

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Bicester

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 123207 |
| Local Authority | Oxfordshire |
| Inspection number | 359393 |
| Inspection dates | 21–22 October 2010 |
| Reporting inspector | Rodney Braithwaite |

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 | 262 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Ian Inshaw |
| Headteacher | Patricia Pickering |
| Date of previous school inspection | 27 November 2007 |
| School address | Queen's Avenue Bicester, Oxfordshire OX26 2NX |
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 17 lessons and observed 10 different teachers. They observed the school's work and looked at documentation relating to the attainment and assessment of pupils' progress, the school's self-evaluation, the provision for safeguarding, governing body minutes, and an external evaluation of the school. They also looked at school policies, samples of pupils' work and the school improvement plan. They analysed 79 questionnaires returned by parents and carers and other written responses from pupils and staff.

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

- The attainment and progress of pupils through the school, especially pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, focusing on reading and mathematics.
- The consistency of teaching and learning through the school, and the quality and use of assessment data for planning and target setting.
- The accuracy of the school's recent self-evaluations, especially in relation to leadership and the school's capacity to improve.
- The effectiveness of subject leaders and senior managers in monitoring and evaluating provision and outcomes for pupils.

Information about the school

St Mary's Catholic Primary School is slightly larger than average serving a wide area of Bicester. A majority of pupils are of White British heritage. There are a number of minority ethnic groups, the largest being of Indian origin. A small number of pupils are in the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than average, the largest group having moderate learning difficulties. In the last two years the school has had a significant number of teachers on long-term absence including maternity leave, but staffing is now more stable. The school has a number of awards including the Eco Schools' Silver Award and Artsmark.

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

St Mary's Catholic Primary is a satisfactory school. It has gone through a difficult time recently because of extensive absence of teachers for a number of reasons. This situation is now much improved and there are clear indications that a stable staff and leadership team have the determination and accurate self-evaluation skills to address the school's priorities effectively and that there is a satisfactory capacity for further improvement. Improvements have been made in raising attainment in mathematics and in introducing better assessment strategies throughout the school. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress, as do more-able pupils, who are challenged well. The achievement and attainment of other pupils have not yet reached these levels. School leaders recognise that for the signs of good improvement to be sustained, teaching needs to be consistently good across the school, in each subject, and for all groups of pupils.

The school has a number of strengths especially in guiding the personal development of its pupils. Pupils are safe, staff care for them well, and there are good relationships between adults and pupils and between pupils themselves. Pupils enjoy coming to school and are enthusiastic about their learning and the variety of opportunities they have through their good curriculum and extra-curricular activities. These, and as a parent described, 'the impressive moral and religious guidance provided', contribute strongly to the good spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of pupils. Pupils are well involved with both the school and local community, and have good links with other schools in Europe, which has enabled them to gain a good knowledge of cultural diversity. Nearly all pupils behave well, although a small number have difficulties in this respect. The school works hard to deal with these occasional problems, but realises that some parents are unhappy with this aspect of management. While most parents are happy with the education and well-being of their children, leaders are now planning further steps to ensure that all parents and carers are kept better informed and can engage positively with school leaders.

Children make a good start to their education in the Early Years Foundation Stage which is a strength of the school, and is clearly recognised by parents. In the rest of the school, achievement varies from satisfactory to good, and this inspection indicates that strategies are now in place which are enabling an increasing number of pupils to improve their progress. The headteacher knows the pupils well, and has remained calm and resourceful during the recent problems for the school. She has guided the development of a new leadership and staff team which gives cause for optimism for the future development of the school. The governing body, under the leadership of the experienced chair, is very supportive of the school's leadership and makes a sound contribution to the leadership and management of the school.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Remove inconsistencies in teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that pupils in all classes, particularly middle and lower attainers, are able to reach the learning targets of which they are capable
 - modelling and sharing more frequently existing good practice in the school to make all teaching good or better
 - using information gained by leaders from monitoring and developing teachers, more quickly and rigorously to drive improvement.
- Enable all parents and carers to have a thorough understanding of school procedures and communication by:
 - ensuring that parents and carers understand how they can bring concerns to school leaders, and work with the school to achieve mutually acceptable outcomes
 - reinforcing existing information for parents about the school's behaviour management strategies and its inclusion policy for the education and well-being of all pupils.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

| |
|----------|
| 3 |
|----------|

Pupils have very positive attitudes to their learning and show good levels of enjoyment in most of their lessons. This is strengthened by their consistently good attendance over time. Pupils think highly of their teachers, and talk with great enthusiasm of their many clubs and trips such as their visits to Compton Verney and the Brecon Beacons. They describe their school as 'arty', 'sporty', 'educational' and 'fun'. They have good knowledge of how to keep healthy, and feel safe and well cared for in school. Although a small number of pupils can sometimes be disruptive, the great majority behave very well, and during the inspection were respectful, polite and cheerful. Their interest in learning was observed in a number of lessons, especially in mathematics. Pupils in both Year 2 and Year 3/4 classes responded well to the challenge of identifying and visualising some complicated two- and three-dimensional shapes, and clearly enjoyed their practical learning. Similarly Year 6 pupils showed considerable concentration when using calculators for checking inverse number operations. Year 2 gave a most impressive 'Noah's Ark' assembly to the school and their parents and carers, showing confidence and good speaking skills.

