

English Martyrs' Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118766
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	326887
Inspection date	18 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Joan Greenfield

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)	208
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	John Trollope
Headteacher	Maureen Pearson
Date of previous school inspection	15 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Frindsbury Road Strood Rochester ME2 4JA
Telephone number	01634 718964
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the impact of the school's recent initiatives to raise standards and pupils' achievement, especially in mathematics
- the use of assessment, including marking and target setting, to inform planning, teaching and learning and help pupils reach challenging targets
- the impact of leadership and management at all levels in driving forward school improvement.

Evidence was gathered from: visits to lessons; a scrutiny of pupils' work; discussions with pupils, staff and the chair of the governing body; the views of parents; and a scrutiny of the school's documentation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but 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

English Martyrs' is an average-sized primary school. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, with the remainder coming from several other ethnic heritages. The proportion of pupils from Black-African families is increasing. In most year groups, there is a considerable imbalance between boys and girls. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is much higher than average, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is lower than average. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage in the Reception class.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

English Martyrs' is a good school. It has made good progress since its last inspection. Standards have risen year on year in science, and marking is more consistent and gives pupils clearer guidance on what they need to do to improve their work. In addition, subject leaders and governors are playing a stronger part in checking how well the school is doing. Senior staff lead and manage the school well and have a good understanding of its strengths and areas for development. For example, the reasons for the dip in the 2008 National Curriculum test results in mathematics were analysed carefully, with firm action taken to reverse the picture in 2009. The school's tracking data show that in mathematics pupils are on course to do better this year in reaching the expected levels at the end of Year 2 and Year 6, and at the higher Level 5 for the older pupils. These improvements show that the school's capacity to do even better is good. Relationships with parents and carers are positive. Nearly all parents are supportive of the school and consider that their children enjoy school and make good progress. Typical comments from parents include, 'My child loves school', '...is making good progress' and 'the school treats each child as an individual and staff care for the children's well-being and education.' Inspection evidence would support their views.

Standards are broadly average by the end of Year 6, although they fluctuate slightly from year to year because of the considerable variations in the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in each year group. Pupils do better in English than in mathematics and science. However, the strategies implemented by the school have resulted in considerable improvement in pupils' progress in mathematics and science this year. Pupils achieve well during their time at school. From their below average starting points when they enter the school, children get off to a good start in the Reception class. They make good progress in all areas of learning, although their reading and writing skills are not quite as secure as other areas. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2. They make faster progress in Years 3 to 6 because of the careful tracking of their progress and the range of intervention strategies and support that pupils receive. The increasing emphasis placed on linking sounds and letters in Years 1 and 2 and extending its use for some pupils in Years 3 and 4 is having a positive impact on pupils' reading and writing skills.

The school's positive ethos and the effective care, guidance and support pupils receive contribute well to their good personal development and well-being. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. However, their understanding of life in multicultural Britain and of the wider global community is not as strong as other aspects of their personal development. Pupils clearly enjoy school, which is reflected in their above average attendance. They participate enthusiastically in the activities the school provides, including the wide variety of after-school clubs and other enrichment opportunities.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe and healthy, which has been recognised by external awards such as Healthy School and Activemark. They are confident that staff will help them if they have any worries or concerns, and speak positively about the 'Sanctuary' to which they can go if they want support. They behave well in lessons and around the school. However, a small minority of parents expressed concerns about behaviour in the school, especially its management by senior staff. Inspectors saw no examples of inappropriate behaviour during the inspection. The school recognises that its procedures for dealing with any unsatisfactory behaviour, on the small number of occasions when it occurs, have not been explained well enough to parents. It now plans to do so.

Pupils have many opportunities to undertake responsibilities in the school, for example as monitors and through Young Leader training. The school council plays an influential role in contributing to the school's development. Its members manage a 'playground' budget and they have looked at the costs of providing fruit for pupils in Years 3 to 6. Pupils regularly raise money for different charities, initiating activities themselves, and contribute well to the local community. They are prepared effectively for their future lives.

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers provide pupils with a good range of interesting activities to keep them motivated and to meet their needs. Relationships between pupils and staff are positive. Teachers manage pupils well and classroom routines are firmly established. Information and communication technology is used effectively to support teaching and learning. Teaching assistants give good support to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, as well as other pupils, enabling them to make good progress in their learning. The setting of short-term targets for individual pupils in literacy and numeracy is effective and helps pupils to know what they need to do to improve. Across the school, teachers do not pay sufficient attention to pupils' handwriting, especially letter formation and the joining of letters, in order to improve the presentation of their work.

