

Stella Maris Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118862
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326914
Inspection dates	3–4 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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)	207
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	Joe Ciantar
Headteacher	Tony Holdsworth
Date of previous school inspection	11 July 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Parkfield Road Folkestone CT19 5BY
Telephone number	01303 252127

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	3–4 June 2009
Inspection number	326914

Fax number

01303 226085

Age group	4-11
Inspection dates	3-4 June 2009
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Stella Maris is similar in size to other primary schools. Pupils attend the school from a wide area because of the school's faith status. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are taught in the Reception class. Around a fifth of the pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds. There has been a recent significant increase in pupils coming from different language backgrounds, many of whom are at an early stage of learning English. A significant number of pupils join and leave the school part way through their primary education. About a quarter of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which 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: 3

This is a satisfactory school, with a positive, inclusive ethos. The large majority of parents are positive about all aspects of the school's provision, making comments such as: 'We are very happy with Stella Maris, it has a very strong community feel.' Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils have good attitudes to learning and enjoy school. Relationships are positive and encouraging across the school, and pupils are well cared for. Pupils enthusiastically take on responsibilities and make a good contribution to the school community. This is evident, for example, when older pupils work with younger children or take on roles as school councillors. The school uses the good partnerships it has with a wide range of agencies well to help it to meet the diverse needs of its pupils, including those joining the school with little English.

The headteacher, leadership team and governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development because of the rigorous systems for evaluating the effectiveness of the school's work. However, subject leaders are not fully involved in all aspects of evaluation. The school has been through a period of change and some uncertainty, mainly because of extended periods of staff leave and increasing numbers of pupils joining the school throughout the school year. The governing body has fulfilled its responsibilities well by acting as a supportive but challenging critical friend. Following two years when standards fell because pupils did not make consistent progress through the school, staff have achieved notable success in reversing this decline. Pupils are now building well on the good start they have in the Reception class and are achieving satisfactorily throughout the school, so that standards are back in line with national averages. The school recognises that raising attainment remains its key priority, particularly in mathematics. Sound leadership and management have ensured that the current strategies for improvement are proving effective, which gives the school a satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

Teaching is sound, and there were many examples of good teaching seen during the inspection. A widening range of teaching strategies is beginning to accelerate the progress pupils make. Teachers use increasingly accurate assessment and tracking information to plan work which meets the needs of different groups of pupils. However, some teaching lacks pace and some tasks could be more demanding for pupils. A broad and balanced curriculum helps pupils to enjoy their learning. They thoroughly enjoy taking part in a wide variety of sport and the extra activities that the school provides.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Strong leadership has ensured that provision has remained good since the last inspection. Children develop an enthusiasm for learning. This was evident, for example, in the way they rushed to write sentences about fish, and then worked with Year 6 pupils to create 'fish habitats'. Children cooperated well throughout this activity and developed their speaking skills by talking in small groups about what they were learning. The school has recognised that it needs to develop children's creative skills further and this is one way in which it is trying to achieve this. Children are encouraged by the bright, cheerful classroom and work safely within it and in their outdoor area. There is a good balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities. The good adult to child ratio means that good attention is paid to the care and welfare of individual children. Adults are clear about the needs of individuals and take learning forward quickly.

While there is variation in children's capabilities from year to year, generally children start school with skills well below those expected for their age, particularly in their speech and language development. The focus on phonics has a positive impact on improving literacy skills and children make good progress. Some children exceed the national expectations for their age, but overall standards at the start of Year 1 remain below the national picture, particularly in early literacy and numeracy skills.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics by increasing the rates of progress pupils make.
- Ensure that all lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and that pupils' tasks are appropriately challenging.
- Build the school's capacity to improve further by involving subject coordinators more fully in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of their subjects.

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

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The school has a clear focus on raising standards and is having considerable success this year. Pupils are now achieving satisfactorily in each year group. Pupils build satisfactorily on the good start they make in the Reception class, although standards remain below average by the end of Year 2. Standards at the end of Year 6 are in line with national averages, with pupils on track to meet their suitably challenging targets. This represents satisfactory progress for pupils in relation to their starting points, and ensures that pupils develop the key skills to prepare them soundly for the next stage of learning and later life. Standards are rising in English and science throughout the school, but have been slower to improve in mathematics. All groups of pupils, including those identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who join the school part way through their primary education, make similar rates of progress. This is because of the clear identification of their needs and the support they are given.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Relationships between pupils are good, with those from different backgrounds playing and working happily together. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are readily accepted and given sensitive support by their peers. Pupils have a good awareness of a range of religious beliefs, and of different cultures. They are enthusiastic learners who are keen to participate in class discussion. The great majority of pupils attend regularly, although a small number have particular attendance problems. Pupils express strongly held views on the need for good behaviour and disapproval of any that is not as good as it should be. Consequently, behaviour is good.

