

St Monica's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111322
Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	395630
Inspection dates	10–11 July 2012
Lead inspector	Marguerite Murphy HMI

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	173
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Rollings
Headteacher	Angela Williams
Date of previous school inspection	29 November 2007
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Introduction

Inspection team

Marguerite Murphy
Steve Rigby

Her Majesty's Inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors spent over twelve hours in direct observation of learning and nine teachers were seen. Meetings were held with senior leaders, teachers, groups of pupils and members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised its monitoring, self-evaluation and improvement planning, and pupils' work. They listened to pupils read. They took account of the responses to the on-line (Parent View) survey in planning the inspection. The responses to 96 inspection questionnaires completed by parents and carers were analysed, in addition to those from 14 members of staff and 109 pupils.

Information about the school

This is a smaller than average-sized primary school. A much lower than average proportion of pupils is known to be eligible for free school meals. A below average proportion of pupils is supported at School Action Plus or has a statement of special educational needs. The vast majority of pupils is of White British heritage and very few speak English as an additional language. The school exceeds the government's current floor standards, which sets the minimum standards for attainment and progress.

The school holds the Primary Quality Mark, International School (intermediate), and Eco-School Silver awards.

St. Monica's Catholic Pre-School provision shares the site and is managed by a committee of governors and representatives of the main school. This was inspected in February 2010, and was not part of this inspection. The report can be found on Ofsted's website.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- St. Monica’s Catholic Primary School provides a good education for its pupils. The school is not outstanding because there have been fluctuations in its overall performance since the previous inspection in 2007 and pupils’ attainment is not consistently high.
- Pupils achieve well because they make good progress in their work, although attainment is higher in reading and mathematics than in writing, despite recent improvements. Most pupils say that they enjoy school and that they learn a lot in lessons.
- Teaching is good. Teachers provide a good range of activities in lessons that meet the learning needs of pupils in all ability groups, including the higher attainers and those who are disabled or have special educational needs. Teaching is regularly monitored to promote improvement, although leaders’ observations are more focused on the teaching strategies used than on their impact on the progress pupils make.
- Although a small minority of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire did not agree that their child’s lessons were not disrupted by bad behaviour, inspectors found that the behaviour of pupils across the school is good. Pupils say they feel safe and their parents and carers agree. Typical comments included, ‘St. Monica’s is a lovely warm school and my child is very happy’; ‘All teachers show care and commitment’; and ‘The child is at the forefront of all their activities’.
- Leadership and management are good. The leadership and development of teaching has secured a good and improving picture. The governing body is improving the rigour with which it holds leaders to account for the school’s performance. The role of middle leaders is rightly seen as an important area for development now that staffing and leadership structures have been reviewed. Partnerships with parents and carers are positive, although leaders and the governing body acknowledge the need to develop the way in which the views of parents and carers are gathered and taken into account in the school’s development planning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop further the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the monitoring of teaching by leaders at all levels focuses more strongly on its impact on the rates of progress made by individuals and groups of pupils
 - exploring ways in which parents and carers can be more informed and engaged in the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning
 - developing the skills of middle leaders so that they can take responsibility for raising achievement in their subject or aspect areas.

- Build on the improvements made to the teaching of writing skills in order to maintain the upward trend in pupils' attainment in writing by:
 - further increasing the opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their writing skills independently across a wide range of subjects and topics
 - building on pupils' increasing enjoyment and confidence in writing to raise its profile across the school, for example in displays and celebrations of their work.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire feel that their children make good progress at the school and inspectors agree with this view. Children enter the Reception class with levels of skill and knowledge that vary from year to year but are typically similar to those expected for their age. They enjoy coming to school, quickly settle in and make good progress in all aspects of their development so that most meet or exceed the early learning goals expected of them. For example, in a well-planned activity to explore the properties of ice, children were particularly excited about the 'ice gloves' and what it felt like to touch them when 'it's starting to melt!'. Children made good progress in their language development as they explained to the adults what they had observed and experienced.

