

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114570
Local Authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	338404
Inspection dates	27–28 April 2010
Reporting inspector	Jacque Buttriss

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	218
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Lang
Headteacher	Mrs Joyce Jones
Date of previous school inspection	28 April 2010
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Eight lessons were observed and all the class teachers were seen teaching. Meetings were held with leaders, staff, governors and pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documents, including the school improvement plan, data about pupils' progress, curriculum planning, safeguarding documentation, school policies, children's work in their books and questionnaire responses returned by pupils, staff and 71 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- what impact any improvements in the teaching and curriculum have had this year on raising attainment and progress in mathematics and science, checking what progress pupils are currently making and how well their varying needs are met
- the extent to which the areas of improvement recommended in the last inspection report have been addressed
- what leaders are doing to bring about the necessary improvements in the core subjects in Key Stage 2 and what effect these actions are having in moving the school forward
- the extent to which teachers' marking and the setting of learning targets help pupils to know how well they are doing and how to improve their work.

Information about the school

St Mary's is an average-sized primary school in an urban area on the outskirts of the city. Nearly a third of pupils, higher than is usual, are from a variety of minority ethnic groups, cultures and faiths. English is not the first language for a quarter of the pupils. Fewer pupils have free school meals than in most schools. An average proportion of pupils have special educational needs, the majority of whom have communication difficulties. There is a daily breakfast club which is run by the school. A number of national awards have been gained, including the Healthy School Gold Award, the Artsmark Gold Award and International School status.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is an improving school. It has several strengths, principal of which are the outstanding care, guidance and support given to its pupils. Parents are unanimous that the school keeps their children safe. Indeed, there is a strong, nurturing ethos in everything the school does for pupils of differing cultures and faiths. There is 'a fantastic atmosphere', as one parent described it.

Although standards dropped after the last inspection, recent improvements in the curriculum and in the quality of teaching have raised the attainment of pupils to broadly average across the school this year in English, mathematics and science. One of several parents praised the fact that 'children have fun while learning'. However, in two Key Stage 2 classes, where teachers' expectations are not sufficiently high, the pace of learning slows and there is a lack of challenge for the more able pupils. Pupils in these classes are given work that is not always well matched to their needs and this leads to a dip in progress, with a few pupils not achieving as well as they might.

Pupils with special educational needs are supported very well and make good progress so that they achieve well, as do those in other vulnerable groups. As one parent put it, 'My son has benefitted so much by receiving the extra help.' Children in the Reception class have a good start in school and make good progress across all areas of learning.

Many of the personal development outcomes are particularly strong, including pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Behaviour is good and pupils are adamant that there is 'almost no bullying at all'. This is reflected in parents' comments, such as 'discipline is very good' and 'children show good respect'.

The school is sympathetically led by the headteacher and her supportive senior management team, who engage exceptionally well with parents and carers. This is demonstrated by the very large majority of positive responses to the parents' questionnaire, such as 'we are extremely happy with the school'. Leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and priorities for development and the new approaches they have introduced this year have already improved learning outcomes across the school. There is therefore satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement. Governors give good and well-informed support and ensure that all requirements are fully met.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring greater consistency in the delivery of:
 - well paced lessons

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- high expectations of what pupils can do
- greater challenge for more able pupils.
- Eradicate pockets of underachievement in two Key Stage 2 classes by ensuring work is better matched to pupils' needs so that pupils all progress as well as they can.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Children come into the Reception class with skills well below expectations. Despite a downward trend in attainment over the past three years, the school's recent actions to improve teaching and learning have turned this situation around. As a result, attainment is rising across the school and accelerates in Year 6, where pupils are now achieving broadly average standards in English, mathematics and science. Progress is good or better in the majority of year groups, but it dips in two Key Stage 2 classes. Achievement overall is satisfactory. Pupils with English as an additional language, those in ethnic minority groups, pupils who have free school meals and those with special educational needs are well supported so that they all make good progress and achieve well.

