



St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104482
Local Authority Knowsley
Inspection number 286957
Inspection dates 26–27 February 2007
Reporting inspector Colin Smith

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Pilch Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Liverpool
Age range of pupils	7–11		Merseyside L14 0JG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0151 4778490
Number on roll (school)	477	Fax number	0151 4778491
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs M Rawsthorne
		Headteacher	Mr P Doyle
Date of previous school inspection	18 June 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Pupil numbers have remained high over recent years in this large junior school because of its popularity. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is above average, reflecting the degree of social disadvantage in the area. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A very small number are of Indian, African and Chinese heritage or from mixed backgrounds. None of these pupils is at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Margaret Mary's is a successful school that provides good value for money.

The school provides outstanding pastoral care and maintains excellent links with outside agencies. As a result, pupils are kept safe and the most vulnerable ones are able to overcome many of the barriers to learning. The vast majority of pupils become confident, interested and happy learners and their personal development is good. They behave well, show concern for others and carry out their responsibilities earnestly. They learn to make informed decisions about keeping healthy and staying safe and appreciate the value of hard work and cooperation. A good curriculum, notably enriched by a stimulating range of additional activities, creates enjoyment in learning and fosters pupils' talents and skills very well. The good personal, social and health education programme, a concentration on the basic skills and good opportunities for independent learning combine to prepare pupils well for the future. 'Children are so well cared for within the school's wonderful community' typifies the views of many parents.

On the whole, the quality of teaching and learning is good and occasionally outstanding. This is why most pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve well and standards are above average by the time pupils are ready to move on to high school. However, the extent to which teachers adapt the work provided to match pupils' different learning needs is better in some classes than others. In some lessons, the learning needs of the more able pupils are not considered sufficiently. This explains why some of them do not reach the higher levels of which they are capable.

The school benefits from good leadership and management. The headteacher's open, reflective and consultative leadership style ensures a clear and shared vision for the future. This has helped the school to move forward positively since the previous inspection. Standards in English have risen well, not least because of the improvements in pupils' writing. Senior staff and governors have overestimated a number of aspects of the school's work, largely because they have been too subjective. All aspects are good but not outstanding. Nevertheless, staff and governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and take decisive action to remedy any weaknesses. For example, pupils' skills at problem solving in mathematics, diagnosed as a weaker area, are currently receiving attention. This illustrates the school's good capacity for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that tasks are well matched to pupils' different learning needs in every lesson so that satisfactory teaching is raised to a good level.
- Raise the achievement of the more able pupils to ensure that all of them reach the high levels of which they are capable.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' attainment is very carefully and accurately assessed as they enter the school. This helps to identify their starting points, which have been broadly average in recent years. Meticulous measuring of pupils' progress year on year shows that they make good progress in reading, mathematics and science. Progress in writing is very good, largely because of the school's concentration on improving pupils' writing skills. Standards in English, mathematics and science are above average and have been significantly higher than national averages in four out of the previous six years. This positive picture has been achieved by setting challenging targets, which most pupils have reached. However, some of the more able pupils have fallen short of reaching the targets set for them. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well, personally and academically, because of the good support they receive. The progress made by the very small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds compares well to that of other pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good. Their cultural development is satisfactory. Although they understand and show respect for other cultures, they have less awareness of cultural diversity in this country. This is why pupils' personal development is good but not outstanding, as the school believes. Pupils' behaviour around school is good and is very good in lessons. They are courteous, helpful and hardworking, which are important factors in their good achievement. Pupils describe their school as 'happy and friendly' with 'very little bullying and no racism.' Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in the above average attendance and their enthusiasm in participating in the rich assortment of out-of-school activities. Pupils have a mature understanding of healthy lifestyles and are well aware of the dangers they face, for example from drugs, smoking and alcohol, and how to avoid them. All pupils, but particularly the older ones, develop an acute sense of responsibility for themselves and others, by acting as playground buddies and school council representatives. Good literacy and numeracy skills and a secure grasp of information and communication technology (ICT) place pupils in a strong position to capitalise on their future educational opportunities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils are well managed. Lessons are calm and purposeful and pupils are able to work productively. Pupils understand what they are expected to learn and teachers usually maintain a good pace in lessons, which keeps pupils interested and involved in their

