

St Mary's School

Independent School

Inspection report

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| DCSF Registration Number | 931/6021 |
| Unique Reference Number | 123280 |
| Inspection number | 330554 |
| Inspection dates | 2–3 July 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Eileen McAndrew |

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school. A separate inspection of funded nursery education was carried out on 12 June 2008 under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and framework Act 1998.

Information about the school

St. Mary's School is an independent co-educational day school for pupils aged between three and eleven years of age. It was opened in 1926. It is situated in Henley-on-Thames in Oxfordshire. Admission is non-selective. At the time of the inspection there were 158 pupils on roll. Nine pupils speak English as an additional language. No pupil has a statement of special educational need. The school aim is *'to provide a stimulating, enjoyable educational experience where all children can develop their talents, whether creative, sporting or academic and develop a love of learning.'* This is the school's first reported Ofsted inspection.

Evaluation of the school

St Mary's school achieves its aim and provides a good education for all its pupils. The specialist subject teaching contributes strongly to the good quality curriculum. Teaching is good overall with some outstanding features and, as a consequence, pupils of all abilities make good progress. They become effective learners who try hard, are well motivated and increasingly able to work independently. The personal development of pupils is good: they are well cared for and procedures for their welfare, health and safety are good. Pupils enjoy coming to school and parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. The school meets all of the regulatory requirements.

Quality of education

The curriculum is of a good quality ensuring all pupils have a wide learning experience which includes all subjects of the National Curriculum, personal, social, health and religious education (PSHRE) and French. A significant feature of the curriculum is the growing amount of specialist subject teaching which begins in Key Stage 1 and gradually increases until Year 4, when all subjects are planned and taught by specialist teachers. This system works well in this school with teachers being able to focus specifically on their specialist areas. This results in effective planning particularly in English, mathematics and physical education (PE) and in a good quality and progressive learning experience in all subjects for pupils as they move up through the school.

Planning is constructively informed by the programmes of study of the National Curriculum, the National Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy and other national guidance. Long term planning outlines what will be covered across the year in each subject with pupils of different ages. Termly schemes of work are methodically developed. In some subjects these specify what pupils will learn and in others, the content and the activities pupils will undertake. Where planning identifies what is to be learned it facilitates the assessment of pupils' progress and helps to secure continuity in the subject when changes of staff occur. Literacy and numeracy are given a high priority and this strong emphasis contributes to the pupils' good progress in these areas. Personal development is fostered in PSHRE lessons and extended through assemblies, contributing significantly to pupils' good personal development.

High value is given to the creative and expressive arts and to sport and these form an integral part of the curriculum for all pupils. As a result, pupils respond with the same interest, effort and motivation that they put into other subjects, thus widening their experience and developing their ability to learn in different ways. Further opportunities for enrichment and achievement are created through after-school clubs and instrumental music provision. The school makes good use of visits to museums, exhibitions and sites of historical interest to make learning more immediate and varied. These activities and residential visits, including to France, add substantially to the quality of pupils' learning through direct experience of the world around them.

Teaching and assessment are good overall with some outstanding features and, as a result, pupils of all abilities make good progress. The teachers' strong subject knowledge contributes significantly to the quality of teaching. Teachers are confident in planning the learning to match the differing abilities and needs of pupils. They are adept at knowing when to make links to other related areas of learning and when to narrow the focus to secure specific understanding. In the best lessons, the pace is demanding and the tasks challenge pupils of all abilities to think beyond the superficial. Good quality questions maintain pupils' engagement and concentration. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good, classroom management is assured and pupils expect to work hard. In the small number of lessons where teaching was less than good, the teaching failed to capture and hold pupils' interest, their attention flagged, and their behaviour became restless, adversely affecting progress.

The small number of pupils in each class means teachers know individual pupils well, so they are able to give them direct and timely support. Pupils have opportunities to work in groups contributing to each others' learning, as well as undertaking some tasks where they can work independently. The strong focus on speaking and listening helps pupils to become highly articulate and confident speakers, eager to express a view or explain what they think to others. Pupils are lively and enthusiastic learners, able to concentrate, persevere and take satisfaction from their achievement.