Pupils continue to make good progress across the school. Their reading skills in particular are above average at the end of Key Stage 1 and often well above average by the time they leave Year 6. Most pupils are confident and fluent readers and many are quite articulate in their speaking and discussion skills. Pupils' attainment in writing has been more variable, although this is improving as a result of the school's actions to develop this aspect of their literacy work. For example, pupils in a Year 1 writing lesson made good progress in developing their knowledge of good sentence structures. They understood how to 'up-level' their sentences by using more interesting words, including simple connectives.

Pupils' good achievement in mathematics is supported by their enthusiasm for solving problems by applying their secure number and calculation skills. This was seen, for example, in a Year 3 lesson when groups of pupils were investigating the volume of a range of objects. Year 6 pupils enjoyed being challenged to explain their reasoning when investigating alternative methods of sorting and ranking data on different nations' achievements in Olympic medal events. Pupils in Year 4 were enthused by the

'archaeological exploration' theme that prompted them to make good progress in breaking down complex problems or calculations into smaller steps in order to solve them.

Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make similarly good progress to that of their peers. When appropriate, they receive additional guidance and confidence-boosting support from adults, while still being encouraged to work independently. Higher-attaining pupils are suitably challenged through tasks and assignments that stretch their abilities, so that they too make good progress.

Quality of teaching

Most parents and carers and pupils who responded to the questionnaire consider that teaching is good all or most of the time. Inspectors agree with this as the teaching observed in all lessons was good, sometimes with aspects that were outstanding. A small number of parents and carers expressed concerns about teaching in some classes but inspectors found no evidence to support this view. Where there may have been inconsistencies in the quality of teaching in the recent past, improvements have been made as a result of leaders' monitoring and the good sense of teamwork among staff that enables ideas and good practice to be shared.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan their lessons well, making effective use of resources, artefacts, and strategies such as role play to motivate pupils in their learning. Reading and writing are taught well, although there are sometimes insufficient opportunities provided for pupils to practise their writing skills independently across a wider range of subjects. Appropriate emphasis is placed on providing a good balance between teacher input and intervention, independent work, and opportunities to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills in group discussion or collaborative work. In the best lessons, the pace of learning is particularly strong for pupils of all abilities; they are challenged by teachers' good quality open questioning that requires pupils to give full responses and express their opinions; teaching assistants are deployed effectively to make a positive contribution to pupils' learning. On occasions when the rate of pupils' learning may fluctuate during a lesson, this is sometimes because the teacher 'scaffolds' or structures the learning a little too much, thereby lowering the expectations of pupils' independence or creative thinking.

Teachers make effective use of a good-quality curriculum to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across a range of subjects. These include residential and day trips, visitors to the school, sports, arts and other activities within and beyond the local community that pupils enjoy participating in. Teachers know their pupils and their abilities well and use this information to inform their planning and to build on pupils' strengths or support them in weaker areas. This enables teachers to channel pupils' energies appropriately. For example, in a Year 2 literacy lesson the teacher created a scenario in which pupils had to respond to an imaginary letter of complaint following a visit. They responded to the teacher's thought-provoking questions and emotive language by expressing their own opinions confidently in full sentences. They subsequently made good progress in their writing, despite some finding this a challenge, because adult support was effectively deployed. The teachers of the Year 5 class ensured that pupils made good progress in their understanding of the features of magazine articles in a writing theme that spread across two days. Pupils were involved in setting their own learning objectives so that the teachers would mark the writing against pupils' own success criteria. As a result, pupils had a better understanding of how well they were doing and what they needed to do to improve their writing.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

When responding to the inspection questionnaire, a minority of pupils expressed the opinion that behaviour is 'sometimes good', rather than most or all of the time, although very few considered that it was never good. Most pupils have high expectations of behaviour and are disappointed if others do not settle very quickly to their work, or are too boisterous on the playground. In discussions with inspectors, pupils said that adults would sort problems out quickly and that incidents of unacceptable behaviour or bullying would not be tolerated. Pupils have a good understanding of different forms of bullying and of things they can do to help keep themselves safe from harm. Behavioural records show that pupils' behaviour is good over time and incidents of bullying or misbehaviour are recorded and dealt with in line with the school's procedures.

