

St Mary Magdalene Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114565
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	357571
Inspection dates	21–22 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Gavin Jones

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	220
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Syliva Cousin
Headteacher	Patricia Longmire
Date of previous school inspection	24 June 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspection team visited 16 lessons, observing all class teachers at least once. Inspectors held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and some parents. They observed the school's work and looked at various documents including the school's development plan, the school's monitoring of teaching and learning, its safeguarding documents and 56 questionnaires completed by parents and carers. They also analysed questionnaires completed by pupils and staff.

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

- The reasons for progress being slower in Key Stage 1 than the rest of the school.
- The variations in teaching, graded good overall by the school.
- The effectiveness of leadership and management in making recent rapid improvements since the last inspection
- The extent to which pupils understand ethnic, religious and cultural diversity in British society.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized primary school, with the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities being in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average as is the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, although this group is growing year on year. The largest group of pupils is of White British heritage. The school has a very stable population, with the vast majority of pupils joining in Reception and leaving at the end of Year 6. The school runs its own before-school club.

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

St Mary Magdalene is an effective school that provides a good education for its pupils. It has made a significant number of improvements since its previous inspection. The school shows outstanding strengths in the ways in which it cares for and supports its pupils. The pupils themselves say how extremely safe they feel in the school. Their spiritual, moral and social development are all excellent. These strengths and improvements have been made by the joint efforts of the school's leadership team, its staff and excellent governing body. Self-evaluation is good and the school has well conceived plans for further development. These illustrate that the school has good capacity to sustain the improvements already made and that it seeks further improvements as outlined in the development plan.

Attainment has risen steadily and is now above average in all core subjects. Pupils make good progress from average levels in the Reception class to the end of Year 6. However, the legacy of some weaker teaching of the younger pupils over the recent past means that progress is still only satisfactory in Key Stage 1, with average standards attained by the end of Year 2. Following the introduction of coaching to meet the identified needs of particular teachers, the quality of teaching and learning is improving, although more remains to be done. Planning does not consistently match the abilities of different groups of pupils to ensure that they receive challenging work. Similarly, questioning does not always stretch the more able pupils. Whilst subject leaders are able to help colleagues with advice on general issues, they do not spend enough time monitoring the teaching of their subjects in order to suggest how learning can be improved. Positive features include good relationships and the deployment of teaching assistants, and the effective support of vulnerable groups of pupils. Recent changes in the content of the curriculum now provide more interest and variety for pupils in their 'Learning Journeys'. The school sees pupils' personal development as very important and consequently nearly all aspects are good. In spite of this and the best efforts of the school, attendance is still only broadly average, although it has improved.

The comparatively new leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage has made a good start in her role. Teaching and learning are not yet strong enough to raise standards, especially in communication, language and literacy. The indoor environment for the Early Years Foundation Stage has been improved, but the outdoor provision has not been significantly improved since the last inspection and remains a weaker element of provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Raise the quality of teaching and learning particularly in Key Stage 1 by:
 - ensuring that planning more accurately matches the needs of different groups and individual pupils and challenges them appropriately
 - focusing the school's monitoring more closely on learning outcomes to ensure that pupils make better progress
 - helping teachers to focus their questioning appropriately across the different groups of pupils, especially the more able, in order to extend the knowledge and understanding of all
 - giving subject leaders more opportunities to monitor teaching in their own subjects in order to improve teaching and the progress pupils make.
- Improve the quality of provision and outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - ensuring that teaching is consistently good, especially in communication, language and literacy
 - improving the outdoor classroom
 - creating a better match of learning activities to the abilities of children in the class, especially for the more able
 - assisting adult helpers to make better use of questioning to explore children's understanding of activities and the development of their language.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

St Mary Magdalene is making a significant difference to the pupils in its care. By Year 6 pupils' attainment is above average and improving. From average starting points when they enter the school, pupils are making good progress and achieving well. Pupils are motivated to learn because of the good relationships with staff and each other. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make equally good progress from their slightly lower starting points. The small number of pupils from different ethnic backgrounds also makes good progress. The progress of vulnerable groups is tracked well by the school. The progress of all of these groups, and others, in many lessons observed is good. However, following a period of significant changes in staffing pupils experienced variable quality of teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage, which has impeded progress. As a result of decisive action by senior leaders staffing is now stable and standards are improving as a result of better teaching. Progress accelerates as pupils move through the school with the most rapid progress being in Year 6, where good and sometimes outstanding teaching occurs.

Pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning and achieve well. They are enthusiastic, as noted in their work on Goodnight Mr Tom in Year 6 and in their work as newspaper reporters in a Year 4 literacy lesson. Behaviour is good and supports pupils' learning and social development well. Pupils feel extremely safe in school and say that they know who to turn to for help when required. They play a full part in the life of the school and take

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part in the Primary Town Council. Older pupils take on many responsibilities at play times. Pupils are well informed about healthy living, understand diet and benefit from sporting club activities after school. Their good levels of basic skills, and their regular opportunities to work alone and in groups, give them good skills for later life. Attendance is broadly average; the school has undertaken a range of initiatives to raise it to that level. Pupils have excellent opportunities to meet with other children from a special school and from an international village, helping to promote their cultural, social and moral development to an outstanding level. Within the school older pupils willingly take on responsibilities for looking after younger children by acting as playground buddies. Their spiritual and cultural development is strengthened by their enthusiastic participation in musical extravaganzas in the school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is satisfactory overall and is good in the upper year groups. The school is aware of this and has been providing support and coaching for teachers in order to improve teaching and its impact on learning. The school's tracking system is

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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satisfactory, but it is not used consistently by all teachers to challenge the different groups of pupils appropriately, particularly the more able.