The school's Healthy School Gold Award confirms pupils' excellent awareness of how to keep themselves healthy. Pupils comment that 'this is a very healthy school'. They say they feel very safe at school and they know what to do if they have any concerns. Their enjoyment of learning is evident. One parent commented, 'My child only cries when she cannot come to school!' Another said, 'Our daughter is eager to learn and is very happy at school.' As a result, attendance is good. Pupils work well together and are satisfactorily prepared for the next stage in their education.

Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community. Two examples of this are their very active partnerships with the local radio station and with the Chinese Centre, involving a variety of joint projects, such as taking part in Chinese New Year festivities at the town hall and taking part in the East-West Festival.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2

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

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The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
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 Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is satisfactory overall and improving. Three good lessons were seen during the inspection. In one of these lessons, Year 2 pupils were challenged to round numbers to the nearest ten. The lesson was well paced and the teacher made clear the learning objective and what she expected of her pupils. There were different levels of task for each ability group, with the most able relishing the challenge of rounding numbers in the high hundreds as quickly as they could, with a fresh challenge to follow. However, in the satisfactory lessons, the pace is often slower and the learning objective vague, with the result that pupils are not always clear about what is expected of them and therefore their progress slows.

Teachers' marking is good and in most classes pupils' work is marked with helpful suggestions about how to improve their work. Older pupils make very good use of the excellent target cards that tell them how well they are doing and how to move to the next level of attainment. Assessment is used well in some classes to plan pupils' work, but this is not consistent across the school, with the result that in a small minority of classes pupils are not sufficiently challenged. Teaching assistants give very good support to pupils with special educational needs and those at an early stage of learning English, enabling them to achieve well.

A new and exciting skills-based curriculum has recently been introduced and pupils talk about their topics with great enthusiasm. As one parent put it, 'My son is keen to tell me about the Deep Learning topics and any new facts he has learned.' Another praised the 'wonderful environment for a child to learn in'. After-school clubs are well attended and pupils enjoy additional enrichment opportunities such as educational trips and the many visitors who come into the school to share their skills.

Care, guidance and support are a great strength of the school and parents fully appreciate the 'very dedicated and caring' staff. One pupil told us, 'Our teachers are really nice and they look after us well.' There is a very strong ethos of care for vulnerable pupils and their families, who are very well supported by school staff and through links with other care professionals who visit the school. As a result, pupils of all cultures and faiths settle in quickly and differences are positively celebrated and

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respected by adults and pupils alike. There is good, caring provision in the breakfast club where pupils of different ages eat and play together happily, giving them a good start to the school day.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The dedicated headteacher leads the school with enthusiasm. She is supported by the strong teamwork of all staff. One member of the senior management team reflected the views of many, commenting, 'It is a privilege to be a member of this school community.' As a result of leaders' actions to enhance the quality of teaching and learning this year, there has been some improvement in those areas highlighted as needing attention during the last inspection. The school's self-evaluation form accurately identifies the areas to work on in the coming year. The school makes good use of data showing pupils' progress to identify and provide appropriately for learners who need greater support. However, the setting of targets is not always sufficiently challenging for more able pupils.

There are good partnerships with local schools and a nearby university, which promote pupils' well-being and learning. For example, teachers at the secondary school provide older pupils with opportunities to learn science in a laboratory. All pupils have equal access to every opportunity and the school tackles any discrimination very effectively. However, a lack of challenge for able pupils in some lessons results in a few pupils not achieving as well as they might.

Safeguarding procedures are fully in place and there is outstanding vigilance from everyone in ensuring the safest possible environment for pupils and staff alike. Indeed, there is a safeguarding governor who personally checks all the policies and processes and ensures that there is rigorous safeguarding and child protection training for both governors and staff in these important aspects.

