

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122036
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	327627
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Usha Devi HMI

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	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	135
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	Hugh Williams
Headteacher	Pauline Turner
Date of previous school inspection	30 June 2003
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Woodside Way Northampton NN5 7HX
Telephone number	01604 581011
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Mary's Catholic is a smaller than average primary school situated to the north-west of Northampton. Just over 60% of pupils are White British and the remaining pupils are from a cosmopolitan mix of different ethnic groups. The proportions of pupils who are from minority ethnic groups and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are above the national averages. The proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals and whose first language is believed not to be English are below the national averages. Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision is provided for children in the Reception class. The school has received the Active Mark in recognition of its work. The school was inspected in December 2007 and was given a Notice to Improve because it was performing less well than could reasonably be expected.

There is privately run out-of-school care provision on the school site. This facility was separately inspected.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Mary's Catholic Primary School provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. It is an improving school, with some good features in aspects of the personal development and well-being of pupils. Improvements to teaching and more frequent monitoring of pupils' progress mean that pupils are now achieving satisfactorily and standards are rising. Effective training and support from local authority advisors have played a crucial part in the improvements that have taken place. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Children enter the Reception class with levels of attainment that are well below those expected for their age. They make good progress and begin Year 1 with performance levels that are below those normally expected. Following a period of underachievement and declining standards, achievement in Years 1 to 6 is now satisfactory and some pupils are making good progress. Current assessment information shows that standards are steadily rising in all year groups, with more pupils working at the expected level for their age than previously in reading, writing, mathematics and science. The school's assessment information shows that there are variations in rates of progress. For instance, girls tend to perform better than boys overall and more able pupils do not always make sufficient progress.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and sometimes good. Progress accelerates when pupils are set tasks that provide an appropriate level of challenge for all groups of pupils. They also achieve well when teachers give them the opportunity to use and apply their literacy and mathematical skills in interesting contexts. In one Year 6 science lesson, the teacher asked pupils to imagine that a light aircraft was forced to make an emergency landing and in order to survive in the remote area they had to find a way of getting safe drinking water. Pupils worked productively in small groups to decide on the best way of filtering the water and reporting their ideas. One pupil commented with enthusiasm, 'This is fun and challenging.' The headteacher is aware that this good practice is not sufficiently widespread. The school is in the process of developing the satisfactory curriculum so that there are greater links between subjects and more opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge in imaginative contexts. In lessons, activities do not sufficiently match the needs of different groups of learners. The tasks for the more able, for example, often lack challenge. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Teachers' marking does not always provide pupils with the guidance they need to improve their work or achieve their learning targets.

While leadership and management of the school are satisfactory, the leadership of the headteacher is good. The headteacher is an enthusiastic and determined leader who has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. She has worked successfully with staff and governors to create an atmosphere where pupils receive a good level of care, which is supported by the strong Catholic ethos. 'I am very pleased with St Mary's school. The staff are very kind,' wrote one parent, reflecting the views of the majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and senior teachers regularly monitor the performance of pupils and provide staff with suitable guidance to accelerate progress. However, once areas for development are identified, some senior staff do not check that staff have implemented all the identified actions. This is leading to inconsistencies in teaching and rates of progress. The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children quickly adapt to school routines and soon feel at home because of good induction procedures. Children arrive with skill levels that are well below those expected for children of their age. During the Reception Year they make good progress in all six areas of learning and move into Year 1 with below expected levels of attainment. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are skilfully supported by teaching assistants. This enables them to make good progress. The EYFS is well led by the Reception teacher. She is very well supported by two teaching assistants. Children feel secure and at ease in the Reception class because staff work together well to ensure their well-being and safety. Children's progress is carefully monitored and reviewed weekly. This enables staff to plan activities that successfully meet the children's learning needs. Staff in the EYFS are in the process of refining the ways they assess children's progress in the six areas of learning. Staff employ a good range of teaching methods and experiences in order to encourage the children to develop their independence and take responsibility wherever possible. However, on occasions they miss opportunities to extend the more able pupils. As a consequence, the progress they make is not always as fast as it could be. The outside area is well used and gives children the opportunity to learn in a practical way. There is an appropriate balance between adult-led activities and those that children can choose for themselves. Children have good opportunities to make choices. The recent introduction of a 'Snack Table', for example, promotes independent decision-making.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards further by ensuring a good rate of progress for all groups of pupils throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring teachers consistently provide activities in lessons that meet the needs of all pupils, and particularly the more able.
- Help pupils to understand how they can improve their work and achieve their learning targets through effective marking.
- Ensure all members of the senior team follow up rigorously the findings from monitoring activities. A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged 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

