

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124358
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	328117
Inspection dates	4–5 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Don Mason

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)	385
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	Philip Guest
Headteacher	Gillian Regan
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Stanier Street Newcastle ST5 2SU
Telephone number	01782 619685
Fax number	01782 714588

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The majority of pupils in this larger than average Catholic primary school come from White British families. About a fifth are from minority ethnic backgrounds and most of the pupils speak English as an additional language. A small percentage are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a little lower than average but varies considerably from year to year. Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is in the Nursery and in Reception. Governors manage a before- and after-school club which includes children of this age group.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. Its friendly, purposeful, harmonious ethos is exemplary. Pupils show great enthusiasm for school life and their personal development and well-being are outstanding because of the very high level of pastoral support provided for them. Pupils feel safe and secure and develop high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. Through the work of the school council, taking on responsibilities in school, and taking part in parish and community events, they make a good contribution to the community. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school, making such comments as 'Both my children are very happy in school. I am delighted with the progress they are making. I have nothing but praise for the staff.'

Children's skills on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are generally in line with those expected for their age. They make good progress and most enter Year 1 with above average attainment. Good progress is maintained from Year 1 to Year 6 and standards at the end of Year 6 are well above average. This represents good achievement. It is a consequence of good teaching and good curriculum provision. Pupils enjoy their lessons. Teachers maintain a good balance between the time they talk to the whole class and the time pupils have to work on their activities and so good progress is made. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make as much progress as their peers because of the effective support they receive. Pupils at an early stage of learning English make rapid progress in their language development partly because of the close links that exist between their parents and school support staff. Pupils' enjoyment and learning are promoted by a wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities involving sports, drama, music and special events. The care, guidance and support provided for the pupils is good overall because, while pastoral care is outstanding, academic guidance is satisfactory. Each term, pupils undertake a key piece of writing which teachers assess in detail. The marking of this work gives pupils clear advice about their achievements and next steps in learning. These 'gold books' also contain good examples of activities in which pupils are encouraged to make their own evaluation of their achievements. These procedures, however, in day-to-day lessons, are only satisfactory because they do not provide pupils with enough information about how to improve their work. The school acknowledges this need and has taken initial steps towards improving guidance.

The school has good systems in place to check the progress made by pupils. The headteacher meets regularly with class teachers to discuss the progress made by their pupils towards meeting their challenging targets. Pupils at risk of falling behind are identified early and provided with appropriate support. In recent years, staff have set more challenging targets for pupils across the ability range, not just for those who are making slower than expected progress. As a result, the progress made by the more able pupils has improved since the last inspection. However, the school accepts that too few pupils attain the higher levels in national tests, especially in writing. Leadership and management are good. It is a tribute to the leadership skills of the headteacher and the teamwork of the staff that, despite unavoidable disruption in staffing, the school has moved forward since the last inspection. The improved standards in writing and the better achievement of the more able pupils provide evidence of the school's good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good induction procedures and warm relationships ensure that children settle in quickly, enjoy their time at school and make good progress in their learning. They make particularly good progress in their personal development. Their achievements are celebrated and they quickly learn to respect each other and make decisions about which activities to take part in. They display good levels of concentration. A good range of teacher-led and independent activities is provided and these are well planned to take account of the children's learning needs. Adults interact well with the children, asking questions which develop their speaking and listening skills and extend their learning. Provision is better in the classroom than outside. This is because access to the large outdoor area is not easy and its use is dependent on reasonable weather. The school has plans in hand to remedy this situation, particularly by providing a covered area, in order that the six areas of learning can be fully developed outside as well as in. The children clearly feel safe and secure and this is because of the careful attention paid to their welfare needs. The adults work very well together as a team and leadership is good. The small number of children from this age group attending the after-school club are well provided for.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of the more able pupils, particularly in writing.
- Improve the quality of academic guidance provided in English, mathematics and science, building on the good practice seen in pupils' termly assessed writing activities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The national test results of recent years show that standards have been consistently above average. In 2008, standards at the end of Year 6 rose to well above average because of improvements in the teaching of writing and science and the setting of more challenging targets for pupils' achievement. The school has clear evidence to suggest that this improvement in achievement and standards is sustainable and that standards overall are now well above average. Staff recognise the need, however, to consolidate and improve further the achievement of the more able pupils, particularly in writing. With this one proviso, groups of pupils achieve equally well because those at risk of not meeting their challenging targets are provided with effective additional support. A strong emphasis on developing speaking and listening skills through, for example, drama and role-play activities, enhances pupils' self-confidence and provides good preparation for their writing activities. This has contributed to pupils' improved achievement in writing.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Whole-school assemblies, with mutual respect a core theme, make a strong contribution to pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is reflected in their good attendance and in the cooperative, friendly and self-disciplined manner in which the pupils, from a wide range of social and ethnic backgrounds, conduct themselves in class and around the school. Their behaviour during the inspection was exemplary. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and healthy and take full advantage of the many sporting opportunities available to them including inter-school competitions. The skills that