After starting school with average skills, children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Progress from Year 1 to Year 6 has been patchy in the last two years. A feature has been the good progress made by pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is because they are well supported, often by competent teaching assistants, and planning for their individual needs is effective. Likewise, more-able pupils make good progress, especially in writing in Years 3 to 6, and reach above average standards. However other pupils have sometimes made slower progress, and achieved less well, particularly in reading last year and in mathematics the year before. The school has focused well on raising attainment in mathematics in the last year and attainment has improved considerably. The school has recognised that teaching must be more consistent in order to raise and maintain better attainment across all groups of pupils.

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The school has a friendly and creative atmosphere and the good spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of pupils is evident everywhere, and strongly supported by the school's Catholic ethos. This is also very evident in the good contributions which pupils make to both their school and the wider community. Pupils enjoy contributing to the ideas box for the school council and representing the school at meetings with other Bicester schools. This is helping them to steadily develop their basic skills in preparation for the next stages of their education.

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

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

How effective is the provision?

Although teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, there are developing strengths. Better assessment strategies are in place and are being used much more accurately by most teachers in their planning for pupils' individual needs. Progress in mathematics, especially in Years 3 to 6, has improved markedly in the last year because teachers analysed clearly what needed to be improved, and set tougher targets. Teacher assessment in Years 1 and 2 is also now much more secure. Teachers manage their classes well, and when the purpose of lessons is made clear, pupils react with enthusiasm and most make good progress. This was seen in several classes in the inspection when pupils wrote imaginary diaries in their 'Big Write' sessions about their lives as trapped Chilean miners. Teaching though, is not yet consistently good because the pace in classes is variable. Sometimes middle and lower attaining pupils are over-challenged because

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teachers do not check pupils' understanding precisely enough through questioning. Pupils also occasionally have to sit for too long listening to teachers. Teachers are increasingly expecting pupils to assess how well they are doing with their work.

The curriculum provides pupils with a wide variety of interesting, exciting and varied learning opportunities. This was exemplified in a celebration assembly, when pupils received awards for their work in the preceding week. Awards were made for making replica Aztec pots, counting to 10 in German, designing a Victorian toilet and swimming widths in breast and backstroke. Pupils also relished their making of delicious scones in a 'Let's Get Cooking' lesson. The curriculum meets the needs of more-able pupils well because there is sufficient challenge for them and high expectations for their independent learning. There are good enrichment opportunities with several residential visits and well-planned SMILE days (St Mary's Learning Experience). There is a wide range of popular clubs which are attended enthusiastically by many pupils. Cross-curricular provision for writing is good, although not as strong in reading and numeracy. The curriculum makes a significant contribution to outcomes in pupils' personal development.

Pupils feel that they are well cared for and almost all feel that they are safe. They are confident that they can share their personal concerns with members of staff. Good support is provided for pupils from the most vulnerable circumstances and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, who are able to make good progress as a result. Induction and transfer arrangements are thorough and effective. There are good links with outside support agencies and services.

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 | 2 |

How effective are leadership and management?

The last two years have posed a number of difficulties to school leaders. The extended absences of teachers and senior leaders have meant that many classes have had teachers sharing duties, and the management of many responsibilities in the school has fallen mainly on the headteacher. She has led with calmness and quiet determination the attempts to maintain stable learning for the school's pupils. Following recent appointments the school now has a promising senior leadership team which has made a good start to addressing improvement. There is now a wider dispersal of leadership responsibilities, for example in the monitoring of teaching and learning, which is leading to an improved focus on school priorities. The leadership is developing a more rigorous approach to the school's self-evaluation which is now realistic and accurate. Leaders have been successful already in raising attainment in mathematics and improving assessment strategies. However they realise there are other challenges, such as improving reading skills and ensuring that

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teaching becomes more consistent across the school, so that all groups of pupils are making good progress. Aspects needing improvement in teaching are now well identified, but are not yet being followed up quickly or rigorously enough. Governors are supportive of the school, are sometimes challenging and make a satisfactory contribution to the management of the school. They ensure that safeguarding and other health and safety procedures are in place as required.

