

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120232
Local Authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	291676
Inspection dates	3–4 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Ian Hodgkinson

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	229
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Blitz
Headteacher	Annette Jones
Date of previous school inspection	8 June 2005
School address	Hastings Street Loughborough LE11 5AX
Telephone number	01509 212621
Fax number	01509 239921

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	3–4 July 2007
Inspection number	291676

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's is a school of average size serving Catholic parishes in the centre of Loughborough. Whilst most children are Catholic, 15% are of other faiths or no faiths. The background of the school's intake has changed over recent years so that around a quarter of pupils are now from minority ethnic groups and a higher proportion speak English as an additional language than in most schools. When children join the Reception class their skills are generally below the levels expected for their age. Standards on entry to Reception have declined since the previous inspection largely because communication, language and literacy skills are lower. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average overall, although it is very high in some year groups. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is broadly average.

At its last inspection in 2005, the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in its leadership and management, and in pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching in Years 1 and 2.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school no longer requires significant improvement. Its effectiveness is satisfactory. Its leadership and management have improved and are now satisfactory. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and leaders of subjects and key stages are now able to manage their tasks much more effectively because their actions are guided by good information about pupils' progress and the improved quality of teaching and learning. As a consequence, they intervene swiftly to support pupils at risk of underachieving, and successful action has been undertaken to overcome weaknesses in the performance of higher attaining pupils in mathematics. The school now has a sound capacity to improve further. The school's self-evaluation is satisfactory, but it does not draw out sharply enough the shortcomings in teaching and learning. This means that the school improvement plan lacks focus on the main priorities in this key area. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, and teachers plan lessons which set clear objectives for what pupils should learn. These are adapted to match the abilities of groups of pupils in the class, but expectations of the standards that pupils can reach are sometimes not high enough to ensure that all pupils make good progress.

Pupils' standards are broadly average by the time they leave in Year 6, and their achievement is satisfactory overall. Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage (Reception class). The staff's careful assessment enables activities to be well planned, resulting in the children developing their skills effectively in all areas of learning. Results in national tests for pupils in Year 2 rose strongly in the two years following the previous inspection to meet the national average. Pupils' standards in Year 2 are lower this year but their achievement is satisfactory relative to their starting points.

Throughout the school, pupils make good progress in the development of their writing skills. They are helped in this by a good curriculum which offers them many opportunities to apply their reading, writing and number skills in interesting topics across a range of subjects. Pupils clearly enjoy their lessons and the good range of extra-curricular activities available to them. They develop a good understanding of how to live and eat healthily, and make an effective contribution to the life of the school and wider community through, for example, their work on the school council and in charitable fundraising. Their personal development and well-being is satisfactory overall. Some parents, however, have expressed concerns over pupils' behaviour in large classes in Key Stage 2. Inspectors agree that in some of these classes, learning is occasionally disrupted by low level chatter and misbehaviour, but that effective classroom and behaviour management by teachers and teaching assistants keeps pupils mostly on task. Care, guidance and support for pupils are satisfactory overall. Pupils are well looked after. Pupils' progress towards their targets is effectively monitored by teachers, but pupils need clearer guidance about how to reach their targets. Whilst marking of pupils' work is regular and gives pupils very clear feedback on how well they have done in the task, it does not always give pupils a clear enough indication about the next steps they need to take to reach a higher level of performance.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teachers' expectations for pupils' achievement are consistently high for all groups of pupils.

