

St Mary's Catholic First School, Dorchester

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113827
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	338248
Inspection dates	13–14 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Colin Lee

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	140
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Catherine Macer-Wright, Caroline Pluck
Headteacher	Jackie Clayton
Date of previous school inspection	20 June 2007
School address	Lucetta Lane Dorchester DT1 2DD
Telephone number	01305 262258
Fax number	01305 257101
Email address	office@stmarysdorchester.dorset.sch.uk

Age group	4–9
Inspection dates	13–14 July 2010
Inspection number	338248

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2010

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited eleven lessons and observed six teachers and one teaching assistant. Meetings were held with governors, staff and groups of pupils. In addition to observing the school's work, inspectors looked at the data the school has collected on pupils' attainment and progress, the raising-achievement plan, lesson and curriculum planning and procedures for keeping pupils safe. Sixty parental questionnaires were returned and scrutinised by the inspectors, who also spoke to a number of parents and carers.

The inspectors reviewed many aspects of the school's work. They looked in detail at the following:

- the attainment and progress of pupils in mathematics and writing, with a particular focus on that of boys
- the use of the curriculum as a whole for the application and development of pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT)
- the impact of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage on the children's progress.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than the average primary school. Pupils are taught in five classes, one for each year group. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly below average, but there are higher proportions in Years 3 and 4 than in other year groups. The range of these needs includes physical disability, speech, language and communication difficulties and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. A pre-school occupies a building on the school site but this is independent provision that is not managed by the governing body.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. It has made significant improvements in all aspects of its work since the previous inspection. Pupils have good levels of attendance and say they love going to school; parents endorse this. The good teaching, curriculum, care, guidance and support all contribute positively to pupils' achievement.

Pupils make good progress from the moment they start the Early Years Foundation Stage, where the attainment on entry of the latest cohort is above expected levels, but for all other year groups was at expected levels. Most aspects of pupils' personal development are outstanding by the time pupils leave the school. Academic attainment is also strong in several areas. Pupils leave the school with well above average attainment in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Pupils' attainment is also high in art and design. In contrast, attainment in information and communication technology (ICT) is not as high as it should be.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Particularly impressive aspects of pupils' personal development are their excellent behaviour and the way that pupils care for one another. Pupils say that they feel extremely safe at school. They know that they are valued and they contribute much to the school community. Pupils love physical activity and have an excellent understanding of its importance and of the need for healthy eating as the basis for a healthy lifestyle.

Staff and pupils are all involved in improving the curriculum. Pupils' ideas often form the basis of days and weeks that are devoted to specific themes for the whole school, such as the arts week that started during the inspection. The curriculum for the whole school is based on the principle of progression in skills taught through topics, with a particular emphasis on developing literacy and numeracy. This means that lessons may have a number of intended outcomes. For example, in a science lesson, pupils planning an investigation might use technical vocabulary in writing and learning how to use graphs to show results. Teachers do not always consistently explain all these objectives to pupils, who consequently are not fully aware of all that they are expected to achieve. Similarly, not all teachers are planning sufficient opportunities for the use of ICT in topics, or ensuring that pupils' ICT skills are improving. Some recent curriculum initiatives, such as a writing project, are having a good impact on attainment. An increased use of drama is also improving writing, particularly that of boys. Such evidence of improvement, alongside a steady rise in mathematics attainment, indicates that the school has a good capacity for further improvement.

Despite several interruptions to the continuity of governance, and to senior staff's leadership and management of the school, an ambitious drive for school improvement

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

has remained sharply focused on raising attainment. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses very well and a very supportive governing body constantly challenges the staff to maintain the momentum of improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in ICT by ensuring that pupils acquire their skills progressively and have frequent opportunities to apply and develop them in all areas of the curriculum.
- Ensure that pupils are fully aware of all the purposes of the tasks they are given in lessons.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' enthusiasm for learning was frequently seen in lessons, and their positive attitudes are a key reason for their good achievement and attainment. The ability to work collaboratively has a marked effect on pupils' quality of learning as well as their social skills. This was exemplified when groups of pupils from Years 2, 3 and 4 worked together with Year 9 pupils from the local secondary school on film animation projects. Constant discussion and respect for one another's ideas led to the production of thought-provoking films on topics such as global warming and pollution.

Attainment at the end of Year 2 and Year 4 has risen consistently in recent years. All groups of pupils are achieving well in relation to their prior attainment in literacy and numeracy, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. By the end of Year 4, most pupils' attainment in reading, writing, mathematics and science is well above average. In contrast, their attainment in ICT is only average.

Pupils appreciate the fact that their views are sought and acted upon. They are very eager to contribute to school life and those with specific responsibilities, such as school councillors, the eco committee and play leaders, carry out their duties very conscientiously. Members of the school council talked enthusiastically about the role they have played in the development of play areas and planning the whole-school arts week. Pupils have an excellent understanding of other cultures and faith groups. This, together with their good or better academic and personal development, means that pupils are well prepared for the future and have many skills to help their eventual economic well-being.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Good teaching enables most pupils to make rapid progress, both in the course of single lessons and also over time. Teachers carry out frequent assessments of pupils' learning and constantly revise planning to take account of how much progress they are making. Learning activities are carefully matched to the needs of pupils of different ability levels. The activities are often very stimulating and the imagination teacher's show in their planning makes learning exciting. Year 1 pupils were totally engrossed in exploring how two- and three-dimensional shapes could be used to make castles and loved the challenge of using estimating, measuring and lines of symmetry to make particular types of castle. Reception children showed their own imaginations after hearing a story, by designing and making a gymnasium for the knights in the story to keep fit. The same story had a princess who snored but the children composed lullabies to cure this.