Community cohesion is truly exceptional. The school has conducted a comprehensive audit and has a very detailed action plan. Pupils are actively involved in a number of local and national projects, including links with a school in Scotland, involving various areas of the curriculum. St Mary's has recently received an award for its 'Outstanding Contribution to Cultural Exchange and Chinese Education in the UK'. The school recently hosted a visit by a group of Australian headteachers, during which the pupils gave them an English afternoon tea and asked questions about life in Australia. There is now a link

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with one of the Australian schools. There is also an active ongoing link with a school in Belgium and a developing link with a village in Kenya where one of the school's families is about to go in order to help build a variety of community facilities to improve village life.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children come into the Reception class with skills well below expectations, especially in aspects of communication, language and literacy and mathematical development. As a result of the good teaching and an exciting curriculum they enjoy their learning and make good progress. Relationships are excellent and children settle in quickly, gaining well in confidence and independence. They enjoy a stimulating variety of activities across all areas of learning, both in the classroom and in their attractive outside learning environment. For example, during the inspection, children were highly enthused when making rockets and were keen to show how they could make them 'take off' and go higher. One little boy happily explained why he was wearing a colander on his head 'It's a space-helmet because there's no oxygen in space.'

The Early Years Foundation Stage is well led by the enthusiastic and dedicated Reception teacher. Team members work very well together to ensure that all pupils are well cared for, nurtured and valued.

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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 responses of parents and carers were highly positive, with the large majority praising all aspects of the school. A typical comment is, 'We are very pleased with St Mary's ... a credit to the head, teaching and support staff.' Another wrote, 'The teaching staff and assistants at this school are friendly and approachable and listen to any concerns we have.' Several parents and carers highlighted the care and support given to pupils with special educational needs, such as 'They have gone above and beyond to ensure his needs have been met.' However, a very small minority expressed concerns about their children with special educational needs with comments regarding communication, a need for more support and individual education plans. Inspectors found these to be exceptional cases and suggest parents and carers contact the school to discuss these issues further.

A few parents and carers wrote that they would like their children to do more physical education (PE). Inspectors investigated this and found that the school does its best with the limited space at its disposal, providing at least one timetabled PE lesson per week, together with additional sports opportunities in lunchtimes and after school. A few parents commented that they would like their able children to be more challenged or that they make less progress than they could. Inspectors found this to be the case in a small minority of lessons and recommend improvements in this area.

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 Primary 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 71 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 218 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	43	61	23	32	4	6	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	49	69	21	30	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	32	45	31	44	7	10	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	33	47	28	39	6	9	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	41	58	24	34	3	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	33	47	29	39	7	10	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	36	51	29	41	6	9	0	0
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)	30	42	31	44	6	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	39	55	23	32	6	9	2	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	33	47	32	45	3	5	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	32	45	32	45	3	5	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	41	58	25	35	3	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	44	62	24	34	2	3	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	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.



29 April 2010

Dear Children

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Portslade BN41 1LB

Thank you for being so friendly, polite and helpful when we came to inspect your school. We very much enjoyed talking with you. Your school is improving and cares for you very well.

These are the things that we especially like about your school

- Children in the Reception classes have a good start to their school lives.
- You all enjoy your learning and most of you work hard. Some of you make good progress and achieve well.
- You have an excellent awareness of how to be healthy.
- The staff and governors make outstanding provision to keep you all very safe.
- You behave well and there is 'almost no bullying' in school. Well done!
- The school provides excellent care, guidance and support for you all.
- Your involvement in your local community's activities is outstanding and you have excellent links with schools and communities in other countries.
- You told us that you greatly enjoy the exciting curriculum topics that are part of your 'Deep Learning' project.
- We especially like the target cards that some of you use to assess your own progress and help you know how to improve your work.
- Your school communicates very well with your parents and carers.
- Your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

These are the things your school could do to improve

- Improve the teaching in a few classes by ensuring that lessons move along at a good pace, that teachers have higher expectations of what you can do and provide more challenge for those of you who are more able.
- Make sure that pupils in all the Key Stage 2 classes are set work at the levels that suit your needs to help you make as much progress as you can.

You can help the school by working hard and continuing to enjoy your lessons. I would like to wish you all lots of success in your future learning.

Yours sincerely

Jacquie Buttriss

Lead inspector

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