

# St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Bicester

Queen's Avenue, Bicester, OX26 2NX

**Inspection dates** 19–20 February 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Standards are above average in English and mathematics and pupils make good progress throughout the school.
- New staff have brought a fresh approach to the Early Years Foundation Stage, where children are enjoying their learning and achieve well.
- The increasing numbers of children who join the school at the early stages of learning English make rapid progress because the school has a special programme to help them settle in and pick up the language quickly.
- Teaching is consistently good and pupils often have the chance to practise their communication, literacy and numeracy skills in different subjects.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. The pupils treat one another and all adults with great respect and say they feel very safe at school.
- The school has improved considerably since its last inspection because of the relentless focus on raising standards by the headteacher and senior staff.
- The governing body is effective in holding the school to account for its performance and checks closely how well pupils are doing.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- More-able pupils are not always given hard enough work to do in mathematics and teachers are sometimes not prompt in picking up pupils' misconceptions.
- Teaching assistants are not as involved in teaching the sounds that letters make (phonics) as they could be.
- There is some inconsistency in the quality of marking in pupils' books, and pupils do not have enough chance to check one another's work.
- Adults in the Reception class use a limited range of approaches to record what children can do.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 22 lessons or parts of lessons, many of which were joint observations with the headteacher. Eleven teachers and most support staff were seen working with the pupils.
- The inspectors heard pupils read, attended a class Mass and, with the headteacher, looked closely at examples of pupils' work.
- The inspection team looked at a wide range of school documents, including development plans, policies, self-evaluation reports, monitoring files, safeguarding and curriculum materials, evidence of the school's partnership work and information for families.
- Meetings were held with representatives of the school council and other pupils chosen at random. Discussions were held with the headteacher, assistant headteacher, class teachers, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors took account of the 47 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and spoke with several parents in the playground.
- The inspection team considered 28 staff questionnaires.

## Inspection team

Nick Butt, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Kate Robertson	Additional Inspector
George Logan	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school is an average-sized primary school.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average and increasing.
- Pupils come from a wide area because the school is the only Catholic school in Bicester.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (which provides additional funding for children in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils with a parent in the armed services) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- Reception children are taught as one large year group with two teachers.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for progress and standards in English and mathematics.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make more teaching outstanding by:
  - making sure more-able pupils are given demanding enough work in mathematics
  - checking how well pupils are doing in class and reshaping teaching promptly to tackle any misconceptions
  - involving teaching assistants more in teaching phonics.
- Improve feedback to pupils by:
  - making sure all marking reflects best practice currently in the school
  - giving pupils more opportunities to check one another's work
  - using a wide range of approaches to record Reception children's achievements.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils make good progress across all year groups because teaching is consistently good. Standards are rising. Pupils do particularly well in Year 6 and in 2012 they made outstanding progress. Standards were above average in English and mathematics. There is no difference in the progress made by pupils of different ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils making and exceeding nationally expected rates of progress compares favourably with the national figures in reading, writing and mathematics. Staff keep a thorough check on how well individuals and groups of pupils are doing and take rapid steps to prevent any from falling behind.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs achieve well because their support is managed well by the special educational needs coordinator, who makes detailed checks on their progress in small groups and through one-to-one tuition. These show that the pupils make good progress, especially in reading and writing, where they receive most help.
- Children join Reception with a wide range of skills and abilities, although they now often enter with less proficiency in communication, language and literacy. New staff, who have only been in school a few weeks, have taken a fresh approach which focuses on children's interests and which encourages the children to find things out for themselves.
- The many imaginative and purposeful activities, both inside and outside, mean children make good progress in all areas of learning. For example, children enjoyed serving the inspector a 'meal' in their Chinese restaurant, having taken his order and 'cooked' the rice while he waited, insisting that he use chopsticks to eat with.
- Reading is generally taught well in Key Stage 1 and pupils are set in three broad ability groups. Some of these are large and make it difficult to set work at exactly the right level. At present, teaching assistants, even though they are very capable, do not take a leading role in teaching phonics to small groups of pupils.
- Pupils apply their reading skills well throughout the school. Younger pupils use their knowledge of phonics to tackle unfamiliar words. Older pupils talk with enthusiasm about the authors and books they enjoy and can express opinions about story characters' motives and conduct.
- Measures to improve writing have been successful, especially in finding subjects that interest boys. For example, pupils enjoyed writing an imaginary telephone conversation between the President of the United States and the Apollo 11 astronauts on the moon, before hearing a recording of the real thing.
- Pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium achieve well because the additional funding is spent wisely on special support for reading, writing and mathematics taught by well-trained teaching assistants. This speeds up their progress so that these pupils do as well as the other pupils and there are no gaps between their attainment and that of others.
- The progress of pupils who speak English as an additional language is good because they are well supported and benefit from a programme to help pupils new to the school from abroad. This means that they pick up English quickly and are fully integrated into their classes.
- In 2012 fewer Year 2 pupils reached the higher levels of attainment in mathematics than in reading and writing. This is because, at times, more-able pupils are not given hard enough work to do in mathematics.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers often ask probing questions to check pupils' understanding and to move their learning on. This was evident when older pupils discussed the merits of the 'space race' and whether it was a good thing or not for the world.
- Teaching engages pupils well because it is often exciting and involves them actively in their learning. Year 4 pupils enjoyed making clay coil pots in the Aztec style, as they carefully built up

their designs and finished them off with lids.

