



St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Falmouth

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 112003
LEA Cornwall
Inspection number 278827
Inspection dates 20 June 2006 to 21 June 2006
Reporting inspector Shirley Billington AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Mongleath Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Falmouth
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Cornwall TR11 4PW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01326 314540
Number on roll	219	Fax number	01326 312251
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Matthew Higham
Date of previous inspection	10 January 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Jackie Scarborough

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized primary school serving a widespread area. Around half the children are from Catholic families living in Falmouth or further afield and the remainder are non-Catholic and live locally. The proportion of children with learning difficulties and disabilities is slightly lower than the average.

A new headteacher was appointed two years ago

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school where pupils achieve well and thoroughly enjoy their education. Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Standards in English, mathematics and science are generally above average, although there was a dip in pupils' performance in tests at the end of Year 2 in 2004 and progress in Years 3 to 6 was not quite as good in 2005 as in previous years. As a result of this, the school identified specific areas for improvement, such as writing, and has effectively tackled the decline. Things are now 'back on track' and all groups of pupils are doing well. The school has significant strengths, good capacity to improve further and provides good value for money. Its view of its own effectiveness is more modest than the findings of the inspection.

The youngest children get off to a sound start in the Reception Year and the vast majority are working within expected levels at the start of Year 1. Their personal and social development is promoted well and provides a very good foundation for their later learning. Pupils throughout the school flourish in the caring environment and gain confidence and good learning habits which stand them in good stead for the next stage of their education. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school's work and provide strong support for their children's learning.

The leadership of the headteacher is good. When she took up post, she accurately recognised the need for more rigour in the school's systems for checking its own strengths and weaknesses. This is now being achieved through regular evaluation of teaching and analysis of information from tests. Teaching is satisfactory and has some good features, particularly in the way that writing is being taught. Systems for tracking pupils' progress have been put in place and information is being used well to target those who need some extra support. However, not enough use is being made of the information to analyse how different groups are doing or to compare pupils' achievement in different subjects or areas of learning. This is important in order to ensure that a dip in standards and progress does not occur again.

There are very good opportunities for pupils to participate in clubs and special events. Accommodation is cramped and this inhibits some aspects of provision, for example, aspects of creative and physical development for the Reception children. Much is done to try to overcome the difficulties. Resources for information and communication technology (ICT) have been improved recently. However, there are gaps in pupils' experiences in ICT and, as a result, the skills of the older pupils are not as good as they should be.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching to the level of the best by ensuring that work is consistently matched to the abilities and needs of all pupils.
- Raise standards in ICT by making sure that all aspects of the subject are systematically taught.
- Make more rigorous use of assessment data to analyse the performance of all groups of pupils across the school in all subjects and areas of learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well and, by the end of Year 6, reach standards that are above the national average.

From a broadly average starting point, children make sound progress in the Reception Year and most are working at expected levels in all areas of learning by the start of Year 1. Over the past two years the rate of progress in Years 1 to 6 has varied from satisfactory to good, but with no particular pattern in terms of the variation. The school recognised the need to improve standards at the end of Year 2 and to ensure that all pupils made progress at a consistent rate through the school. Writing has been a particular focus for improvement and the strategies put in place to improve the teaching of writing have proved successful in raising standards. Standards in science are now targeted for improvement with an increased emphasis on practical and investigative aspects of the subject.

Analysis of the school's data during the inspection established that all groups of pupils achieve well. Higher attaining pupils are well challenged and those with learning difficulties are effectively supported so that they meet their individual targets. The school sets challenging targets for pupils' performance in national tests and these are generally achieved.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and this is reflected in their good attendance. Behaviour is very impressive, both in lessons and around the school.

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is exceptionally strong. This is supported well by very strong church links and opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and make decisions about aspects of school life. They have good appreciation of local cultural traditions through participation in activities such as the Falmouth Oyster and Helston Dance Festivals. Pupils have reasonable knowledge of the beliefs and practices of different religious groups but the school knows that there is more to be done to extend their awareness of cultural diversity in modern Britain.

