

St Mary and St John Junior and Infant School

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|----------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 103442 |
| Local Authority | Birmingham |
| Inspection number | 308321 |
| Inspection dates | 20–21 May 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | David Driscoll |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 430 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Jayne O'Brien |
| Headteacher | Veronica Fenlon |
| Date of previous school inspection | 26 April 2004 |
| School address | Beaufort Road Erdington Birmingham B23 7NB |
| Telephone number | 01213 823522 |
| Fax number | 0121 3825274 |

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|--------------------------|----------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This very large school serves an inner city area of Birmingham. A high proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, as is the proportion with a statement of special educational needs. A high proportion of pupils come from a minority ethnic background. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is above average and much higher than when the school was last inspected. No permanent headteacher has been in school since 2004, until April of this year, when a new headteacher took up post.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could be reasonably expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the school's leadership and management.

The school's overall effectiveness is inadequate, because leadership and management are inadequate. Governors did not effectively deal with the considerable instability in leadership. Checks on the effectiveness of what the school provides have lacked rigour, so the school's main areas for improvement have not been identified. There have been no effective plans drawn up to drive the school forward and meet its changing needs. Middle managers carry responsibility for major aspects of the school's performance, with insufficient time to do their jobs properly, while senior managers carry lesser responsibilities. The lack of leadership has resulted in poor improvement since the school was last inspected. At this time, pupils made good progress in Year 1 and 2. The weaknesses identified then still exist, but not the strengths. Pupils' achievement is now satisfactory through the Foundation Stage to Year 6, as they usually join the school with standards that are below those expected for their age, and leave with standards that are below average. Progress is slower in mathematics and writing than it is in reading.

Nevertheless, the school is still providing a satisfactory education, because teaching, the curriculum and the care, guidance and support offered to pupils are all satisfactory. Much of the credit for the school maintaining a satisfactory education can be given to a hard-working and dedicated staff. However, teachers have operated in increasing isolation, so strengths have not been shared with others and weaknesses have not been identified, leading to great variation in practice across the school. In one lesson, for example, the pace was rapid, but the work was a little easy; in another, the work was demanding, but the pace slow. The same is true of the curriculum. Pupils at an early stage of learning English make better progress in some classes than in others as a result of better planning. Staff know their pupils well, although behaviour management is inconsistent, both in and out of lessons. Pupils' response to such provision is one of reasonable enjoyment. They like the good range of extra clubs, and lessons where they are active. Their personal development, including their behaviour and attitudes, is satisfactory. This is not as good as at the time of the last inspection, when behaviour and attitudes were good. Parents are rightly concerned about falling standards of behaviour and discipline.

At present, leaders and managers at all levels cannot point to a convincing track record of improvement to demonstrate the capacity to improve. However, the new headteacher already knows the school's strengths and has started to address its main weaknesses, but time has been far too short for actions to have had a significant impact, other than the important factor of improving staff morale.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children achieve satisfactorily in the Foundation Stage, although they enter Year 1 with standards that are still below those expected for their age. Staff take good care of children and get on well with them. The Nursery provides a bright and stimulating environment, but the Reception classes are much less inspiring. Teachers plan the work together well and provide a

good mix of activities led by the teacher or initiated by the children themselves. However, the work is not always based on an analysis of what standards the children have previously achieved, so is not always challenging enough for the most able. The teaching of phonics is good, and there are many opportunities for children to talk to one another and adults, which helps most of them to make good progress in their language skills. However, there is no bilingual support for children who are at an early stage of learning English, which slows their development not only in language, but also in areas of personal development because they are not always clear about instructions or guidance. The Foundation Stage manager is aware of the main strengths and weaknesses, but plans for improvement lack the necessary detail to drive up standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the leadership of the school by allocating responsibilities more appropriately between senior and middle managers.
- Monitor and evaluate the work of the school more thoroughly in order to identify accurately the main areas for improvement and drive up standards.
- Draw up plans that respond to the school's changing circumstances, address the school's main priorities and eliminate the variation in practice that exists, especially in teaching and the curriculum for different groups.
- Improve achievement in writing and mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils make steady progress as they move through the school, although this varies between year groups and classes. Standards are below average by the end of Year 6 and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. They are adequately equipped with the skills needed for the next stage of their education. Progress in mathematics and writing is a little slower than in reading. Pupils find it difficult to check calculations and sentences for accuracy and so are not clear where they have made mistakes and this impedes their progress. Pupils who are in the care of the local authority generally make better progress than others do, because they have plans that identify their specific needs and how they are to be met.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Children in the Foundation Stage are taught to 'have a go' at tasks for themselves, and this stays with them in later years. Pupils enjoy tackling problems and lessons where they are 'doing', rather than just listening. When work does not interest them, or they are not under close adult supervision, they are quick to lose concentration and start to distract those around them. Pupils generally feel safe at school, but behaviour in the playground can be a little rough for some, which leads to a fairly high number of minor accidents. There is a good degree of racial harmony in the school, with pupils from all backgrounds getting on well with one another. Pupils say that bullying is rare, and dealt with effectively. Attendance has fallen from average to below average over recent years, mainly because of holidays taken in term-time, but the decline has now been halted. The junior school council plays a good part in decision making, but the excellent links with the community evident at the last inspection have not been maintained, so the wider part played by pupils is now satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