pupils will require in the future are good overall. They display outstanding personal characteristics and well above average skills in literacy and numeracy. Their skills in information and communication technology (ICT) are satisfactory and improving rapidly due to the introduction of a new scheme of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good quality teaching ensures that pupils' progress is good in all year groups. The teaching of writing has improved, with the result that pupils are becoming enthusiastic, effective writers. A change in class organisation means that teachers are now able to provide activities which make effective links between subjects, thereby giving pupils opportunities to develop their writing skills across the curriculum. In mathematics and science, there is an emphasis on practical activity which enhances pupils' interests and their understanding of the relevance of the skills they are learning. The pace of most lessons is good and pupils settle very quickly to work. Teachers make the purpose of lessons clear to the pupils and explain how each lesson fits in with previous and subsequent learning. Teachers generally use the information they have about their pupils' achievements to set work which matches their learning needs appropriately. However, on occasions, especially in writing, teachers do not give pupils sufficiently clear guidance on how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has a strong impact on the progress pupils make throughout the school. It is highly successful in promoting the basic skills in literacy and numeracy and increasingly effective in developing skills in ICT. Lessons in personal, social and health education and initiatives such as 'walk to school week' and 'bikeability' contribute to the pupils' good understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives. The curriculum is enriched well by the Year 6 residential visit, class visits, history days and visitors. A wide range of extra-curricular activities, ranging from judo to guitar and dance to tag rugby, promote pupils' enjoyment, learning and personal development. Provision for dance, drama and music is a strength of the school. The 60-strong Year 5 and 6 choir sings with great gusto and enthusiasm. In addition to many opportunities to learn instrument playing, all pupils in Year 4 enjoy the opportunity to learn to play the violin for two years. The involvement of the local football club has enhanced the sporting opportunities available to the pupils. The pupils who attend the after-school club are well provided for. They are safe and happy and enjoy a good range of activities inside and outdoors.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are cared for extremely well in this inclusive, welcoming environment, however the academic guidance they receive is satisfactory. Policies to promote equality are fully implemented in practice and governors and parents are kept informed of their impact. The requirements for safeguarding pupils are fully met. Attendance is carefully monitored. Good attendance is celebrated and the school is working closely with a small number of families whose children's attendance is less regular. The school has very close links with parents and seeks support and advice, as necessary, from a wide range of agencies to promote pupils' well-being. Staff go to

great lengths to ensure that the relatively large number of pupils who join the school other than at the normal time settle in quickly and that any disruption to their learning is minimised. The academic guidance provided for pupils is satisfactory. Pupils are set targets in writing and mathematics but these are sometimes too general in nature and are not yet used consistently well. As a result, their potential to help pupils improve their work is not fully exploited. Governors manage a before- and after-school club which includes children of this age group.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership role of subject leaders has improved since the last inspection. The headteacher's consultative style of leadership means that senior staff have the time, responsibility and resources to carry out their roles effectively. Staff have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and an effective plan, with a manageable number of priorities, is in place to bring about further improvements. Senior staff are fully involved in a wide range of activities to check the impact of improvement strategies. Assessment arrangements and the teaching of science through investigations have improved following valuable professional development for staff. Similarly, a new scheme of work and staff training, introduced by the ICT leader this year, is leading to a rapid improvement in pupils' ICT skills. Pupils are becoming increasingly successful in reaching their challenging targets because of the strategic use of assessment information by senior staff. However, while pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the good individual support they receive, the school does not routinely gather together the information about their progress. Consequently, senior staff and governors cannot easily monitor the overall achievement and impact of support for this group of pupils. The school's good contribution to community cohesion is particularly effective at the local level. However, it has yet to fully analyse the impact of its provision. Governors are proud of the school. They provide strong support and a good level of challenge in their efforts to help the school to move forward.

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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?	1
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	2
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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	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?	2
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**

8 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Newcastle, ST5 2SU

My colleagues and I really enjoyed our visit to inspect your school. Thank you for being so friendly and helpful. We particularly enjoyed visiting your classrooms, seeing the work that you were doing and talking to you about your school. We found that your school provides you with a good standard of education and that it does some things extremely well.

Things we found out about your school

- You make good progress in your work and reach standards that are well above average at the end of Year 6.
- You are polite, friendly and self-confident. You behave extremely well and take good care of each other.
- You enjoy your lessons because of the interesting things you are given to do. You particularly enjoy the practical activities in maths and science.
- You are proud of your school and enjoy the many after-school activities and special events which the teachers provide for you.
- You get on very well with the adults in school and they take extremely good care of you.
- The adults in school work very well together as a team and are working on ways to help you make even better progress.

What we have asked your school to do now to improve even further

- Help those of you who find work less difficult than others to make even better progress, particularly in writing.
- Tell you more about how you can do even better in your work in English, maths and science.

You can help your teachers by continuing to do the things that make you a credit to your school.

We would like to wish you all the very best of luck for the future.

Yours faithfully

Don Mason

Lead inspector