A greater focus on teaching basic literacy and mathematical skills, problem-solving and investigative skills has led to better rates of progress. The school's latest assessment information and inspection evidence shows that standards are below average and pupils in Years 1 to 6 are making satisfactory progress. Some make good progress. Good support enables pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make progress that equals that of others and is sometimes better. Following an analysis of progress made by different groups of learners, the school recognised that boys did not always perform as well girls. In response to this, the school has recently introduced strategies to better meet the needs of boys and the different learning styles of pupils. These are beginning to have a beneficial impact. In lessons observed by inspectors, there was no significant difference between the progress made by boys and girls. More able pupils are not always reaching the high standards and making the faster progress of which they are capable.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Staff place the highest importance on developing pupils' self-esteem and confidence. The impact of this emphasis can be seen in pupils' good behaviour, their enjoyment of school and the positive relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils' spiritual awareness is well developed and strongly reinforced by the school's religious identity, which also supports their genuine sense of moral and social responsibility. Regular visits to places such as the Camrose Centre, where pupils can see food, artefacts and clothes from different countries, effectively promote pupils' understanding of different cultures and religions. The school has initiated effective measures to improve the attendance rate, which is satisfactory and showing an upward trend. Pupils develop a satisfactory understanding of how to stay safe and adopt a healthy lifestyle through the school curriculum. The opportunities pupils have to contribute to the school and wider community are satisfactory. The school is planning to reintroduce the school council later in the year in order to allow pupils to have a greater input. Pupils' skills in literacy and mathematics prepare them suitably for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Good relationships between adults and pupils have a positive impact on pupils' attitudes towards learning and behaviour in lessons. Pupils respond with enthusiasm and make good progress when teachers give them the opportunity to discuss their work with a partner and learn through practical activities. They also achieve well when teachers use assessment information to plan activities that are not too easy or too difficult for different groups of learners. Pupils make satisfactory progress overall rather than good progress because these examples of good practice are not consistently implemented in all lessons. Teaching assistants make an effective contribution to pupils' learning when they are well deployed during introductions and ends of lessons and when they work with groups or individuals.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has rightly focused on the development of pupils' literacy and mathematical skills. This has contributed positively to improved rates of progress. Provision for information and communication technology, literacy and mathematics is satisfactory. Some staff are beginning to make good links between subjects and setting pupils tasks that encourage them to use their imagination and encourage creativity. A good range of intervention programmes provide good support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Curriculum provision for more able pupils is in the early stages of development. The school enriches the curriculum through a small range of extra-curricular activities such as football. A suitable range of educational visits and links with other schools and external agencies support pupils' learning and broaden pupils' experiences.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pupils feel safe because their welfare is at the centre of all that the school does. A strong commitment on behalf of all the staff ensures a positive environment. This results in a good level of care and support for all pupils. Pupils say that there are many adults who they can turn to when necessary. The school complies with statutory safeguarding procedures. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well structured. Strong links with external agencies ensure these pupils receive a good level of support and make satisfactory and sometimes good progress. Academic guidance is satisfactory. There are inconsistencies in the quality of marking. As a result, pupils are not always aware of what they need to do to achieve their targets. The school is seeking ways of extending the sound opportunities parents have to be involved with their children's learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The focused leadership of the headteacher has been pivotal in improving provision and accelerating progress in the school. Staff set pupils appropriately challenging targets and keep a close check on their progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The headteacher regularly reviews this information to identify groups of pupils who are underachieving and ensures they are provided with targeted support. Although this is leading to higher standards, the impact of this process is not evident in the progress made by the more able pupils. The headteacher has suitable plans in place to increase the involvement of other school leaders in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. The school improvement plan identifies the right areas for development but the success criteria are not always measurable. Governors visit the school regularly and are developing the skills required to hold the school to account for the progress made by pupils. The school contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory. There are secure plans in place to more effectively promote community cohesion within and beyond the immediate school community.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	3
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
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	3
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?	3

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	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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	3
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**

23 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Northampton, NN5 7HX

Thank you so much for the very warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being a part of your school community and talking to you about your work and visiting your lessons. We would like to say a special thank you to all the pupils who came to talk to us.

Many of you told us that St Mary's Catholic Primary School has improved and is helping you to make better progress. We agree! This is down to the hard work of Mrs Turner, the staff and the governors. Your positive attitudes towards school and good behaviour have also helped St Mary's improve. We decided that the school is a satisfactory school with some good features. Here is what we found.

- You are polite, kind and are growing up to become youngsters with a caring manner.
- You get off to a good start and make good progress in the Reception class.
- All the staff that work with you take good care of you.
- Mrs Turner, the staff and governors are working hard to keep improving your school.
- In lessons, you listen carefully and like it when your teachers give you the chance to solve problems. We saw how much the pupils in Year 6 were enjoying solving a problem during their science lesson.

To help you do even better we have asked Mrs Turner, the staff and governors to help you reach higher standards and make faster progress in reading, writing and mathematics. We have asked all the teachers to give you work that challenges you to do your best, especially those of you who are capable of harder work. We would also like teachers to make sure that their marking shows you more clearly how to make your work even better. Finally, we have asked the school to make sure that all the senior teachers continue improving the school by carefully checking that everything is always as good as it can be. You can help by continuing to work hard in all lessons.

Thank you once again to all the adults that work with you, the governors, the office staff and you for making us feel so welcome. We really enjoyed the time we spent with you and wish you the very best for the future.

Usha Devi Her Majesty's Inspector