One consistent strength in teaching is the good way that teachers prompt and help individuals to tackle problems. This makes pupils think about their work, and they enjoy working out an answer for themselves. In all other respects, teaching is inconsistent with variable strengths and weaknesses. Marking, for example, is good in Year 6, and explains exactly what pupils need to do to improve. In Year 3 though, some work is rarely marked with anything other than a tick or rubber stamp. However, not enough attention is paid to improving standards of presentation in any year group. Even within the same lesson, some teaching assistants will be carefully directed to work with pupils, while others move around doing the work for pupils, rather than helping them to understand how to do it for themselves. Pupils are always told what they are going to learn and the criteria against which they can judge their own success. Sometimes these criteria provide precise targets for pupils, but on other occasions there are too many or they are written using vocabulary that pupils do not understand.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides a good range of extra clubs and activities, such as trips, that widen pupils' horizons. Provision for sport is particularly good, because of the very effective links that have been forged with a local secondary school, which enables pupils to receive specialist coaching. The personal and social curriculum is successful in helping pupils to respect one another's differences and understand how to get on well with other pupils. It also helps them understand how to lead a healthy life, but pupils do not always put this into practice when choosing what to eat. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are generally supported well, particularly the more able pupils in Years 5 and 6. Lower down the school, the curriculum is not always planned in enough detail to allow sufficient guidance for teaching assistants to be able to provide effective support for such pupils, and the curriculum is not being adapted quickly enough cater for the increasing numbers of pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pupils are known well by staff. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good, and pupils say they know who to turn to with any worries they have. Child protection and all other checks to safeguard pupils' health, safety and well-being meet current requirements. A minority of pupils have difficulty controlling their behaviour, but the school uses its good links with the Malachi Trust to provide specific, and effective, guidance for such pupils on how to improve their attitudes. Elsewhere, sanctions for poor behaviour are not applied consistently, so pupils are not always aware of where the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour lie. Recent innovative approaches to improving attendance are starting to prove effective. An arrangement with a local travel agent, for example, provides discounts on holidays taken outside of term-time. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Pupils' progress is accurately tracked, but the resulting information is not used consistently to provide guidance on how pupils can improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

For a number of years the school has not been driven forward by its leadership. This has resulted not only in a lack of improvement but in the school's inability to maintain its previous strengths. Until Easter 2008, few checks had been carried out on the quality of teaching, and these failed to identify to individuals the areas in need of improvement. The school improvement plan consists of a collection of plans drawn up by individual members of staff, with no identification of whole-school priorities that all staff can help to implement. Senior staff, with little or no teaching commitment, carry responsibility for less important aspects of provision, such as organising assemblies, or duties usually carried out by clerical staff. Middle managers, with a full teaching load, are responsible for aspects such as assessment and raising standards in mathematics and literacy. Such inequalities have led to a fall in staff morale, which is only now improving with the arrival of the headteacher. Governors have not carried out their duties effectively. They allowed the school to go for too long without effective leadership. However, the current governing body consists largely of relatively new governors, who are fully aware of the school's weaknesses and committed to improving the standard of education provided.

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

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| 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? | 4 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | No |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage | 3 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 4 |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| 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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 3 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 3 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 3 |
| The attendance of learners | 3 |
| The behaviour of learners | 3 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 3 |
| 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? | 3 |
| 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

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 4 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 4 |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 4 |
| 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 | 4 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 4 |
| 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? | Yes |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

22 May 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of St Mary and St John Junior and Infant School, Erdington, B23 7NB

Thank you for welcoming us into your school and helping with our inspection. We very much enjoyed talking to you and listening to your views.

Even though we found that you are getting a satisfactory education, there are a few things that need improving. You make steady progress in your reading, writing and maths. Your work is not always as neat as it could be, so you are not sure where you have made mistakes in your writing and sums. So, we have asked your teachers to make sure you always try to make your work as neat as possible. You all get on well together and enjoy being active in lessons. However, you need to try to concentrate as much as possible, so that you do not disturb others during lessons. You told us that you liked all the extra clubs and trips, especially the sporting activities. You know how to stay healthy, but do not always chose the healthiest foods to eat. You also told us that you feel safe in school. This is because the teachers know you well, and so you have someone to talk to when you have problems.

When we looked at the lessons, the work you are given and the help that you receive, we found that there was a big mix of things that were good, and things that were not helping you. Changes with staffing has meant the school has not got better as quickly as we would expect, and some of the things that were good when we last checked the school are no longer happening. We have asked the grown-ups who run the school to sort this out by finding out what things are stopping you from learning more quickly and then putting them right. Your new headteacher has made a good start. However, some of the people who should be helping her do not have enough time to do their jobs properly, so we have asked the adults who run the school to make sure that everyone is able to do their jobs and make the school better more quickly.

With all best wishes for your futures.

David Driscoll Lead inspector

22 May 2008

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Lead inspector