- Learning runs at a brisk pace with plenty of time for pupils to complete tasks on their own and find things out for themselves. Teachers do not spend too long introducing activities, but encourage pupils to get on with their work independently. In some classes teachers do not routinely check how well pupils are doing to pick up any misconceptions or to reshape teaching in response to pupils' progress.
- Pupils apply themselves very well to their learning and there are excellent relationships in all classes. Teaching assistants are well deployed in classes and make a valuable contribution to pupils' achievement, whether working with small groups or with individuals. They are not as involved with teaching phonics as they could be, however.
- Pupils' workbooks show that pupils make good progress over time and that they have a wide range of interesting work to do in all subjects. There are many opportunities for pupils to practise their communication, literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects.
- There are some outstanding examples of marking, which clearly show pupils what they have to do next to improve and involve them in a dialogue with their teacher about learning. This is particularly the case in Year 6. At times there is some variation in marking between classes with pupils of similar ages, so that not all receive the same high quality feedback.
- Pupils often have the chance to say how well they think they are doing themselves based on a set of steps for success, such as features of persuasive writing. However, there are few examples of them checking one another's work and giving constructive advice to their friends.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught well, particularly in discussing their ideas and developing their language. For example, they considered what promises for Lent they could make to help their families and show their love for Jesus.
- Adults in Reception keep careful checks on how well children are doing, but do not use a full range of approaches when recording their findings. For example, children's learning journeys do not contain many photographs of the children doing things or brief observations of what they have found out. This means it is harder for adults to fine tune the children's future activities.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**

- Pupils have exemplary attitudes to learning and are very considerate of one another. Their excellent behaviour reflects the strongly-held Catholic values of the school. These are reinforced by a 'focus of the week', such as remembering to say 'please' and 'thank you.'
- Pupils say they feel very safe at school and that there is no bullying at all. They know all about different kinds of bullying, such as name calling and cyber bullying, and produced some high quality entries for a recent anti-bullying poster competition, which revealed the depth of their understanding.
- Parents agree that pupils behave extremely well, that there is no bullying and that pupils are safe at school. They are very happy with their children's experiences of school, and feel that the school equips them very well for life in the modern world.
- Pupils relish the opportunity to take responsibility, such as leading play for the younger pupils at lunchtimes or as members of the school council. The 'green team' makes sure the school recycles, conserves electricity and grows its own vegetables.
- Pupils have an outstanding understanding of keeping safe, whether at school, at home, or out and about near roads, railways and expanses of water. They know all about keeping safe when using computers, and not to give out their personal information when visiting websites.
- Attendance is above average, reflecting pupils' great enjoyment of school.

### **The leadership and management are good**

- The school has improved considerably since its last inspection because of the drive of the

headteacher and assistant headteacher in raising standards and lifting the quality of teaching. All areas for improvement from the previous report have been successfully tackled, including engaging parents more in their children's learning. The school now enjoys favourable relationships with parents, who commented to inspectors about how much it had come on under its senior leadership team.

- The focus on improving the quality of teaching has been particularly successful, with very clear feedback given to staff and robust action to remove any underperformance. This has resulted in much more consistently good teaching with outstanding elements.
- The school knows itself very well. All teachers are involved in checking its work and contributing to improvement plans. There are robust targets for teachers to improve their performance linked to pupils' progress. High quality training makes sure that any weaknesses are overcome swiftly, and best practice is often shared among staff.
- Leaders have overseen a rapid rise in standards since the last inspection. Only in mathematics is there inconsistency, where a few able pupils are not reaching the higher levels of attainment by the end of Key Stage 1, because sometimes not enough demands are made of them.
- The way subjects and topics are taught interests and motivates pupils to learn. Themes such as 'Sizzling highs and icy lows' and 'To infinity and beyond' excite them and especially appeal to boys. A whole-school topic on the Olympic Games was very fruitful, and a wide range of visits and visitors enhance pupils' learning and give the pupils memorable experiences. The older pupils enjoyed visiting the space centre in Leicester.
- Imaginative activities and the school's commitment to its core values develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness very well. A class Mass in Year 4 gave pupils the opportunity to share with members of the parish and take a key role in saying prayers and leading worship. Strong links with the church, the parish and the community mean pupils look beyond themselves, and are keen to help others. The school makes sure all pupils have equal opportunities to take part in all activities, and that discrimination of any kind is not tolerated.
- The local authority has given good support to the school in refining its systems for tracking pupils' progress and with the Early Years Foundation Stage. The amount of support is reducing in line with the school's increasing capacity for further improvement.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors visit the school often to check on its work and form a good understanding of the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils. They know how well pupils are doing compared with all schools nationally, and the steps the school is taking to reward good teaching and tackle any underperformance. Governors have a good overview of the targets teachers are set to improve their performance. They have been active in improving their own effectiveness through undertaking training and consulting with staff about the form their visits should take. Individual governors are directly linked to the school's key priorities for improvement and keep a close eye on how well actions to move the school forward are being carried out. They have a good knowledge of how the school spends pupil premium money and the impact this has on eligible pupils. As a result of their informed understanding of the school's work, they ask searching questions of leaders and to hold them to account well.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	123207
<b>Local authority</b>	Oxfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	406147

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	270
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Nicky Blacker
<b>Headteacher</b>	Patricia Pickering
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	21–22 October 2010
<b>Telephone number</b>	01869 252035
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