

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Marnhull

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113825
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	325896
Inspection date	15 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Deborah Zachary

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)	128
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	13
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	James Mackain-Bremner
Headteacher	Nicola Denham
Date of previous school inspection	5 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Old Mill Lane Marnhull Sturminster Newton DT10 1JX
Telephone number	01258 820417

Age group	4–11
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Fax number

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following:

How well pupils in the current Year 3 made progress through Key Stage 1, and how well those currently in Years 5 and 6 made progress through the earlier years of Key Stage 2

How well pupils in Years 3 and 4 are making progress now

The impact of the school's leadership and management on improvements, focusing on strategies, monitoring and evaluation.

Evidence was gathered from discussions with staff, pupils and governors, analysis of school data on pupils' progress, examination of pupils' work, study of documentation, observations of lessons, assembly and playtime, and study of questionnaires returned by parents. 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

St Mary's is the only Catholic primary school in North Dorset and draws its pupils from a wide area. There is a wide spread of attainment on entry. An above average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but none has a statement of special educational needs. Also, a significant proportion of the pupils are of above average ability. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, or speak English as an additional language. The school provides for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in a mixed-age class with Year 1 pupils. A higher than usual proportion of pupils join or leave the school between the EYFS and Year 6. A playgroup, under separate management, shares the use of one room in the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Mary's is a good school. Pupils achieve well and their personal development is outstanding. In particular, pupils feel extremely safe and look out for each other's welfare. They are very well cared for by adults and their moral and social development is exceptionally strong. Behaviour is excellent. The vast majority of parents who responded to inspection questionnaires expressed strong support for what the school achieves. One parent expressed the views of many as follows: 'It's a fantastic school and I feel happy every time I drop them off.'

Progress is good in the EYFS and in Key Stage 1. Progress in Key Stage 2 has recently improved. Records of pupils' past progress show a pattern of a significant dip in the early years of Key Stage 2, with underachievement in this age group, especially in mathematics. Pupils then caught up rapidly in Year 5 and particularly Year 6, to reach above average standards overall. This inconsistency in progress indicates that there were variations in teaching quality. However, teaching is now good overall in the school, and good where there was previously underachievement. Teachers give clear instructions, and lessons are structured well to present activities in an effective order. For example, Year 5 came up with a wide variety of descriptive words – such as 'shark-infested' – that they might want to use in a poem, before moving to writing. Teachers use a range of helpful strategies, including identifying a partner for each pupil with whom to discuss and analyse work. They choose interesting activities and teaching methods to engage pupils, including good use of interactive whiteboards, and there are good relationships between staff and pupils.

There are still some minor inconsistencies in teaching. In whole-class sessions, teachers do set different work for different ability groups in mathematics and English, but this is not always sufficiently fine tuned or consistent across other subjects to fully meet pupils' needs. As a result, the more able pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities sometimes make slower progress. However, there is compensation in that their progress in mathematics and English is accelerated by other sessions where groups of pupils are withdrawn from the class for extension work or for support. Overall, the different ability groups do all make good progress, as do pupils who speak English as an additional language, but opportunities for more rapid progress in class are being missed.

Significant innovations have been introduced in the way pupils' personal skills are developed. The work towards 'Rights Respecting School' status has given pupils a very good multicultural understanding and appreciation of the wider world community. A project on democracy, adult jobs and working together has given them a very useful picture of some of the things they may face as adults. Many of these innovations have been managed by the deputy head, who has a wide range of responsibilities beyond teaching, and plays a highly effective role. The school council has a high level of involvement in the running of the school, for example helping to appoint teachers. Spiritual development is strong and even young pupils demonstrate their ability to reflect; regular prayers are taken seriously by pupils. One said, 'We are a very religious school.' The pupils have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and the importance of exercise. The curriculum is good, giving emphasis to sport and music as well as academic subjects. A very wide range of extra-curricular activities, visits out and visitors extend pupils' experiences and greatly enhance their enjoyment. On the day of the inspection many pupils were very excited by a variety of activities associated with a 'vardo' – a traditional Romany Gypsy caravan.