own learning. Teachers explain new ideas clearly and often imaginatively, using ICT to make learning visual. This helps pupils to understand complex ideas such as planetary orbits and angular measure. Valuable and timely assessments are made of how well pupils are learning. Where teaching is good, the assessment information is used very well to provide tasks that are challenging and well matched to pupils' different learning needs. This ensures that all pupils learn successfully and achieve well. Where teaching is less effective, the same tasks are provided for all pupils, irrespective of their different learning needs. When this happens, the more able pupils are not challenged sufficiently and their learning slows down. Pupils who find learning difficult benefit greatly from the additional support provided by classroom assistants. This ensures that they master the basic skills successfully. Teaching is occasionally outstanding. In these lessons, pupils are inspired to think, calculate and write quickly, accurately and creatively, leading to a heightened sense of personal achievement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The well organised curriculum meets the needs of most pupils. A concentration on literacy and numeracy, for which the school has gained the Primary Quality Mark, helps pupils to acquire the basic tools to enable them to learn other subjects successfully. The curriculum is sensitively adapted to cater for the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This helps them to gain confidence and achieve their targets. However, because the needs of the more able and gifted pupils are not considered to the same degree, their achievement is more limited. An excellent range of out-of-school activities, local and residential visits, visitors and special theme weeks makes a valuable contribution to pupils' personal development. These additional activities boost their enjoyment of school and nurture their sporting, musical and artistic talents. As one parent commented, 'There is so much for children to do here and excel in.'

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides excellent pastoral support for pupils. Vulnerable pupils, particularly those with emotional and social needs, are tenderly nurtured. The school has a wonderful quiet sanctuary, where pupils can unwind, reflect, share their anxieties and receive spiritual uplift. As one parent remarked, 'Visiting the 'Quiet Place' has cracked open her shell. She is no longer the timid, shy girl she used to be.' Excellent support from key members of staff, in tandem with outside agencies, plays a crucial part in guiding and supporting pupils to face and overcome the barriers to learning. Procedures to ensure safe staff recruitment and child protection are very well established. Most activities have been assessed to minimise risks. The quality of guidance pupils receive is largely good, although not sufficient to enable all of the more able pupils to reach challenging targets. This is why the overall quality of care, guidance and support is good but not outstanding, as the school believes.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides clear direction and purposeful and sensitive leadership. Governors offer good support and challenge. The headteacher and senior staff are ambitious for the school. This is reflected in the excellent resources provided and a myriad of additional opportunities for pupils to follow their interests and develop their talents. At the heart of the school's philosophy is the belief that pupils can only learn successfully if they are content, confident and happy. This is why so much energy is channelled towards helping pupils to overcome their personal difficulties. Achieving well and reaching good standards is high on the agenda. Consequently, the school has implemented good strategies to check how well pupils are progressing and how well the school is meeting its stated aims. In this respect, the school has made significant improvements since the previous inspection. Pupils' work is examined and their progress from year to year is very carefully tracked. Prompt action is taken to remedy any faltering progress. This is evident in the impact that extra classes have on pupils who are on the margins of achieving a higher level. Talking to pupils helps subject leaders to know how to provide more meaningful experiences. Lessons are observed to gain an overview of the effectiveness of teaching. However, while these observations identify what teachers do well, insufficient emphasis is placed on how successfully pupils are learning, particularly the more able ones. This is why leadership and management are good but not outstanding as the school judged them to be.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making us welcome, answering our questions and showing us what you can do. We thoroughly enjoyed our visit and would like to share our findings with you.

You are correct in believing that your school is a good one. Most of you achieve well and standards are above average by the time you are ready to move on to high school. We were particularly impressed by the way teachers and support staff help pupils to overcome their learning difficulties. We have rarely seen a school with a 'Quiet Place' where pupils can relax and let their worries drift away. The school provides excellent support for pupils who need extra reassurance and help.

Every time we spoke to you, your enjoyment of school shone through. We believe that this is because, in addition to the usual lessons, your school provides an excellent range of clubs, visits and additional experiences. The headteacher and all members of staff take good care of you and listen to what you say. We believe that this is why you behave well, cooperate together and try your best.

Yours is a very large school but it runs very smoothly. Everybody works together to plan and organise lessons and extra activities. Your progress is carefully checked and the curriculum is regularly improved and extended. This tells us that your school is well led and managed.

Although your school is successful, our job is to help it to improve even more. We are recommending two improvements.

- Much of the teaching is good but in some lessons it could be better. We have asked teachers to make sure that in every lesson the work you are asked to complete is at just the right level. Sometimes you are all given the same worksheet, which some of you find too easy. You can help by working quickly so that you can tackle extension activities.
- Although most pupils make good progress, some of the more able ones do not reach the higher levels that they should. We have asked teachers to give more consideration to the needs of the more able pupils, particularly when planning their lessons.