Systems for assessment are well established. Pupils' work is routinely scrutinised in class and is marked regularly. However, there is no school marking policy so each teacher has an individual marking procedure and there is rarely any extended comment to make clear to pupils why work is good or what needs to be done next to improve it. Progress is regularly assessed in all subjects and is particularly rigorous in English and mathematics with detailed profiles for each pupil. Target setting is in place for English throughout the school and for mathematics at Key Stage 1. The school carries out a useful range of standardised tests as well as national tests to compare pupils' performance with that of pupils nationally.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The ethos of the school creates an harmonious environment where pupils respond to the expectation that they will behave well. No rules are written and pupils' behaviour is good; they develop a clear moral sense and an understanding of right and wrong. The staff encourage and support the pupils, who respond by working hard, enjoying school and achieving well.

Pupils say they really enjoy lessons and coming to school and their attendance is consistently high. They are able listen to each other, cooperate and respond to one another with confidence and openness. Pupils make good progress and in consequence, develop self-confidence and self-reliance, becoming increasingly able to take responsibility for their learning. Their growing competence in basic skills lays a strong foundation for their future development and economic well-being.

Pupils are introduced to the notion of religious belief through learning about major world faiths and this helps them to recognise and appreciate differences in cultural heritage and ways of life. The curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to learn about life in their own society and voting for their two representatives for the Henley Youth Council gives them practical experience of democracy in action.

The school encourages pupils to widen their horizons by taking part in local and national sporting competitions. Pupils contribute to the life of the school through undertaking tasks in class and around the school and by using their talents and skills in performances for their parents and each other.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. The school has successfully created an ethos in which pupils feel known and valued as individuals within a safe and secure community. The child protection policy and procedures are in place and training has been undertaken by all staff. Thorough fire risk assessments are carried out and fire-fighting equipment is regularly checked and maintained by specialist providers. The first-aid policy is supported by qualified members of staff.

Aspects of nutrition and healthy eating are explored in science and reinforced daily through the balanced meals provided at lunchtimes. Pupils develop a growing awareness of the dangers to health from smoking and the misuse of drugs. They understand that exercise is an important part of healthy living and have opportunities for developing stamina and fitness as part of their regular PE programme. The admission and attendance registers comply fully with requirements. The school took account of the need to increase accessibility in the most recent school building and it will be drawing up a further plan to review the possibility of improving access elsewhere.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance with the Criminal Records Bureau at an enhanced level. The school carries out other essential checks before staff appointments are confirmed, complying with the most recent legislation.

School's premises and accommodation

The school premises which occupy a large Victorian house have been remodelled and extended to provide suitable accommodation. Good use is made of the space to create specialist provision including a library, science laboratory, art room, and information and communication technology suite. The newest building provides good quality accommodation for the kindergarten and a good sized hall.

The limited outside hard surface area provides a useful space for PE and recreation with some fixed play equipment. Nearby facilities offer a good quality environment for sports.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides clear and useful information through its handbook for parents and prospectus which include details of the curriculum, organisation and school policies. The notice board has an updated weekly calendar and the school regularly communicates with parents through email. Communication is effective as parents attested in their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire.

Formal opportunities are planned each year for parents to meet teachers to discuss their child's progress. Twice yearly written reports include informative details of the work studied and the child's progress in each subject. Parents believe they are kept well informed.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's policy and procedures for handling complaints meet the requirements

in full.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- design a whole school marking policy
- when reviewing schemes of work in the future, specifying what pupils will learn in each year group.

School details

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| Name of school | St Mary's School |
| DCSF number | 931/6021 |
| Unique reference number | 123280 |
| Type of school | Primary |
| Status | Independent |
| Date school opened | 1926 |
| Age range of pupils | 3-11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils) | Boys: 71 Girls: 60 Total: 131 |
| Number on roll (part-time pupils) | Boys: 14 Girls: 13 Total: 27 |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £7,050 |
| Address of school | 13 St Andrew's Road Henley-on-Thames Oxfordshire RG9 1HS |
| Telephone number | 01491 573118 |
| Fax number | 01491 636144 |
| Email address | stmarys.henley@btinternet.com |
| Headteacher | Mrs Sue Bradley |
| Proprietor | Cognita Schools Ltd. |
| Reporting inspector | Eileen McAndrew |
| Dates of inspection | 2–3 July 2008 |