The headteacher has established a climate in which the pupils' welfare is a priority for staff. Pastoral care is very strong and, as one parent put it, the school produces 'happy, confident children'. Pupils joining the school are helped to settle in with sensitivity, and the school goes out of its way to ensure all are included in the community. Many parents commented on the way the school makes pupils feel part of a family. There are good links with agencies such as social services and with other schools, and sound links with the local village even though pupils come from far afield. Attendance is above average. All safeguarding requirements are in place.

Guidance to pupils has both strengths and underdeveloped areas. Marking is often helpful and gives useful advice. A productive development has been that most teachers now identify for the class what they are expected to achieve by the end of the lesson, but these lesson objectives are approached differently in different classes. For example, some lesson targets identify what all must do, what some should do and what some could do. These can be usefully adopted to ensure classwork matches the needs of pupils of all abilities, but are not used in all classes. Also, not all pupils are familiar with the longer-term targets they have been set in literacy and numeracy.

The headteacher tracks progress closely and very effectively, and where individuals are dropping behind, works closely with the special needs coordinator to ensure good support is provided. Such tracking provides a strong base from which challenging statutory targets for Year 6 are set. Through this tracking, the year groups in which progress was slower were clearly identified and action taken. During this period there was some drop in staff morale, and some perception that improvement was too slow. However, there is now good will amongst both teachers and support staff to move forward as a team.

The chair of governors provides highly knowledgeable and organised leadership to the governing body. Most governors provide strong support to him and to the headteacher, with regular visits. Self-evaluation is good, so the school knows exactly what needs to be done. Its record of improvements to teaching, personal development and progress indicates that there is a good capacity to improve further. At the moment, however, some minor aspects of the school's leadership systems are not sharp enough. The school development plan has a wide range of targets, all useful but without an indication of what is most important. This makes it harder for staff to be clear of where the school is heading, and harder to achieve a quick impact. Very helpful work is not always followed through to have maximum impact. For example, monitoring of lessons, though accurate in assessing the quality of teaching, is not well focused on evaluating the success of an initiative. Whilst they do identify weaknesses, monitoring records do not summarise targets for improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The EYFS is good. The children settle quickly, make good progress and enjoy being in school. They are helped to settle well through good liaison with home, including home visits before children start. This helps the staff to get to know the children very quickly, and they are looked after well. They play together sensitively and safely, and are already learning to take responsibility for choosing activities for themselves. Both the indoor and outdoor areas are stimulating, and planning takes good account of the children's interests. Teaching is good. It is well organised, with some good intervention to support learning, for example when children are using the sand tray. However, the teaching assistant is not yet being used to full effectiveness and so opportunities are missed to use both adults to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities and ages. Assessment is detailed and a comparison of children's entry attainment with

their attainment just before Year 1 shows that last year's group achieved well. Leadership and management are good. Records of progress are analysed well and the teacher is well aware of strengths and weaknesses in different areas of learning.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Fine tune activities to improve the way pupils of different abilities have their needs met in whole-class lessons.
- Focus both school development planning and lesson monitoring better, and ensure lesson monitoring identifies priorities to help teachers improve teaching.
- Improve pupils' understanding of what they should be aiming for, both in lessons and in the longer term.

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?	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	2
The attendance of learners	2
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	1

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	3
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**

16 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Marnhull, Sturminster Newton DT10 1JX

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school yesterday. Particular thanks to those of you who talked to us about the school. We think you are getting a good education at St Mary's.

We were very impressed with your behaviour and the way you help each other. Many of you make a really good contribution to the way the school runs, for example on the school council. You enjoy your lessons and the extra activities the school puts on for you. We saw how much fun many of you had seeing the vardo, and we also saw a lot of you doing lots of different things after school. You told us how well you are looked after, and you are also well taught.

Every school can get better, and we are asking the school to do these things now to improve further:

- Teaching should be made even better by making sure that all of you, regardless of your different abilities, are set work that is exactly hard enough.
- Improve the plans for the school to improve and the way the school checks on what is going on.
- Help you to be very clear on what your targets are, both in lessons and over the term. You can help by asking if you don't know what you should be aiming for.

We wish you all the best for the future.

Deborah Zachary Lead inspector