Pupils feel safe in school, knowing who to approach with a problem. They have a good awareness of internet safety, and understand factors that pose a risk in their own lives, such as drug addiction. Pupils recognise the benefits of healthy eating, and are enthusiastic about the many clubs and sports opportunities provided. The school was recently given an Activemark award in recognition of the quality of its sport provision. Pupils develop confidence and self-esteem

through their experiences in school. For example, school council members helped to interview candidates for a teaching post, while some other pupils researched issues related to the impact of behaviour on learning and presented their findings to governors, staff and fellow pupils.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

A recent focus on staff development and an emphasis on sharing good practice in teaching and learning have effectively developed teachers' confidence. This is helping to improve the consistency of teaching across the school, and there are plans to extend this more widely. Teaching assistants are well briefed so that they can give pupils good support. Lessons are well structured, the intended learning is routinely shared with pupils and progress checked at the end in a way that helps them to understand how well they are doing. Teachers understand how well individuals are doing and use this information to set work which is matched to pupils' different capabilities. However, sometimes tasks are not sufficiently challenging because there is not an effective balance between consolidating existing knowledge and skills, and taking learning forward at a fast pace. On occasion, teachers and pupils do not always have high enough expectations of what could be achieved in the time available. By contrast, there are instances of effective challenge for all abilities. For example, when teachers use their good subject knowledge to inject pace through focused questioning, pupils are encouraged to express their ideas and contribute to valuable whole-class discussion.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactorily planned to help pupils to gain the skills that are relevant to their future education and to the world of work. The school has identified a need to develop its curriculum to engage pupils more in their learning, and some initiatives to achieve this are proving successful. For example, collaborative writing projects and a series of problem-based activities are enthusing pupils. These support the development of personal skills, such as teamwork, in addition to extending subject skills and knowledge. However, the school recognises that further work is necessary to ensure that problem-solving activities and the termly topics build pupils' skills and knowledge in a progressive and systematic way, and are used well to develop literacy skills through other subjects. The investment in improving provision for information and communication technology is increasing opportunities, to develop pupils' research skills. The curriculum is enriched through regular planned events including visits and visitors linked to topics, such as the 'Astrodome' visit. Extra-curricular activities cater well for pupils who are keen on sport, and there are music, science and Spanish clubs for those with other interests.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides a happy, safe and supportive atmosphere where safeguarding procedures meet requirements. Support for individuals is carefully planned and monitored thoroughly, with the full involvement of pupils, staff and parents. The school is making steady progress with a small number of pupils who have low levels of attendance. The school has effective procedures for working with families and for supporting vulnerable pupils who may need additional help.

It works very effectively with outside agencies, using local authority procedures to ensure that the full range of available support is considered when provision for individuals is planned. Systems for tracking pupils' progress have been refined this year, and are used extensively. This has helped to assist in the planning of intervention strategies when pupils are not making the expected rate of progress. Marking is helpful in showing pupils how to improve. Targets for improvement are well established in mathematics and English, and pupils themselves can identify where improvements in their work are needed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school acknowledges that a pattern of steady improvement that had begun when the school was last inspected has not been sustained in all areas. Following a dip in results in 2008, the school actively sought the support of the local authority and other schools with recognised good practice. Following the strengthening of monitoring procedures and other initiatives, achievement has improved and standards are higher. The headteacher has provided a clear direction in leading this initiative, with the full support of staff and governors. Self-evaluation is satisfactory, although monitoring procedures are not yet fully established throughout the school. Senior leaders review the work of the school regularly, but not all subject co-ordinators are fully involved in monitoring in all aspects of their subjects. The school has been consistently effective in promoting the well-being of its pupils and an inclusive ethos, reflected in a recent inclusion quality mark. Community cohesion is good. The school is alert to the changing nature of its intake and responds well to different needs, for example, in making provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language. It constantly strives to widen the community dimension to its work both locally and in the wider world. Regular contacts locally, such as with the church, help to give pupils a good understanding of the local community. Their awareness of the world community is widened through contacts abroad, for example with schools in France. The governing body has been fully involved in key aspects of the school's development through a time of significant change. It very closely scrutinises the school's work and is a strong critical friend. Financial management is secure, as indicated by the award of a nationally recognised financial management standard.

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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?	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?	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	3
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?	2

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	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	3
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**

5 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stella Maris Catholic Primary School, Folkestone, CT19 5BY

I would like to thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you and seeing how you learn in lessons. This letter is to tell you about what we found out.

You get on well together and your behaviour is good. You feel safe in school and said that there is always an adult on hand to help you if you have a problem. You understand how important it is to eat healthily and to take plenty of exercise, and many of you thoroughly enjoy the lunchtime sport.

Most of your parents and carers are happy that you attend Stella Maris. You get a sound education. We know that you enjoy school and most of the things you do in lessons. You make satisfactory progress and reach the expected standards for your age in English and science, and are almost there in mathematics.

The headteacher and staff are trying hard to make things even better for you and we agree with them about what they should do next.

- Expect you to reach higher standards, particularly in mathematics.
- Make sure that the work you are given is always challenging and that they sometimes expect you to work more quickly.
- Make sure that all subject coordinators regularly check how well things are going.

You can help by making sure that you concentrate hard in lessons and always do your best.

Please thank your parents and carers for returning the questionnaires. It was really helpful to hear their views.

We wish everyone at Stella Maris well for the future.

Yours faithfully

Helen Hutchings

Lead inspector