



St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Aston-le-Walls

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122040
LEA Northamptonshire
Inspection number 281159
Inspection dates 4 July 2006 to 4 July 2006
Reporting inspector Rajinder Harrison AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Aston-le-Walls
School category	Voluntary aided		Daventry
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Northamptonshire NN11 6UF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01295 660258
Number on roll	80	Fax number	01295 660258
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Deborah Thorneycroft
Date of previous inspection	27 November 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Ann Allison

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
4 to 11	4 July 2006 - 4 July 2006	281159

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's Catholic Primary School is smaller than most other primary schools. Because of its denominational status, it serves a relatively large area. Many children are transported into the school from other villages and small towns. Most pupils are from a White British background but there are a small number from minority ethnic origins, some of whom speak English as an additional language. Very few pupils are eligible for free school meals. An average proportion of pupils are identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities. Attainment on entry to the Reception Year is judged to be average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This outstanding school gives excellent value for money. The school believes that 'every child is a gift from God' and this powerful belief underpins its high aspirations. Because a love of learning is effectively nurtured, the pupils do exceptionally well and attain very high standards. They experience a real 'wow' factor in the exciting and 'magical' way teachers set learning challenges. Excellent provision in the Foundation Stage results in children making very good progress, with most exceeding expected standards by the end of the Reception Year.

Parents choose this school over others because children thrive here. One parent said, 'I could not ask for anything more - the school is fantastic!' Pupils love their school, work hard, form excellent relationships and behave impeccably. They feel secure and trust their teachers. They learn to become model young citizens, well prepared for the future. The school and its community are one extended 'family' that respects the contributions of all its members. A warm, welcoming atmosphere prevails throughout.

Procedures to care for the pupils are very effective. The process of setting targets and marking guide pupils very effectively in improving their work in English, mathematics and science, but this high quality guidance is not always as good in all subjects.

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The school has a very strong focus on raising standards and operates in a very productive and purposeful way. Self-evaluation is rigorous and accurately identifies strengths and areas for development. Regular exchange of information keeps everyone in the picture, but a few parents would welcome even greater consultation when decisions are taken. The school is well placed to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the very effective practice of guiding pupils through setting and monitoring individual targets extends to all subjects.
- Consult more extensively with parents when taking decisions that affect them.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The school makes excellent preparation for children entering the Reception Year so that they settle and develop confidence and independence quickly. Their progress is very good in all areas of learning because provision is stimulating and fun. Most children exceed the standards expected of them by the end of the Reception Year.

In Years 1 and 2, pupils' overall achievement is outstanding. Pupils attain exceptionally high standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers' improved understanding of how different pupils learn has helped them to match work to their needs more accurately.

Pupils continue to make very good progress in Years 3 to 6. By Year 6, they are working at well above average standards in English, mathematics and science and attain very high results in tests. Many start on work set by their secondary schools. Support for individuals is identified early so that interventions are accurate and effective, enabling pupils of all backgrounds and abilities to make the same level of progress as their classmates. The school is very successful in meeting the challenging targets it sets itself.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The pupils' personal development is outstanding. The school's strong Christian ethos underpins every aspect of school life. Assemblies, where pupils share personal prayers, help them develop a robust spiritual and moral sense. In the Reception class, children have 'cloudy and sunny' pegs, to remind them of what is acceptable behaviour. Pupils respect the richness and diversity of other cultures and faiths through special 'faith weeks'. International visits and visitors extend pupils' awareness of the wider world and their place within it. Older pupils develop initiative and social responsibility by organising fund-raising stalls. They are involved in many community and church events. The school choir sings at the Church of England fete and local community homes. Pupils serve on the school council and make decisions that affect them, for example, designing playground facilities. Behaviour is excellent. The pupils are polite, eager to please and happy in their work. Relationships are very strong. Pupils show the same level of care and kindness to others as is shown to them by adults who work with them in school. They have a love for life and learning that is highly praiseworthy. Their self-esteem is very high because the school celebrates the value of each individual.

Pupils' good attendance indicates that they enjoy school and see it as an important stage in their lives. The programme for personal and health education gives them a very intelligent understanding of living healthy and safe lifestyles. Their academic and personal skills are of high quality as they become mature young people ready to face the world.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding and ensure pupils' high achievement. Vibrant displays show pupils take pride in their work. Caring relationships between pupils and teachers demonstrate a strong sense of mutual respect. Teachers instil a love for learning and captivate pupils through challenging questions and fun activities. For example, in the Year 1/2 class, pupils sat spellbound watching penguins 'slip-sliding' in the Antarctic, making observations like 'examine their sharp beady eyes', 'standing as straight as sticks' and 'oily feathers glittering in the snow'. The teacher inspired them to use 'magical words' as they explored vocabulary. In a Year 5/6 class, pupils

