

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111340
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	378282
Inspection dates	12–13 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Sarah Drake

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	Roy Davies
Headteacher	Susan Noyce
Date of previous school inspection	23 January 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 12 lessons taught by eight different teachers and held meetings with school staff, members of the governing body and groups of pupils. They also spoke informally and held telephone conversations with a small number of parents and carers. The inspectors observed the school's work, and scrutinised documentation relating to pupils' achievement and school management, including safeguarding. They also took into account the inspection questionnaires completed by 91 parents and carers, 13 staff and 124 pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The achievement of pupils in order to determine whether teaching is sufficiently challenging.
- The impact that the school's assessment and monitoring systems have on outcomes for pupils.
- The leadership's capacity to drive forward school improvement.
- The effectiveness with which the school provides for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Information about the school

St Mary's, which is an average-size primary school, takes its pupils from a wide catchment area with a stable population. The proportion of pupils that is known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The very large majority of pupils are White British and few speak English as an additional language. A below average proportion of pupils has special educational needs and/or disabilities but the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is average. Since the previous inspection the school has achieved the silver Primary Quality Science Mark, re-accreditation of the Primary Quality and Inclusion Quality Marks, and the Eco-schools Green Flag award.

The school is currently led by an acting headteacher and two acting assistant headteachers all of whom took up post in September 2011. The substantive headteacher and one assistant headteacher have been seconded for one year to another school in the authority.

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 school, which is held in high esteem by pupils, parents and carers for its welcoming, family atmosphere, provides a satisfactory quality of education overall. After a period when attainment levels fell, they are now rising so that by the end of both Year 2 and Year 6 they are above average in reading, writing and mathematics. This is in response to positive action taken by the school's leadership and all staff.

Children's skills on entry to school vary from year to year but are generally as expected for their age. In the past, their skills on entry to Year 1 have been above average but currently they make satisfactory progress in the Reception class where the provision and adults' questioning is not always tailored with sufficient precision to their individual needs. While increasing numbers of older pupils are making better than expected progress, over the past three years pupils' progress has been satisfactory. The majority of teaching observed was of satisfactory quality leading to satisfactory learning. Good quality relationships abound in every classroom and pupils are willing learners but activities do not always provide them with sufficient challenge to move their learning forward at a good pace.

The school offers its pupils a vibrant curriculum and good quality care, guidance and support which lead to their great enjoyment, sense of security and consistently high levels of attendance. They eagerly take on responsibilities, voice their opinions and participate in activities, making an excellent all-round contribution to the community. Pupils' polite, thoughtful behaviour helps to create a calm, happy environment. They have a good understanding of the benefits of adopting a healthy lifestyle and leave the school well prepared for the next stage of their education.

The school has comprehensive systems for monitoring its overall effectiveness and pupils' progress, which include the close involvement of all staff and members of the governing body. Leaders' analysis informs school improvement planning but is not sufficiently precise about specific areas to work on or, critically, in defining success criteria in terms of the desired impact on pupils' attainment and progress. Parents and carers greatly appreciate their children's happiness at school but around one in ten considers that there is room for improvement in communication. The school has successfully tackled the area for development related to attainment in science which was raised at the previous inspection and has satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the majority of teaching is of good or better quality, by:
 - developing planning that is precise about the expectations for different groups and making these expectations clear to the pupils
 - consistently providing pupils with activities and questioning that offer them suitable challenge.

- Increase the impact of the leadership's actions, by:
 - sharpening the rigour with which the monitoring and evaluation systems focus on outcomes for pupils
 - improving the effectiveness of communication with parents and carers, especially about their children's progress.

- Strengthen the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - developing a vision for the key stage based on the developmental needs of the children
 - using observations effectively to plan closely for individual children's needs
 - ensuring that all adults' interactions with children help them to develop independence, curiosity and thinking skills.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The overwhelming majority of pupils greatly enjoy school, describing it as, 'safe, friendly and exciting'. In particular, they appreciate the educational visits, including residential visits from Year 3 upwards, and many extra-curricular activities. The achievement of pupils is satisfactory. Pupils settle well in lessons, are helpful to each other and take care with the presentation of their work. They generally persist when encountering difficulty but do not always show initiative if they have completed the required task. The majority of older pupils demonstrated above average skills by the end of their time in Reception and have built satisfactorily on these. In response to good quality support, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those whose progress is faltering or who speak English as an additional language make similar progress to their peers. Those who are more able also make satisfactory progress. For example, the most recent group of Year 6 pupils maintained the above average levels that they reached at the end of Year 2.

