



St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111335
LEA Cheshire
Inspection number 278661
Inspection dates 7 March 2006 to 8 March 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Brian Padgett HMI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Belgrave Avenue
School category	Voluntary aided		Congleton
Age range of pupils	5 to 11		Cheshire CW12 1HT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01260 274690
Number on roll	146	Fax number	01260 297366
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr J Norbury
Date of previous inspection	4 December 2000	Headteacher	Mrs M Johnstone

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

Description of the school

This smaller than average school serves the Catholic parish of Congleton and surrounding parishes. Children come from a wide range of social backgrounds. They enter school with a very wide range of skills and understanding, that are broadly average overall. Nearly all children are of white British heritage. There are small numbers of children from minority ethnic backgrounds, nearly all of whom speak English well. Relatively few children have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although their numbers are increasing. Only one child has a statement of special educational needs.

A pre-school setting is housed on the school site, and there are before and after school clubs. These are operated by independent providers.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory education and sound value for money. It has good features and it is improving. The school has seen significant disruption since the last inspection. The current headteacher is the fourth headteacher to take charge of the school in the last six years. Although above average standards have been maintained, the numbers of pupils in the school have fallen. Some parents have been unhappy with the school and felt it was declining in the quality of education it provided. Since the arrival of the new headteacher, the school has steadied. It is now making good progress in all aspects of its work. It continues to provide good care, support and guidance for children, and it is working hard to improve their personal development. Children's achievement is satisfactory. Standards and the quality of provision in the Foundation Stage (the Reception class) are satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory overall, with good features. However, there is insufficient support in class to enable them to meet the needs of children with a wide range of abilities, especially in those classes with children from two age groups. Children are happy at school. They behave well in lessons, but they do not always try as hard as they should because high standards are not expected of them all the time. Also, the school does not make the most effective use of the time available during the school day to make the most of teaching and learning. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The leadership of the new headteacher is very good. She has won the respect of parents and raised the morale of the staff. Governors are keen to develop their role. But the contribution that senior and middle management make has not kept pace with what is expected.

The school has turned a corner. The headteacher has an accurate understanding of what has been achieved and what is yet to be done and this tallies closely with the judgements of the inspectors. The momentum for change is considerable and the school has a good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more support for teachers to enable them to teach the wide range of abilities in each class more effectively.
- Raise the expectations of the quality of children's work.
- Develop the leadership and management roles of senior and subject leaders.
- Make better use of the time available for teaching and learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory. The school has maintained a good track record for standards at Year 6, and children regularly meet their targets. Children leaving for secondary education have never attained less than average standards since the last inspection and frequently do well in the national tests. The 2005 results were the best yet, with a particularly good performance in mathematics. However, this represents only satisfactory progress, since this was a cohort of children of high ability. Although

the attainment of children entering the school is broadly average, it is slowly falling. Children in the infant years also make satisfactory progress but they only reach broadly average standards, with variations from year to year. In 2005, the children's test results at Year 2 were the lowest for some years, and particularly low in reading. This was exceptional, since this cohort of children forms a particularly low attaining group. Nevertheless, the significantly below average results have caused the school to review how reading is taught, to ensure that children make better progress this year.

No single group of learners achieves better or worse than any other, except that girls have traditionally achieved more than boys. During the inspection, there were lessons where the more able children achieved better than the less able, and lessons where the reverse was true. This was generally a consequence of teachers being unable to meet all the needs of learners with widely different abilities without additional support. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress. They receive the support they need from teaching assistants who work closely with them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The personal development of children is satisfactory and it has improving features. Children are happy at the school. In Reception, children are quickly settled and enjoy school. Children like and respect their teachers and share good relationships with them. They acquire the basic skills they will need in their adult lives, although the school is only in the early stages of considering how best to equip children to face fully the demands of life in the future. Attendance is above average and behaviour in class is good. Children are increasingly aware of how to stay safe and healthy: they have healthy snacks at break times, more and more children stay for a school dinner now that the dinners have improved, and children regularly take part in sport and physical exercise. They make a positive contribution to the community, including the wider community through their support of charities. The school has very close links with the church and children are often involved in celebrations throughout the church calendar. Within school, the school council is active and empowered. Recent surveys of children's views have revealed that many do not believe that, out of class, behaviour and care for each other are good enough. With the headteacher's support, the school council is investigating ways of improving the situation.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Their spiritual and moral development is enhanced successfully through assemblies. Social and cultural development is satisfactory, but awaits a planned programme of personal, social and health education to improve social and cultural awareness.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. There are good features. The staff are hard working and keen to develop professionally through undertaking training courses. The teaching observed during the inspection was generally good and was never unsatisfactory. The most interesting and exciting work, in mathematics and science, was seen in the class for the oldest children. Teachers enjoy good relationships with their children and they are making effective use of the new interactive whiteboards, although children say they would like more opportunity to work with computers in the classroom. Behaviour management is good, following recent action to provide more consistency, and children respond well to their teachers. Teachers plan thoroughly for groups of different abilities and they assess progress rigorously. Teachers who work part time, and share a class, plan together well and ensure that the work children do is seamless when they change over.

