

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124356
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	328116
Inspection dates	13–14 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Chris Kessell

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	157
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	Jo Smith
Headteacher	Alex Bolton
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Cruso Street Leek ST13 8BW
Telephone number	01538 483190
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's is a smaller than average size primary school. Nearly all pupils come from White British families. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. A very small number of pupils are at the early stages of learning English. The school's Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) comprises of a Nursery and mixed-age Reception and Year 1 class. The proportion of pupils who join or leave the school outside normal admission dates is much higher than average. Since the last inspection there has been significant long-term staff absence and an acting headteacher was in post for 18 months until the end of last term. The current headteacher joined the school six days before the start of the inspection.

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 is a satisfactory school. It has strengths in the EYFS and in pupils' personal development. Pupils' behaviour for example, is outstanding. Parents have very positive views of the school and appreciate the good relationships and the Catholic ethos found in this caring and welcoming school.

Pupils' achievement and the standards they reach are satisfactory. The proportion of pupils making good progress is steadily increasing but there are variations between subjects and in different parts of the school. For example, whilst there is some good and outstanding teaching, the overall quality is satisfactory, which leads to variations in pupils' progress. Although standards and pupils' progress in writing have improved since the last inspection, it is still a development priority. Pupils in lower Key Stage 2 are not making the same good progress as those in the older year groups. Learning is calm and purposeful in all classes. However, in weaker lessons, teachers do not use the information they have on what pupils already can do to plan work that is tailored accurately to the needs of different ability groups. Additionally, teachers' expectations are not always high enough so pupils are not challenged sufficiently, especially the higher attainers. A significant minority of pupils do not take enough care with their work and their presentation is poor. Children in the EYFS achieve successfully because of the good provision made for them.

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Parents correctly say that their children are well cared for and are valued. Good attention is given to the pupils' well-being, with effective arrangements in place to ensure that all safeguarding requirements are met. The school is working hard to improve attendance and punctuality but there are still a few pupils who do not attend school regularly enough. Pupils are given individual targets for improvement in English and mathematics. However, the use of target setting is having a limited impact on improving pupils' achievement. Many pupils are unaware of when their targets were set or whether they have achieved them. Good features of the school's sound curriculum contribute well to the pupils' personal development. Pupils are confident and mature and feel safe and happy in school. They enjoy their work and the many extra activities they are provided with. Pupils offer endless reasons about why they enjoy school and find it difficult to find anything they want to improve.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. In her role as acting headteacher, the deputy provided an effective springboard for the new headteacher. Parents are appreciative of the stability she brought to the school over the last 18 months. In an exceptionally short time, the new headteacher already has a very accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. She has identified the priority areas to be tackled that will lead to better quality and outcomes. The skills of those with other management responsibilities are developing well. They are effectively strengthening their role in monitoring and evaluating performance. Despite the challenges of long-term staff absence and the lack of a substantive headteacher, the school has continued to improve since its last inspection, raising standards in Key Stage 1 for example. It has a sound capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children settle into school life well because the learning environment is welcoming and friendly and there are effective induction arrangements. Parents appreciate the good provision and the good links established with them. Children enjoy coming to the EYFS because they like the activities and consequently develop good attitudes to learning. Provision for their welfare is good. Children's skills and knowledge on entry to the EYFS are variable, but generally at the levels normally expected. Children make good progress in all areas of learning. This is an improvement on the previous year and the current Reception children are on course to begin Year 1 with above average attainment.

A well-planned and interesting range of activities engage and interest the children and cover all areas of learning effectively. There is a good balance between activities the children choose for themselves and those led by an adult. Learning outdoors is effective in the Nursery but is less well developed for the Reception children. Personal development is good. Children are encouraged to take responsibility, organise themselves and learn new skills. They develop good levels of confidence and behaviour because relationships are good and they enjoy the activities provided. In the Nursery, children showed absolute amazement as they were guided to observe a large melting block of ice and spot the frozen air bubbles. In Reception, children made good progress counting two sets of beads and identifying the cost of food in their shop.

Teaching is good in both classes. Teachers use questions well to develop children's thinking and other skills. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to their achievement. Planning is good overall, but work is not always matched closely to the needs of children in the mixed-age class. Management of the EYFS is good. The coordinator checks progress regularly and staff work well together, although weekly planning is not shared across the EYFS because of the Reception children being in a mixed-age class.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of pupils making good progress by ensuring that teachers always provide work that is tailored accurately to individual needs and by raising their expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Improve the target-setting procedures so that pupils are regularly provided with challenging targets and have a clearer view of how well they are learning.
- Raise expectations of the presentation of the work pupils produce.

A small proportion of the 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

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and standards in Year 6 are broadly average. Standards at the end of Year 2 show good achievement for these pupils, although progress is more rapid in Year 2 than in Year 1. These higher standards at the end of Year 2 have not yet fed through all of Key Stage 2. Progress through Key Stage 2 is not consistent and pupils make more rapid progress at the end of the key stage.