Good behaviour in the classroom contributes to effective learning as most pupils are keen to follow the school's rules and expectations. Pupils work well together collaboratively in groups or pairs and settle quickly to their tasks in lessons. Relationships with each other and with their teachers and other adults are positive because they are well cared for, praised and encouraged to build their confidence. Attendance is above average and most pupils are punctual.

Leadership and management

The vast majority of staff who completed inspection questionnaires or spoke with inspectors feels that the school is led and managed well and that appropriate provision is made for their professional development. All feel proud to be a member of St. Monica's staff and this is evident in the positive ethos and commitment to working together as a team. Most parents and carers feel that the school keeps them well-informed and they would recommend it to others. Of those who expressed minor concerns, a common theme related to staffing or job-share arrangements, or the growing numbers of pupils in classes. However, inspectors found that these issues were not detrimental to the progress pupils are making, because teaching and learning are good. The governing body and senior leaders are aware that the previously unavoidable lower than average class numbers had placed a strain on the school's well-managed, yet limited resources. The school's success in setting up its own financially viable pre-school provision has helped to secure pupil numbers into the Early Years Foundation Stage. Above average pupil mobility in Key Stage 2, however, continues to be beyond the school's control to some extent, as a result of parental choices related to independent and grammar school options in the local area and beyond.

The school's engagement with parents and carers, although generally very positive, is not always as successful as it might be in ensuring that all families are well-informed and consulted in the school's development, so that leadership decisions may be better understood. Senior leaders and the governing body recognise the need to consider ways in which this can be improved in the future.

The school ensures that a broad and balanced curriculum promotes pupils' engagement in learning and their good achievement in basic skills and a wider range of subjects. The headteacher and deputy headteacher take the lead in the monitoring of teaching and learning, providing useful feedback to staff, who respect their views and are committed to continuous improvement. Senior leaders track the performance of different groups of pupils or individuals to adjust targets, identify any underachievement and hold teachers to account

for pupils' progress. The school has rightly identified the need to delegate more responsibility to middle leaders, once their skills and confidence have been developed further through training and sharing good practice. Good leadership and management of the school's provision for Early Years Foundation Stage and for inclusion result in children getting a good start to their education and any difficulties they may have are identified quickly. Consequently, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are monitored carefully in liaison with parents, carers and outside agencies so that their needs are met.

The governing body meets its responsibilities with regard to the school's arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils. It demonstrates a clear commitment to promoting equality and tackling discrimination. These principles are also evident in the school's good promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Leaders and governors recognise the school's key strengths and areas in which its performance has fluctuated since its previous inspection. However, appropriate action has been taken, within the school's limited resources, to raise pupils' attainment further and ensure that all reach their potential. The impact of this work can already be seen in pupils' improving skills in writing and in teaching that is consistently good. This demonstrates the school's good capacity to improve further.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add up exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



12 July 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St. Monica's Catholic Primary School, Warrington, WA4 3AG

Thank you for helping us when we inspected your school recently. We enjoyed watching you at work and talking with you about how you are doing and what you think about your school. You will be pleased to know that we agree that St. Monica's is a good school. You make good progress in your learning and reach levels of attainment that are above average, especially in reading and mathematics. Your behaviour is good, even though a few of you think it could be better at times, because you have such high expectations of yourselves and others.

Your teachers and leaders are doing a good job to make sure that you have lots of enjoyable experiences that help you to learn new things. Adults give you the confidence to take on challenges and problem-solving tasks that make you think hard and work together in teams, too. The school is good at caring for and looking after you so that you can feel safe and happy in your work and everyone gets along together well.

We have suggested a couple of things that the school could work on to improve further in the future. One is to develop some aspects of leadership and management more, including seeking the views of your parents and carers more regularly. The other is to carry on with the work to improve your writing skills. You can help by making sure you practise those elements of your writing that the teacher sets as targets for improvement.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Marguerite Murphy
Her Majesty's Inspector
On behalf of the inspection team

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