Despite these strengths and children's willingness to learn, teaching is not as effective as it should be. Partly, this is because teachers do not insist on children doing their best at all times, and accept work that has mistakes the children know about and are able to rectify themselves. However, in the main, it is because too little support is available to teachers so that they can teach all the different groups at the right level of challenge. They teach too much to the middle. The school has far fewer support staff than most schools. The few teaching assistants are well deployed. Good use is made of their individual strengths, and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from their experience most of all.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. The work for children in the Reception class is planned according to the guidance for children in the Foundation Stage, and in Key Stages 1 and 2, the children follow the National Curriculum (religious education is inspected separately in this school). Statutory requirements are met. The school gives appropriate attention to teaching the basic skills of literacy and numeracy and ensures that science and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are not neglected. The teaching of reading is under review at present in Key Stage 1, in response to last year's fall in standards and the lower starting points of children entering the school. The new headteacher has initiated a discussion amongst staff about adapting the curriculum to make work more interesting and relevant for children and the demands they may face as adults. She plans to find space in the timetable for lessons to promote personal development and citizenship. This should not be hard to do, because the timetables for each class require an overhaul: too much time is spent on tasks that are not priorities and could be more usefully allocated to lessons.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. This is a caring school where children are valued. This was so at the time of the last inspection and it remains so now. The greater involvement of the parents and the children, so that their views are known, has enabled the school to take action to make care and support better still. Parents appreciate the efforts the school has made recently to find out what they think. Children feel secure, and the school has made it a priority to ensure that they are as safe as possible inside and outside the class. The governors have nominated one of their number as a 'Children's Champion' to reflect the importance of children having their own 'voice'. The arrangements for child protection, risk assessment, health and safety, and the checks made of the suitability of staff are all robust. The school has forged close links with the pre-school that ensures children make a smooth transfer to Reception, and the transfer of information to and from the before and after school clubs ensures important information is passed to the people who need to know.

Considerable progress has been made in introducing assessment systems that track the progress children make, and in setting curriculum targets for them to achieve. Although the systems are cumbersome at present, senior management is aware of how much progress is being made in each class and is introducing more accountability for the progress children make. For their part, teachers maintain comprehensive records of children's work, and they know just what stage each child is at, which should help them plan challenging work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The leadership of the headteacher is very good but the leadership of other leaders is not well developed.

Previous inspection reports have drawn attention to shortfalls in the leadership and management of the school. The several changes in headship since the last inspection have had a destabilising effect on the school, causing parents some concern. The school has not improved as much as it should until very recently and has fallen behind in several respects over the years, including the development of the role of subject leaders. Credit is due to staff for maintaining standards throughout this period. Since she took up post in June 2005, the new headteacher's calm and measured approach and belief in partnership has steadied the school and restored the confidence of parents and the team spirit of the staff. She has taken stock, produced development plans and introduced monitoring systems to bring more rigour into management. She has a clear and accurate view of the school that is very much in keeping with the view of inspectors. There is a good capacity for improvement. There is a common determination to improve at all levels, but although significant progress has been made in all areas, so much is as yet unproven. Governors, many of whom are parents, share a renewed sense of optimism and are keen to participate more fully in the work of the school.

Individual governors are taking on link roles with staff to improve their knowledge and involvement.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	3	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	NA
The behaviour of learners	3	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, Mrs Kenna and I visited your school recently to find out how well you are learning. Thank you for being so open, polite and friendly. We enjoyed our time at St Mary's. I am writing to let you know what we found.

These are the things we think are good about your school.

- When we were reading about the school, before the inspection, we were a bit worried because over the years quite a lot of children have left St Mary's to go to other primary schools. So we were pleased when we came and found that you are happy at St Mary's and enjoy your lessons.
- We think the governors have appointed a very good headteacher in Mrs Johnston. You seem to like her. Perhaps that's because she asks children what they think and listens to what they have to say.
- Your teachers are hard-working and want the very best for you, and you seem to get along with them very well.
- We were impressed by you, the school council, especially the grown up way you are working towards improving the way children look after each other.
- You reach good standards in Year 6.
- You are one of very few schools that has a 'Children's Champion' on the governing body to speak on your behalf.

We have asked your headteacher and teachers to improve some things to make the school even better.

- To give more support to your teachers. Your teachers are planning some good work for you but they can't always be with you when you need support and encouragement. We think your teachers need more help to keep you achieving as highly as you can.
- To change the timetables to fit in more subjects and make sure you make the best use of every minute at school.
- To check that all the subjects you study are taught properly. Your teachers can each take a share in doing this.

And one for the children.

- Do your best at all times. When we asked children about their work, they could pick out the mistakes they had made, but they hadn't corrected them. If you are going to succeed as a school, everyone has to try their hardest, and that includes the children!

Thank you very much for helping us with the inspection.