your work, for example in reading and writing.

We have asked your headteacher and the other adults to do these things:

- give you more help in setting yourselves targets so that you can learn even better
- help you improve your understanding of other cultures and lifestyles.

You can help your school to improve even further by continuing to always do your best.

Yours faithfully

Peter Clifton

Lead Inspector