Pupils make an excellent contribution to the school and local communities. The school council is regarded by pupils as being a powerful force in representing their views. Younger children, for instance, have asked if they can use playground games that are currently available only to older ones and they know that the council's decision will be acted upon. Pupils have a very good understanding of safe practices and of how to keep fit and healthy. Participation in regular 'Huff Puff' activities is a favourite activity for many. Pupils' good skills in literacy and numeracy and ability to work well in teams and small groups mean that they have a good base for their future well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Consistently sound teaching, together with pupils' very positive attitudes to learning and good parental support, ensure that achievement is good. Throughout the school, teachers and support staff have good relationships with pupils. Good use is made of resources, particularly the interactive whiteboards, to engage the pupils' interest and to stimulate ideas. Some shortcomings in teaching were identified when the rate of progress slowed down two years ago. Steps taken to tackle this and to improve the overall quality of teaching are having a positive impact. This was particularly evident in some good 'exciting writing' lessons seen during the inspection. Planning generally takes account of the range of pupils' abilities but there is more to be done to make the best use of assessment information to ensure that this is a consistent feature of all lessons. Marking of work is good in most instances. Comments such as 'Top Banana!' followed by 'Well done for trying with both commas and joining words' combine praise and specific feedback for pupils. Occasionally marking is more superficial and does not give pupils a clear view of how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and offers pupils an exciting range of experiences. Provision for basic skills has been improved recently through extending the range of reading material and introducing the 'exciting writing' project. Focused teaching of writing skills, and increased opportunities to write for a variety of purposes, are motivating pupils and have raised standards in this area. ICT equipment has been upgraded but not all aspects of the subject are covered in enough depth and there are gaps in areas such as control and use of sensors. Provision for art is a strong feature and provides good opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively with local artists, for example, in creating large three-dimensional illuminated fish for Truro's Festival of Lights. There are also very good opportunities for pupils to attend clubs, pursue their interests in areas such as drama, sport and music, participate in special events and perform in school productions and the choir. A good programme for personal, social and health education effectively promotes pupils' well-being.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is a significant strength of the school and academic guidance is rapidly improving. Procedures to ensure pupils' health and safety, including those for child protection, are rigorous and known by all staff. Support staff play a particularly valuable role in supporting potentially vulnerable pupils or those who need a boost with their learning.

Teachers are now monitoring the progress of pupils carefully and using the information to plan to meet the range of needs in their class. Targets are set to help pupils to improve. This is in the early stages, but older pupils are keen to use the guidance they are given to further boost their achievement. Parents appreciate the quality of the individual care and support given by the school. The parent of a child who has had extra help with reading commented how much this has improved her confidence, 'which has, in turn, boosted her reading again'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management by the headteacher, senior staff and governors is good. Since her appointment, the headteacher has been instrumental in leading developments to tackle the recent dip in standards and to ensure that the progress of all pupils is systematically tracked. This has meant that provision has improved, particularly for the teaching of writing, and there is now an upward trend in achievement.

Effective systems have been put in place for evaluating performance and the school has a clear view of areas that need improvement. Good in-service training is helping to strengthen the quality of teaching and the leadership roles of subject managers. The views of parents and pupils are taken into account when planning improvements and this has resulted, for example, in more activities at lunchtime and regular curriculum information evenings.

Several governors are fairly new but have undertaken training and are taking on their roles enthusiastically. All governors have specific subject links which give them a good knowledge of the school's work and areas for improvement. Governors are involved well in forward planning for the school and in evaluating improvements. Financial planning is sound, but there is a large surplus in the budget. Part of this has been used for the recent purchase of ICT equipment and the remainder is earmarked as the governors' contribution to an anticipated 'new build' for the school*.

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	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?	2	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?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	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	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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

Thank you very much for the help that you gave us when we visited your school this week. We enjoyed talking to many of you, visiting your classrooms and looking at some of your work. We thought you might be interested in what we are saying in our report.

Good things about the school:

You do well in your learning and the 'exciting writing' project is helping your written work to get even better.

You behave very well. Those of you who have responsibilities in your classes and around the school take them seriously and carry them out well.

You really enjoy coming to school because there are lots of interesting activities for you to take part in.

You understand the importance of staying healthy by taking regular exercise, especially in 'Huff Puff', and eating healthy foods.

You get on very well together, work well in teams and small groups, support each other and care for one another.

What we have suggested the school does now:

Give you a better range of work in ICT so that you have all the skills that you should.

Make more use of the information about your progress to make sure that everyone is doing as well as they should in every subject.

Thank you again for your help. Keep on enjoying school!

Best wishes from the inspection team.