The school's determination to enable its pupils to become well-rounded individuals is strongly manifest in their good spiritual, moral and social development. The very great majority show unflinching respect for adults and each other, and older pupils take delight in their caring, buddy role for children in Reception. The recent award of the Green Flag demonstrates pupils' keen interest in environmental issues which, together with their participation in local events such as opera performances and displays of artwork, give them a high profile in the wider community. Pupils willingly reflect on concepts such as forgiveness or the negative impact of violence on a

situation. They have a strong sense of shared values within their community and an awareness of other cultures but few express real understanding of the similarities and differences between their own and other societies. Many pupils are involved in sporting activities both in school and in the community, and older pupils regularly bicycle to school. They know which foods are healthy and also understand about how to keep themselves safe, including safe use of information and communication technology. Over their time in the school, pupils mature into pleasant, outgoing young people whose understanding of the benefits of good relationships, participation and hard work is likely to stand them in good stead for the future.

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	2
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	3
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	1
The extent to which pupils develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The orderliness of the school and staff members' good knowledge of pupils as individuals create a positive learning environment. The teaching generally provides initial activities that inspire pupils' enthusiasm, such as the discovery of a letter in a pirate's treasure chest or the heroism of a celebrity in raising funds for charity. It encourages pupils to consider emotions, for example when choosing relevant adverbs, and to support each other. Teaching assistants usually provide good quality support, especially for those who find learning more difficult. Teachers evaluate the effectiveness of previous lessons and usually plan different activities for those of different ability, based on their termly assessment of progress. However, the planning does not regularly identify the expected outcomes for different groups nor do teachers make these clear enough to pupils. The planning includes additional work for those who finish early but this does not always offer them further challenge. When questioning pupils, adults sometimes miss opportunities to extend pupils' thinking further or are too quick to offer their own suggestions rather than building on pupils' responses. Regular homework effectively supports pupils' independent learning. The marking of this and pupils' other work is supportive and provides specific, helpful indicators about what they need to concentrate on next. Termly individual discussions between teachers and pupils about their next targets for

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

improvement ensure that pupils are well aware of these but less than 80% of them indicated that they are clear about how well they are doing at school.

Good use of first-hand experiences and specialist provision for physical education, music and modern foreign languages bring learning to life for pupils and add greatly to their enjoyment of school. The high quality artwork on display is the result of having artists in residence. Effective links between subjects bring cohesion to pupils' learning and help their concentration. The school also seeks pupils' views about what they would like to learn so that, for example, Year 3 are discovering more about snakes as they also extend their understanding of verbs such as 'shed' and 'bask'. Effective provision to support younger pupils' understanding of the sounds that letters make helps them to develop a secure foundation on which to build further literacy skills. An extensive range of support programmes helps pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and others to achieve their targets. High quality pastoral support also makes a strong contribution to pupils' learning, with all staff placing pupils' well-being at the heart of all they do. Areas identified for improvement with regard to safeguarding requirements mean that the overall quality of care, guidance and support is good.

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?

Leaders and staff at all levels demonstrate a strong vision for the school, a sense of shared responsibility and a commitment to providing well for pupils. Those who have recently taken up leadership positions are quickly adapting to their new roles. The school engages in extensive monitoring of its provision and shares the outcomes of this with all staff endeavouring, for example, to ensure consistency over the assessment of pupils' work. Staff are supportive of each other and open to guidance so that the regular monitoring of lessons and teachers' planning, together with access to training, helps to drive forward improvement. The dip in pupils' progress and attainment levels has been halted but development planning and evaluation are not yet linked with sufficient precision to the impact on outcomes for pupils.