A very successful initiative has markedly improved boys' reading. Pupils' writing is not as strong as reading and mathematics, particularly at the end of Key Stage 2. The school has correctly identified this as a development priority. Pupils at the early stages of learning English make good progress in the development of their language skills as a result of the effective and focused support provided by the school. Although pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress overall, there are occasions when teachers do not take sufficient notice of their individual education plans when planning lesson activities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils show good spiritual, social and moral awareness. They are exceptionally well behaved and have very positive attitudes to learning. They are kind and helpful to one another and to visitors to the school and are sensitive to the needs and views of others. Their cultural development, in terms of their understanding of other faiths and beliefs, is satisfactory. Pupils enjoy all school activities. They work and play well together because relationships throughout the school are good. Pupils feel very safe and secure and say that any instances of bullying are dealt with well. They effectively adopt safe practices, accurately identifying, for example, the care needed when using the internet. Pupils' good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle is reflected in their sensible choice of healthy options at lunch time and their enjoyment of physical activities, such as working with representatives of Port Vale Football Club or just running around during breaks. Members of the school council have well-defined roles and they are clear about their contribution to improving their school and contributing to the wider community. Pupils are developing a satisfactory range of skills that will help them in their future education and the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In the most successful lessons a good pace of learning is maintained through strategies such as using time targets or being very explicit about the amount of work that is expected from an activity. However, assessment information is not always used rigorously to plan activities to match the range of abilities of pupils. Pupils talk confidently and enthusiastically about their lessons. Despite this, too many pupils do not take sufficient pride in their work. Discussions about different activities are conducted maturely by pupils and they undertake work successfully together in teams. The marking of pupils' work is often good, although it is not consistent across the school and subjects. In the best practice, teachers provide useful guidance to pupils on how to improve their work, often in response to the pupils' self-evaluation in a particular lesson. Teaching assistants generally support teaching and learning well and provide good support to individuals and groups of pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Adults work hard to plan an interesting curriculum that pupils enjoy. Curriculum planning is satisfactory and linked well to a theme, but is not always closely matched to pupils' individual abilities. Information and communication technology provision has been improved since the last inspection but is not used sufficiently well to support work in other subjects. Curriculum

enrichment is good and covers a broad range of interests. Initiatives such as international and multicultural days ensure a sound contribution to community cohesion. Pupils benefit from music tuition and a wide range of clubs such as gardening and aero modelling, which are popular and well attended. Personal, social and health education is planned well and ensures pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe and be healthy.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides a safe and secure environment, which effectively nurtures pupils' personal development and well-being. Parents and pupils appreciate the good level of care the school provides. Positive attitudes and excellent behaviour reflect good support and guidance for personal development. Pastoral support is strong and the school works effectively with a number of outside agencies to support those pupils with specific needs. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory and consequently they make sound gains in their learning. Pupils' welfare and safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements. Although the school has procedures for target setting for the pupils, these targets do not contribute sufficiently to improving pupils' achievement. Pupils do not fully understand the benefits or importance of the process.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership, management and governance are satisfactory overall. The new leadership team has only just started working together but is already aware that the inconsistencies in provision, such as those found in teaching and learning, are preventing all pupils from making good progress. The school and pupils have good links with the local community and stakeholders such as parents. Pupils' understanding of different communities and diversity is satisfactory. Development planning has improved since the school's last inspection and governors are actively involved in the strategic leadership of the school. The governing body provides a wealth of expertise on finance, health and safety, and buildings and maintenance. Individual governors have recently been allocated subject responsibilities and plans are in place for them to work closely with their teaching staff counterparts. The governors are supportive and fulfil their statutory requirements, although they do not assess the impact of their policies sufficiently.

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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	1
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?	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**

15 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Leek, ST13 8BW

Thank you for making the inspection team welcome and for being so polite and friendly. We enjoyed talking with you, visiting your lessons and looking at your work. We judged St Mary's to be a satisfactory school. You make satisfactory progress and when you leave school, standards in English, mathematics and science are very similar to those found in the majority of primary schools. All of the adults who work with you make sure the school is a happy and safe place. Your behaviour is outstanding and you have a good knowledge of how to stay healthy, keep fit and stay safe. You all enjoy school and most of you attend regularly. However, there are a few of you who do not come to school as often as you should do. This stops you learning and making progress as fast as you should.

We have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to make sure that you are given work that is not too easy or too hard. This will help more of you make good progress. We have also asked the school to give you more information about the targets you have in English and mathematics so that you have a clear understanding of how they are helping you to learn. Although most of you are keen and enthusiastic about school, there are quite a few of you who could make more of an effort with your presentation. We have asked the staff to help you with this.

Your new headteacher, the staff and governors are working hard to make your school even better. You can help by continuing to behave exceptionally well, coming to school regularly and working hard on the presentation of your work. Thank you once again for making us feel so welcome. We wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Chris Kessell

Lead inspector