

St Mary Magdalens Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119638
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	327096
Inspection dates	1–2 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Joan Elton

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)	184
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	Mr Gerry Collins
Headteacher	Mr John Welch
Date of previous school inspection	20 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Buller Avenue Penwortham Preston Lancashire PR1 9QQ

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	1–2 April 2009
Inspection number	327096

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is smaller than average and oversubscribed. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, with a smaller than average percentage from minority ethnic groups. Of these a very small number are at an early stage of English language acquisition. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average, as is the percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The percentage of pupils joining the school at times other than the start of the Reception class, is higher than the national average. The school has an Early Years Foundation Stage, which consists of one Reception class and extended school facilities, which are run privately.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. It has many excellent features and is exceptionally popular with parents and carers. They praise its 'well led team' of 'stable and committed' staff, its excellent standards of teaching, its 'continuous striving for improvement' and its celebration of pupils' achievements. Many recognise the school's ability to identify individual pupil's needs quickly and its decisiveness and success in meeting those needs. This is a very caring school, where teachers and the headteacher 'fall over themselves to answer queries or offer advice', where all staff are 'supportive to family circumstances' and 'where all are valued and welcomed'. As one parent commented: 'I feel privileged for my children to attend such a fantastic school'.

When children begin Nursery, their skills are slightly below those typical for this age group in language and mathematics. When they leave Year 6, standards are well above the national average in English, mathematics and science. This is outstanding achievement and reflects the national assessment results of 2008 and predictions for current Year 6 pupils. These are the results of outstanding provision and very effective leadership and management, which focus on raising pupils' academic and personal achievements. Pupils achieve very well personally, socially and emotionally and they acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to become active citizens. They learn to be considerate and tolerant of others; they enjoy responsibility and community involvement and confidently express and defend their views and opinions. Pupils also have highly positive attitudes to learning and believe in their own ability to succeed.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Teachers know their pupils very well, track their progress carefully and ensure that learning activities challenge and inspire the pupils. A range of strategies is used effectively to ensure pupils sustain concentration and know how to improve their work. Basic skills are very well consolidated and writing has improved significantly because of an additional emphasis on content and structure. Sometimes the teaching does not always make the best use of interactive whiteboard technology to enhance the pupils' learning. The curriculum is exciting and because it is so relevant to the pupils' needs, it motivates them to learn and to extend their basic skills and computer expertise creatively across the curriculum. There is much practical work and pupils are taught to explain experiments concisely using the correct technical terminology. Visits, including a proposed residential, French and a wide range of well attended after-school clubs add further enhancement to the school's provision.

The school provides an excellent standard of care, both personally and academically. It has rigorous systems in place to ensure pupils' safety and security. It ensures pupils know how to keep safe and healthy and encourages them to express and understand their feelings. Academic guidance is also very effective because pupils are well supported in their work to achieve individual targets, no matter where their starting points are.

Leadership and management by the headteacher, staff and governors are outstanding. Meticulous monitoring and highly effective processes of self-evaluation, keep pupils' academic and personal progress central to the school's work. The school acts quickly to bring in appropriate expertise and best value resources whenever necessary. This is a very well run and happy school and richly deserves the accolades of parents and carers because it provides an excellent education for all its pupils.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

This is excellently led and managed. Staff work very well as a team, providing a warm, caring atmosphere, where children's learning and development thrive. Children join Reception from a variety of pre-school settings but because of excellent procedures and the successful priority given to personal development, they soon settle and grow in confidence. Their level on entry to Reception is slightly below that typical for this age group in language and number but because of excellent provision they make outstanding progress and exceed the national Early Learning Goals. Activities across the curriculum are very imaginative and capture the children's interest and develops their learning. There is a very good balance between indoor and outdoor play and between teacher-led and child-initiated learning. Teaching by all staff is excellent because every opportunity is taken to fully develop language and thinking. Independent activities, particularly role-play, are well constructed to successfully consolidate and extend basic skills. Children are happy because they feel safe. Staff provide excellent standards of care and ensure that children understand the importance of healthy food, hygiene and general safety. Courtesy and consideration are encouraged and as a result, children's behaviour and general manners are exemplary. Although children have plenty of opportunities to develop their hand/eye coordination, there are sometimes fewer easily accessible opportunities to exercise the whole body. Arrangements for induction into Reception and transition into Year 1 are very well managed and the school establishes very constructive relationships with parents and carers.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have a variety of opportunities to develop their physical skills.
- Make more use of technology, such as interactive whiteboards, to further enhance the teaching and learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Since 2004 Year 2 national assessment results have fluctuated between exceptionally high and above average in reading, writing and mathematics. During the same period Year 6 results have shown a rising trend in mathematics and English. The issues surrounding a slight dip in results in 2007 were effectively tackled and in 2008, Key Stage 1 results returned to above average. Key Stage 2 results were exceptionally high in mathematics and science and above average in English. The inspection finds that the school is currently maintaining these high standards in both key stages and successfully ensuring that the pupils in all classes make good or better progress. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make comparable progress to their peers, as do those with English as an additional language. This represents outstanding achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