understood that traffic surveys help planners consider environmental and social issues and explained why young people should think about such matters. Excellent assessment information allows teachers to plan work that matches individual needs. Because teachers understand that pupils learn in different ways, they modify activities accordingly and use whiteboards imaginatively to enrich learning. Skilled support staff provide excellent guidance to individual pupils. Investigative work takes high priority as pupils explore and research ideas and pose questions. Talk is a key feature in lessons as pupils solve problems and design activities that help them learn.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum, which is skilfully interwoven with high quality experiences that underpin exciting learning, is outstanding. A seamless knitting together of skills and knowledge from different subjects creatively builds on pupils' previous work. Because of the different ways pupils learn, activities incorporate discussions, practical investigations and research opportunities that involve using books, computers, the environment and a range of museums and historical sites. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is very good, allowing them to participate fully. Learning targets are set and learning assistants work in partnership with parents to support individual needs. The curriculum for children in the Reception class combines work and play so imaginatively that learning is more of an adventure than work. Pupils have very good opportunities, for example, through science and physical exercise, to learn about eating sensibly and taking exercise. Dangers from the misuse of drugs and learning to stay safe are highlighted through a well structured programme of personal, social and health education. The school offers an excellent range of enrichment activities that includes music, sport and French. Visits to places such as Rome and the Royal Opera House add to pupils' experiences of the world beyond school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The school believes that the welfare of every child is paramount. The staff are totally committed to serving the best interests of each child by ensuring their welfare and progress. Trusting relationships give pupils the confidence to approach any member of staff if they are worried or upset. Pupils feel very safe and valued in school. The arrangements for care, including pupils' safety and child protection, are very good. Monitoring and assessment arrangements are very thorough and every effort is made to support individuals as the need arises. Pupils have long-term and weekly targets for learning, and are encouraged to set their own targets and evaluate their achievement. This high quality setting of targets does not extend to all subjects. Similarly, marking is very good in English, mathematics and science in helping pupils improve their work but it is not always as effective in other subjects. Cooperation between the school and the parents is excellent. Parents receive written reports every half term, to indicate their children's achievements in literacy

and numeracy. This helps them appraise their children's progress and ask for help and advice about supporting them at home.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher's commitment to the school is exemplary. Through her inspirational practice, she has created a strong team. High aspirations for the success of every child permeate all aspects of the school's work. As a result, standards are very high and continue to improve.

The school sees the quality of its practice as 'normal' and so actively seeks to improve, and has the capacity to do so. Issues from the last inspection have been fully resolved, for example, provision for the Reception class is now exemplary. The rigorous and accurate monitoring of teaching highlights its strengths and areas for further improvement. The leadership team has a very considered approach to self-evaluation and has identified priorities that include improving library facilities and making greater use of whiteboards in everyday teaching. Their plans are very precisely formulated and activities identified include regular checks to ensure plans are realised and have the expected impact.

Parents are kept fully informed. A few seek more consultation when decisions are taken. Regular questionnaires and other effective communication channels capture their view and these help to shape school developments. Partnerships with other institutions are highly productive and the school is regarded as a centre of excellence. Financial management is very good and shared activities with other schools help to save costs. Governors are very supportive and extremely astute. They carry out their responsibilities in a very businesslike manner. They are frequent visitors in school, sit in on many lessons and offer staff a high level of critical challenge. They know what sort of school their community wants and pupils deserve, and so work with parents and staff to achieve this.

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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?	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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?	1	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	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	1	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	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	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

I am writing to tell you what we found out when we visited your school recently. We came to look at the work that you do and to talk to you and your teachers. We really enjoyed meeting you, thought you were very friendly, sensible and very mature. Thank you for talking to us. We would also like to thank your parents for filling in a form that gave us their views about the school. It helped us to form a good picture in the short time we were there. We especially liked the way you made us feel part of the 'family', something we know your school feels really proud about.

There are so many good things that we remember about your school it is hard to know where to start other than to say your school is Excellent! This is because:

- You love school, always do your best and make excellent progress.
- Your teachers do an excellent job in helping you learn, as do all the people who work there.
- The teachers want you to do well and succeed, and they really care about you.
- You are just so kind to each other, behave impeccably and know so much about staying fit and healthy. You also raise lots of money for charity and school with your clever ideas like running your own stalls at the summer BBQ!
- The school provides you with exciting things to learn about and you go on interesting visits to places like Rome – wow, how fantastic!

While your school has many excellent features, we think there are a few improvements that could be made. For example:

- Your teachers set you targets and advise about how to improve your work further not just in English, Maths and Science, but in all other subjects too.
- The school could discuss with your parents even more about their views on any decisions that might need to be made to improve the school.

In such a great school, we are sure you will continue to enjoy your school days and do really well.