Many parents and carers are supportive of the school and are good school partners in engaging in their children's learning. The school is making satisfactory progress in promoting equalities. It has had considerable success in promoting good achievement for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and with more-able pupils, and is taking steps to ensure that all pupils have the same opportunities. The school has good partnerships with other schools and outside agencies, which helps the confidence and learning of pupils. The school provision for community cohesion is good, and pupils talk enthusiastically of their contacts with children in several other European countries. Links with other contrasting schools in this country are less well developed.

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 | 3 |
| 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 | 3 |
| The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures | 3 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion | 2 |
| The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money | 3 |

Early Years Foundation Stage

Most children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage with the skills expected for their age. They make good progress during their first year and many attain higher levels than many four-year-olds. Children are sociable, friendly and develop good speaking and listening skills. They behave well, and have very good relationships with adults who are especially kind and caring when children are not feeling at their best, such as the 'brave soldier' who slipped over when marching. Children's care, safety and welfare are a high priority and teaching is consistently good. Teachers have well-structured and detailed assessments of every child, and individuals are well known by an effective team of adults.

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The classroom environment is colourful, spacious and welcoming. Play opportunities are well planned and purposeful although there is scope to develop outside provision further. Children are encouraged to develop independence in their learning, such as in their excited search for mini-beasts, and also cooperation, which they showed well in parachute games. The Early Years Foundation Stage is well led and the leader has an ambitious vision and clear priorities for improvement. There is good self-evaluation and communication between adults which have helped in overcoming staff absences, and the fact that none of the staff are full time. There are good links with parents who are very positive about the start their children have in school. Equally the arrangements for the transition of children into the class and into Year 1 are effective and enable children to settle quickly.

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

Over a third of parents and carers responded to the questionnaires. A good majority of them show positive support for the school and its provision for their children. Nearly all feel that their children enjoy school, are kept safe and have good teachers. One typically commented: 'I feel the care given by the teachers is quite exceptional, and my child makes very good progress.' A minority have issues about how the school deals with difficult behaviour, and how the school leadership manages their concerns. The inspection team judges that useful information is offered to parents and carers on a regular basis on how behaviour is managed. Parents and carers also have opportunities to express their views through responding to questionnaires. The team also finds that some parents and carers are not sufficiently informed by the school about its behaviour management strategies and statutory inclusion requirements, which has sometimes led to misunderstanding and dissatisfaction.

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 80 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 262 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements | Strongly agree | | Agree | | Disagree | | Strongly disagree | |
|---|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|----|-------------------|----|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| My child enjoys school | 51 | 64 | 25 | 31 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 4 |
| The school keeps my child safe | 42 | 53 | 32 | 40 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| My school informs me about my child's progress | 36 | 45 | 31 | 39 | 7 | 9 | 3 | 4 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school | 37 | 46 | 32 | 40 | 7 | 9 | 0 | 0 |
| The teaching is good at this school | 40 | 50 | 36 | 45 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning | 36 | 45 | 38 | 48 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 3 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle | 30 | 38 | 44 | 55 | 3 | 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) | 35 | 44 | 36 | 45 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| The school meets my child's particular needs | 34 | 43 | 35 | 44 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour | 28 | 35 | 26 | 33 | 10 | 13 | 10 | 13 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns | 27 | 34 | 35 | 44 | 9 | 11 | 5 | 6 |
| The school is led and managed effectively | 30 | 38 | 35 | 44 | 7 | 9 | 7 | 9 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school | 39 | 49 | 36 | 45 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 4 |

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 all 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 pupils' 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 October 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Bicester, OX26 2NX

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed hearing how much you enjoy going to school, which explains your good attendance. It was interesting to hear about all your visits and residentials, and how you take so many responsibilities around the school. We were also pleased to hear that you feel safe, know how to keep healthy, and that you feel well looked after by the adults in your school. You go to a satisfactory school which gives you a very interesting curriculum. I loved Year 2's assembly about Noah's Ark, and the awards you received afterwards for all the different things you had done well during the week.

You have made good progress in your mathematics in the last year, but not as much in your reading. Some of you have been making good progress in your learning, and we would like all of you to do this. You can help by telling your teachers if you do not understand what you are learning – don't be afraid to put the thumb down! You have teachers who are very keen to teach you as well as they can. All of them, their assistants and your headteacher, are very caring and want the best for you. We have asked your school leaders to help teachers improve in a number of ways so that all of you can make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics every year, like the children do in the Reception class.

We are also suggesting another way to help the school improve. Although most of your parents and carers are pleased with the school, a few are not sure that the school deals with some behaviour very well and would like the school to take more notice of what they say about this. We think that the school can help by making sure that all parents know what the school does if anyone behaves badly. Everyone can help by trying to behave well all of the time, as nearly all of you do already.

We are confident that all of you will try hard to do your best, and that you will continue to enjoy your 'exciting' learning. Keep up the 'Let's Get Cooking!'; we really enjoyed your scones.

Yours sincerely

Rod Braithwaite

Lead inspector

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