This is outstanding, as is spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils have a very good understanding of health and safety. They say that bullying and racial harassment are non-existent in school and that they enjoy their learning because the atmosphere and

environment are very positive. One pupil commented that he enjoyed paired work because it enables him to see different viewpoints. Pupils' attendance is excellent. Pupils behave very well, both in the classroom and around school. Relationships throughout the school are very good and pupils say that because teachers are very friendly, they are motivated to work very hard. Pupils are very proud of their school and appreciate it takes account of their views through the school council. Older pupils support younger ones by manning the friends' meeting point and working in the safety patrol. Pupils enjoy responsibility and recognise its excellent preparation for adult life. They learn to respect difference and this contributes greatly to the school's harmonious atmosphere. Pupils are aware of ecological matters through environmental studies in the school garden. They leave exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their education because of outstanding basic skills, very positive attitudes to learning, and the ability to work very cooperatively with others.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Staff have very high expectations, very good subject knowledge and are very effective communicators. Teaching is clearly matched to well-judged lesson objectives and this leads to challenging and successful learning for all pupils. Staff use a wide range of strategies to engage pupils and to increase their independence. They have accurate knowledge of pupils' prior attainment and make sure that learning tasks sustain very good progress. The deployment of teaching assistants is very carefully planned to support those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff form very productive relationships with pupils and these contribute to pupils' excellent behaviour and personal development. Classrooms are well equipped with interactive whiteboards but opportunities for their effective use in lessons are sometimes missed. Pupils have high level computer skills, which are used very effectively across the curriculum. The school has rigorous and supportive monitoring systems to ensure that the very high quality teaching and learning is sustained throughout the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is rich, vibrant and highly relevant to all pupils. It successfully boosts achievement in English, mathematics and science because it is so well adjusted to individual needs. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities respond very effectively to sympathetic and expertly focused tuition. They also benefit from the school's excellent phonics teaching and its very effective consolidation of basic skills through exciting cross-curricular projects. Improvements to the writing curriculum have been effective in raising the pupils' achievements in writing. Pupils appreciate the outstanding provision for physical education, art and technology. At Key Stage 2 pupils benefit considerably from strong links with the local high school, especially when they learn a foreign language, join the after-school 'Mad Scientist Club' or receive free instrumental tuition. An innovative feature is the school's approach to personalised learning which is developed by linking subjects, often through information and communication technology. Visits, visitors and the excellent range of after-school activities provide further enhancement to the school's effective provision.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school successfully keeps pupils happy and safe. All statutory requirements are met and systems for safeguarding and health and safety are kept under close review. Training is appropriately updated and many staff are qualified in first aid. To secure pupils' personal development staff successfully incorporate discussion and emotional development techniques into the curriculum. There is early identification of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and excellent use of outside agencies to ensure they receive appropriate resources. Close links with the church and parish have enabled the school to support vulnerable families very effectively and there are many examples of exemplary care for individual pupils. The school has a very rigorous tracking system, which is used efficiently to ensure progress and to identify individual pupil's targets. Staffs' marking of work is constructive. It provides detailed instruction so that pupils are successful. Opportunities for pupils' written response to this marking are sometimes missed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership and management of the school, by both staff and governors, are outstanding. They successfully focus on raising standards and achievement. By his inspirational example the headteacher has created a common sense of purpose and the motivation to improve the pupils' personal and academic achievements. To this end, all systems and practices have been successfully reviewed to ensure their effectiveness. Staff coordinate subjects exceptionally well and work very productively as a team to ensure consistency and smooth progression. Staff and governors have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and have accurately identified areas for development, such as the outdoor area. All are committed to inclusion and use resources very well to improve achievement and secure best value for money for all pupils. The school provides a very high standard of care, is fully committed to overall pupil development and makes a good contribution to community cohesion. This it achieves by raising awareness of its own identity, work within the parish, collaboration with other schools and twinning arrangements with Tondo, a school in the Philippines. It has made excellent progress since the last inspection and has outstanding capacity to improve further. It currently provides excellent value for money.

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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?	1
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	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
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?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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**

3 April 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary Magdalen's Catholic Primary School, Lancashire,

PR1 9QQ

Thank you for your kindness to me during your recent inspection. I enjoyed my two days with you and found your school to be outstanding. Your parents' questionnaires were very useful when I was collecting my evidence. Please thank them on my behalf.

Teaching and learning are excellent and staff take very great care of you. You study some interesting and exciting projects and I know how much you value your after-school clubs. You are all making good or better progress. I saw this in the lessons I watched, the books I scrutinised and in the tracking of your progress. You are achieving very high standards in your work and are becoming very caring and responsible citizens. Your knowledge of health and safety is very good. I was very impressed by your behaviour and how well you concentrated and worked hard. Congratulations on your excellent attendance, well above the national average! The headteacher, staff and governors are a very successful team. They work very hard to provide an excellent education and high standard of care for you all.

There are just two areas where I feel your school could be even better:

- to provide more opportunities for Reception children to develop their physical skills
- make more use of technology, such as interactive whiteboards, to further develop the teaching and your learning.

Your headteacher, staff and governors are very keen to make progress with these improvements. Please continue to enjoy your learning.

My very best wishes to you and your families.

Yours faithfully

Joan Elton

Lead inspector