The good curriculum provides pupils with a broad range of experiences, mainly taught through discrete subjects. The school has not yet embraced the opportunity to link subjects together more creatively but plans to review the curriculum shortly. Pupils experience a wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities, which they value and enjoy. Pupils in Years 2 to 6 learn a foreign language. Music is strong, as is art. These opportunities, as well as visits and visitors to the school and the school's personal, social and health education and citizenship programme, contribute well to pupils' personal development.

Pastoral support is strong. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those considered 'vulnerable' are identified quickly and supported well. This enables them to feel secure and to make good progress. The school has good links with a range of external agencies, which provide additional specialist help. The arrangements for safeguarding, child protection and health and safety meet requirements. Pupils' academic progress within each year group is tracked carefully by class teachers and by senior leaders. However, the data on pupils' longer-term progress over a key stage or during the whole of their time at school are not brought together well enough. This makes it more difficult to check whether pupils' progress over time is secure enough to ensure they meet their challenging targets.

The school's improvement plan is comprehensive and the priorities identified in it are the right ones. Senior leaders and subject leaders have a good understanding of where the school is at through their regular monitoring arrangements. The governing body works effectively to fulfil its responsibilities and governors give good support to the school. Governance has improved since the last inspection and it is good. The school has a good understanding of its own community, as well as that of the local area, and many activities that take place during the year and through the curriculum support community cohesion well. However, not enough emphasis has been placed on developing pupils' understanding of life in the wider community, both in this country and overseas. Although it is actively under discussion by the governing body, the school has not done enough to check the impact of its activities on promoting community cohesion.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children get off to a flying start in the Reception class because the provision meets their needs well. Their skills and experiences when they enter Reception are below the levels typically found in children of this age. Many have weak literacy and language skills. They make good progress across all areas of learning because of the interesting range of activities planned for them and good teaching. By the end of the Reception Year, most children are working well within the levels expected for their age, with some exceeding them. However, their communication, language and literacy skills, especially writing, are not quite as strong as other areas. The programme of activities provides a good balance between those led by adults and those that children choose for themselves. As a result, children become increasingly confident, well able to work independently and with others. Children move seamlessly between activities in the classroom and outdoors. Sometimes, too many children choose the same outdoor activity, which affects the rate of learning. Staff rightly recognise the need to manage this more carefully. Adults are sensitive to children's needs and provide them with good care, support and guidance. As a result, children behave well, develop positive attitudes to learning and enjoy their work. The Early Years Foundation Stage is led and managed well. Staff work together effectively. They regularly assess and record children's progress in a variety of ways and use this information to ensure that lessons and activities are appropriate to the needs of the children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Establish a robust system to maintain a clearer overview of how well pupils make progress during their time at school.
- Extend pupils' understanding of life in multicultural Britain and in the wider world and check more effectively the impact of its activities in promoting community cohesion.

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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	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	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	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**

19 June 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of English Martyrs' Catholic Primary School, Rochester ME2 4JA

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting some of you and seeing many more of you at work and play. You told us a great deal about what you enjoyed in the school and how well you are doing. This letter is to tell of our findings.

- You go to a good school, which helps you to develop into confident young people, well prepared for your future lives.
- Standards are broadly average but you make good progress and achieve well in your time at school. Children in the Reception class get off to a flying start and do well by the time they start Year 1.
- You clearly enjoy coming to school. You concentrate well in lessons because teachers give you interesting things to do and check your progress regularly.
- You are friendly and polite to each other and work well with one another in lessons and in the playground.
- You have a good understanding of the need to keep healthy and stay safe.
- Members of the school council work well on your behalf to make sure that the school takes account of your opinions.
- Adults look after you well and you say that they always help you if you have any problems.
- The adults who run the school have a good idea of what needs to be done to improve the school and are working hard to make sure this happens.

We have asked the school to do two things in particular to help the school get even better.

- Check your progress more carefully over the whole time that you are a pupil in the school.
- Check more carefully how well the school is helping you to develop a better understanding of life in multicultural Britain and in the wider world.

You can also help by working as hard as you can and doing your very best. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Mrs Joan Greenfield

Lead inspector