Members of the governing body meet regularly with subject leaders, take a keen interest in pupils' progress and have helped to shape the strategic direction of the school that has brought about improvement. Some play a prominent role in the school's promotion of community cohesion, which is particularly strong at a local level and encompasses links with a range of countries internationally through the Comenius project. Satisfactory procedures are in place to safeguard pupils from harm, especially taking into account staff's strong emphasis on care for individuals. The school is taking positive steps to redress gaps in administrative procedures and staff training. Its strong ethos of inclusion and support for individuals combined with recent improvements in pupils' progress confirm that the school provides good

equality of opportunity. Good partnerships with other schools and outside agencies as well as, overall, with parents and carers enhance the quality of provision and support pupils' learning. For example, parents and carers volunteer to help in school, support their children's attendance and homework and generously raise funds that enhance the provision. The school provides much information about pupils' progress but accepts that, given the views expressed; this is not yet clear enough for all parents and carers.

These are the grades for the 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	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	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

Children generally settle smoothly into the Reception class and respond positively to its calm atmosphere, soon beginning to understand rules such as the need to return resources to the correct place and the fairness of taking turns. They participate enthusiastically in rhymes that promote friendship. Parents and carers are positive about the arrangements to ease their child's first experience of school and the opportunities to contribute to assessment of their progress. The creation of small groupings within the large class, combined with resources such as the pictorial timetable and adults' effective use of praise, all help the children to develop a sense of security. The quality of the provision and adults' discussion with children to extend their learning is more variable. For example, with an adult using well-judged questioning to extend children's thinking and understanding, they happily looked for mini-beasts outdoors choosing to use magnifying glasses because they 'bring things closer'. However, the malleable dough was too stiff for the children to manipulate, the creative table offered only scissors, paper and crayons with no other stimulus and the book corner is outside the classroom and, therefore, not freely accessible to children. Staff meet weekly to discuss future activities but the planning lacks clarity about the intended outcome of these or specific points, based on their observations, related to individuals' needs. By the end of the year, the overwhelming majority of children are working at the expected levels for their age and some exceed these. Their achievement is satisfactory. Satisfactory leadership and management secure the children's welfare but this key stage has no stated vision to guide its direction and features little in whole-school evaluation or development planning.

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 in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Almost all parents and carers hold very positive views about the school's ethos and their children's happiness. They particularly praise the commitment of the staff and the richness of the curriculum. A minority expressed concerns about the large class sizes for younger pupils, the information provided about their children's progress, and the attention paid to parents' and carers' views. The inspection team discussed parents' and carers' views with school leaders. The Reception and Key Stage 1 classes are larger than average but there is no hard evidence that this has had a negative impact on pupils' learning.

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 91 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	60	66	30	33	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	65	71	24	26	2	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	42	46	36	40	7	8	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	37	41	43	47	1	1	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	53	58	32	35	0	0	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	44	48	36	40	4	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	48	53	39	43	0	0	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)	43	47	36	40	4	4	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	46	51	34	37	4	4	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	41	45	35	38	6	7	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	29	32	40	44	11	12	3	3
The school is led and managed effectively	43	47	40	44	2	2	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	57	63	29	32	2	2	0	0

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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. Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



14 September 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Middlewich, CW10 9DH

Thank you for the warm welcome that you gave to the members of the team when we inspected your school recently. Particular thanks should go to those of you who gave up some of your lunchtime to talk with us.

Yours is a satisfactory school because it helps you to make satisfactory progress in your learning. Almost all of you are working at the expected levels for your age and around half are working at levels above this. Well done! Congratulations also on attending school every day that you possibly can and on your strong contribution to the school and local community. You behave well, treat others with respect, have a good understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle and are keen to involve yourselves in all the exciting activities that the school offers you. The staff take good care of you so it is unsurprising that you say you feel very safe in school.

Your teachers generally organise interesting things for you to do in lessons. We have asked the school to make sure that these always provide you with good levels of challenge. We have also asked the leaders to make sure that the actions they take to improve things in school are really helping to increase your rate of progress. The school's arrangements help the youngest children to settle quickly into the Reception class and they are clearly already enjoying their time there. We have asked the leaders to put arrangements in place to make sure that they, too, make good progress in all their different areas of learning.

You told us clearly why you are so proud to be members of your school community and we can understand this because, in only a short time, we were able to see how you form happy, trusting and supportive relationships with each other. These skills are likely to be really useful to you in your future lives.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Drake
Lead inspector

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