- Link marking more closely to pupils' targets to give pupils clearer guidance about how to reach higher levels of performance.
- Sharpen school self-evaluation through a clearer and more explicit identification of the main areas for improvement, to give a clearer focus for school improvement planning.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards fluctuate year on year reflecting substantial variations in the characteristics and prior attainment of each year group. Overall, standards are broadly average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Throughout the school, boys and girls make good progress in writing. The performance of higher attainers in mathematics, a weakness in earlier years, has markedly risen because of the focused support given to boost attainment. Currently, the proportion of Year 6 pupils reaching the highest level, Level 5, is higher than that seen nationally. Pupils with particular needs, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities and those learning English as an additional language, are now receiving good support because of improvements in the management of their provision since the last inspection. These improvements have yet to fully make an impact on pupils' progress, which is nonetheless satisfactory. The significant underachievement of pupils in Years 1 and 2, reported by the previous inspection, has now been eliminated, because better monitoring of both teaching and pupils' progress has secured improvement in teaching and learning. Pupils' rates of progress vary by year group, with progress accelerating particularly in Year 6. Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage to reach standards that are in line with the national average, despite joining with skills which are lower than expected for their age, especially in communication, language and literacy.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral and social development, is satisfactory. Spiritual and cultural development is well supported by special theme weeks where pupils learn about customs in other parts of the world and different faiths. Pupils form strong relationships with adults and as a result, they enjoy coming to school. Attendance is satisfactory. In lessons, most pupils pay attention and are keen to learn. The strong emphasis the school places on considering others' feelings results in their good social development. However, a small minority of pupils do not always behave well and sometimes lack consideration for others. During breaks, most pupils uphold the playground rules and therefore there are relatively few disagreements. Bullying is rare and pupils know what to do if they are hurt or feel threatened. As a result of sensible guidance during lessons, pupils have a satisfactory understanding of how to exercise and play safely. They have a good understanding of how to adopt a healthy lifestyle, how to make sensible choices about what they eat and the need to take regular exercise. Physical education is popular and pupils attend out of school sports clubs regularly, especially swimming. In lessons, pupils explore how to express their feelings when there are important changes in their life. This helps them prepare well for new classes or a new school. Pupils' satisfactory development of basic literacy, numeracy and computer skills and their good social skills prepare them soundly for later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers plan lessons carefully and make pupils' clear about the learning objectives behind each activity. They ensure that activities are adapted to match pupils' skills and understanding, and they work effectively with their teaching assistants to support different groups of pupils in their classes. However, not all activities are pitched at an appropriate level to challenge all pupils and secure good progress. Sometimes pupils spend too long on low level tasks before being prompted to move on. In whole class discussions, some teachers skilfully adapt their questioning of pupils to draw in lower attainers and draw extended answers from higher attainers, but other teachers do not offer such structure to their questioning. Teachers' expectations of pupils' work and progress have improved, but still vary somewhat between year groups. High pupil numbers in Key Stage 2 classes present some additional challenges for teachers in managing their classes. In most cases teachers and their assistants cope well and keep pupils on task, but learning is slowed on occasions by the low level misbehaviour of a few pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. The Foundation Stage curriculum offers a very good balance of activities, which are well planned to help children make progress in all areas of their learning. These activities promote particularly good progress in children's social and emotional development, and help them develop independence. Throughout the school, teachers plan interesting and exciting links between subjects so that pupils can see the relevance of their work and they can write for a range of different purposes. This approach, along with the organisation of special theme weeks, motivates and engages pupils. Extra sessions to help with English and mathematics run by teaching assistants support those with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with English as an additional language to achieve their targets and make similar progress to others in the class. However, not all activities during lessons offer a suitable challenge to all pupils. A good range of after school clubs and sports are well attended.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pupils are kept safe and secure whilst at school and the school's child protection arrangements meet government requirements. The tracking of pupils' progress is used to identify those who need extra help and the school has effective links with a range of specialist agencies that provide expert help and training. Support for pupils' academic guidance is satisfactory and teachers have a clear picture of their pupils' levels of ability. Many of the older pupils are aware of their targets for improvement and they are increasingly involved in evaluating their own work. Teachers mark pupils' work carefully to let pupils know how they are doing in relation to their learning objectives. However, marking does not consistently refer to targets to give pupils a clear idea about what they need to work on to reach a higher level of performance.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The effectiveness of the school's leadership and management has improved markedly since the last inspection. Leaders at all levels now have much better information about the performance of each pupil and of the school as a whole, and have begun to make effective use of this information to tackle underachievement. Information is drawn from the tracking of pupils' progress through an improved assessment system, from frequent classroom observations and book trawls by senior managers, and through better consultation with parents and pupils. A number of parents commented favourably on the school's greater willingness to listen to and act on their views than hitherto. Self-evaluation, whilst satisfactory, lacks some sharpness in identifying shortcomings in teaching and learning. As a result, the school improvement plan does not focus sufficiently well on the main priorities for improvement in this key area. Governance is satisfactory. Governors have worked hard to improve leadership and communication in the school and, in spite of the constraints imposed by a budget deficit, have successfully obtained resources to significantly improve the classroom accommodation. They recognise the need to further develop their skills in scrutinising the school's performance data.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
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?	3

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

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

5 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Hastings Street, Loughborough, Leicestershire LE11 5AX

Many thanks for the welcome you gave to me and my colleagues when we visited the school for its recent inspection. We really enjoyed talking to you. We were particularly impressed by your knowledge about how to live and eat healthily. You clearly get fully involved in the life of the school by your contributions to the school council and by joining in with a wide range of clubs and activities. Your teachers provide a good range of activities in lessons too, which is why most of you enjoy school so much. The school takes good care of you, and you get on well together. Most of you behave well, but some are a little inconsiderate to others and, occasionally, take their attention away from learning.

We think that the school is now satisfactory, and that it has overcome the problems identified by the last inspection. The headteacher and leadership team now have plenty of information on your progress and they are moving the school forward soundly. As a result of the satisfactory teaching, support and guidance you receive, the standards you reach are similar to those of pupils in other schools, and you make satisfactory progress. Your writing skills develop particularly well throughout the school, and it is good to see how hard many of you have worked to improve your standards in maths.

- There are a number of ways we think the school could become better still. We have asked the school to;
- check that you always get work which sets you enough challenge, to help you make good progress in your learning
- link teachers' marking comments more to your targets, so that you know what to do to raise your standards
- make sure that school managers identify clearly the most important things to improve in the school to help them make better plans to raise standards.

You can help by continuing to work hard and by taking your teachers' advice on how to improve. I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson Lead Inspector