Assessment is closely matched to the curriculum and is starting to give a detailed picture of each pupil's progress and provide a continuous series of targets for pupils to work towards. Special projects also enhance learning. Exciting art work of a very high quality which is the result of pupils' work with artists in residence forms many attractive displays in the school.

Good quality pastoral care, guidance and support impact well on pupils' personal development and well-being, particularly their social skills. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are generally supported well in their learning. The coordinator of this provision is new to the role and she is quickly addressing issues from a period when insufficient attention was paid to the very specific needs of a few individual pupils.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Much of the continuing improvement in pupils' outcomes is due to the robust management, monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning by senior management and subject leaders who identify any areas for development and regularly follow them up. They also identify wherever there is especially good practice that can be shared. Teachers are therefore being constantly encouraged to learn from one another. This process has been extended beyond the school through several very active partnerships with other schools in the area.

The most important partnership, with parents and carers, is one that the school recognises as a priority area for improvement. There has been a concerted effort by staff and governors to improve communication, involve parents and carers in their children's learning, and develop a feeling of school and home working together. More work is needed, especially in reassuring parents and carers that their concerns are being addressed and their suggestions listened to.

The school shows a strong commitment to promoting community cohesion. It contributes much to life in the local neighbourhood, working with various organisations and sections of the community. Parishioners particularly appreciate the open invitation they have to mass at the school. Several links with schools in other parts of the world, including Ghana and Venice, are developing pupils' understanding of life in those schools and communities. The school is seeking to establish similar links within the United Kingdom. The school's good promotion of equal opportunity and its readiness to tackle discrimination ensure all groups of pupils achieve equally well.

Governors have very effective strategies to ensure they are fully informed about the life of the school and they contribute knowledgeably to planning for school improvement. They ensure that safeguarding arrangements are thorough and that staff are well trained and vigilant in their attention to health and safety, risk assessment and child protection issues.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Good provision and leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage help children to make good progress from the moment they start school, and they end the stage well above average in all areas of learning. Children experience a rich curriculum and benefit from teaching that is consistently good and occasionally outstanding. This results in children loving every minute of being at school.

Staff work very closely together, showing exemplary levels of concern for children's welfare. They all assess children's learning by recording observations of their successes and areas for development, but these observations are sometimes too general and not sufficiently specific to the activity children are engaged in. Children quickly develop the confidence to work independently. They are inquisitive, love learning new things and talk excitedly about their discoveries. This all stems from learning activities, both indoors and outdoors, being well planned, with a good balance of those led by adults and activities that children initiate for themselves.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The large majority of parents and carers who returned questionnaires, or who spoke to

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

inspectors, are happy with the school and are supportive. They said that their children enjoy school, are kept safe and progress well. Pupils' enjoyment of all that they do at school was very obvious and it was clear that safety is an absolute priority. A few questionnaires had additional, positive comments. The main concerns expressed by parents and carers related to the school's support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, the inappropriate behaviour of some pupils and aspects of leadership and management that they feel could be improved. Behaviour observed during the inspection was excellent and pupils say that incidents of bullying are very rare. While inspection evidence does not confirm the validity of the other concerns, it is clear that the school sees communication with parents as an area in need of attention, including communication with parents and carers of special needs pupils about provision for these pupils and the progress they are making.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's Catholic First School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 60 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 140 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	39	65	20	33	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	34	57	20	33	5	8	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	17	28	34	57	3	5	5	8
My child is making enough progress at this school	29	48	20	33	4	7	3	5
The teaching is good at this school	25	42	20	33	5	8	2	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	23	38	20	33	13	22	4	7
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	26	43	29	48	2	3	1	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	26	43	26	43	5	8	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	24	40	24	40	8	13	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	20	31	52	7	12	6	10
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	23	30	50	5	8	7	12
The school is led and managed effectively	20	33	23	38	3	5	10	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	30	50	17	28	11	18	1	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



15 July 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic First School, Dorchester DT1 2DD

Thank you for making us so welcome in your school and for talking so willingly. We thoroughly enjoyed joining you in lessons and seeing you at work. We think your school gives you a good education and several things about your school are outstanding. This is what we particularly appreciated.

- You make good progress and your work is very good in English, mathematics, science and art.
- You are taught well and teachers plan exciting things for you to do.
- Your behaviour is excellent and we saw how well you all look out for one another. This makes your school a very happy place that everyone enjoys.
- You know the importance of healthy eating and exercise.
- You are very good at carrying out responsibilities, such as being a school councillor or play leader.
- You feel very safe in school because all the adults do a really good job looking after you and making sure that you get help whenever you need it.
- Everyone in the school works well together to help it improve.

We have asked the school to do two things to help make it even better:

- plan more opportunities for you to use computers, cameras and all the other equipment you need to learn about in ICT
- make sure that you know exactly what you are expected to learn in lessons.

We hope you will carry on working hard, enjoying learning and helping your teachers to make St Mary's Catholic First School an even better school.

Yours sincerely

Colin Lee

Lead inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.