The school presents much of its curriculum through topics and themes, which it calls Learning Journeys. These often start or end with a 'wow factor' presentation, such as with the Tudor Day and special visit. The curriculum has been mapped carefully to meet the pupils' needs. It is enriched with special events, such as the Year 6 pupils' residential visit which helps improve both their physical and personal skills. A slightly weaker area of the curriculum is information and communication technology (ICT). Whilst the school has sufficient hardware, this has to be moved around the school continuously as there is no space available to be set aside for ICT. Plans are quite rightly being implemented to improve this situation and further integrate ICT into the Learning Journeys by making the computers more accessible to everyone. The school's care and support for pupils are outstanding, exemplified in the support given to the most needy. This includes nurture groups and the services of a parent support adviser, who gives advice on improving attendance, punctuality and behaviour. The school's own before club gives around 20 pupils a good start to each school day. One parent came into school to explain to inspectors how well the school supported her child who had diabetes. This type of response was echoed in other letters to the inspection team. There is good transition between classes and to the schools to which the pupils transfer.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
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 headteacher and leaders and managers work well together and have shown their ambition and drive by taking the school from a satisfactory to good standard in just two years. They have continuing plans for further development and have engendered high morale and teamwork in the school, giving them good capacity to sustain the improvements already made. The work of middle leaders in the school has improved since the previous inspection. They are now more involved in overseeing their subjects across the school. Their more regular access to classroom monitoring is an appropriate area of development that the school is now considering. Leaders are actively supporting the improvement of teaching and the work of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The latter includes much help from specific members of the governing body. Governors have an excellent understanding of the strengths and areas for further development, gained from their own monitoring and their attendance at a range of courses. The governing

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body, along with the bursar and headteacher, has ensured that safeguarding is of good quality in all aspects. Child protection issues are dealt with rigorously by the school. The governing body has also overseen a move to recover from a deficit budget. Good links have been formed with parents and carers, noted in raising the level of attendance, the support for homework and high levels of interest in the work of the Reception class. Similarly, good links have been made with the Bexhill consortium of schools through which extra support, courses and further curriculum links have been established. A good music lesson was seen, taken by a specialist teacher from the consortium. Extra reading support from a teacher in the same consortium is also effective. The school has a strong commitment to ensuring that every pupil has an equal chance to learn. It works hard to eradicate any differences in the achievement of groups of pupils, particularly the most vulnerable. Senior leaders guide staff so that equality of opportunity and inclusion are effective, but recognise that occasionally, although improving, the most able pupils do not do as well as other groups of learners. The very rare incidents of racist behaviour are quickly tackled. The school has evaluated its contribution to community cohesion, which is good. This has been achieved by developing and promoting a detailed understanding of its own community and the different ethnicities and cultures that exist within it. Nevertheless, not all pupils have a full appreciation of what it means to be a citizen in the United Kingdom

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
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
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

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and understanding that are

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typical for their age. However, these skills are less evident in communication, language and literacy. Children settle quickly into the Reception class and rapidly become confident and eager to learn. By the time they enter Year 1 they are working at levels that are generally average, but above that level in personal, social and emotional development. The acquisition of communication, language and literacy skills still lags behind the development of other skills, especially for boys. Children are well looked after and good links have been made with parents and carers who are very largely supportive of the work of the school. The classroom reflects the six areas of learning, although the outdoor classroom is not sufficiently well resourced and organised, especially for the physical development of children. Assessments are made regularly, but these are not used sufficiently well to inform planning in order that new learning activities are well matched to the prior learning and abilities of different groups of pupils. In spite of this, improvements have been made by the Early Years Foundation Stage leader, who has only been in post for a year directly from her first year in teaching. She has been supported well by the school and has completed her first action plan which captures much of what needs to be done. This includes the need to challenge pupils more rigorously, especially the more able children, so that they make good progress.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

From the returned questionnaires it is clear that the school enjoys the confidence of a large majority of parents and carers. Over 90% of responses noted that children enjoy school and that they know about healthy lifestyles. Some noted concerns about behaviour and the quality of leadership and management. After examining these issues, inspectors found that behaviour during the inspection was good and that leadership and management had improved the school in many areas since its previous inspection.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary Magdalene 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 56 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 220 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	26	46	25	45	2	4	2	4
The school keeps my child safe	31	55	19	34	1	2	1	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	20	36	28	50	2	4	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	32	26	46	5	9	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	15	27	33	59	2	4	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	17	30	25	45	3	5	2	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	21	38	29	52	2	4	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)	21	38	24	43	2	4	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	16	29	31	55	0	0	4	9
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	23	27	48	6	11	5	9
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	9	16	35	63	2	4	2	4
The school is led and managed effectively	17	30	27	48	6	11	3	5
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	25	45	23	41	3	5	2	5

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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.



23 September 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary Magdalene Primary School, Bexhill-on-Sea TN40 2ND

Thank you for your help when we visited your school for its recent inspection. You clearly enjoy being at school, as we saw from your questionnaire responses and when we talked to you.

Here are some of the highlights we saw on our visit:

- the above average standards you reach in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6
- the improvements your school has made since the last inspection
- your excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- the excellent way the governing body support and guide the school
- the high levels of care and support given to you by all the adults in the school.

The school must now:

- improve teaching so that pupils in all year groups reach higher standards and make good progress
- improve the learning and achievement for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

I am sure that all of you will continue to do your best and, for some, to try even harder to improve attendance.

Thank you again for such an interesting visit.

Best wishes for the future

Yours sincerely

Gavin Jones

Lead inspector

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