

St Margaret Mary RC Junior and Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103453
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	308325
Inspection dates	6–7 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Andrew McDowall

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	215
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christine Glasgow
Headteacher	Michael Aldred
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2003
School address	Perry Common Road Birmingham B23 7AB
Telephone number	01214 646355
Fax number	01213 848558

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school but pupil numbers are falling slowly due to regeneration in the locality. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, as is the percentage of pupils who are learning English as additional language. The proportion of pupils who are from minority ethnic groups is above average and the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well above the national average. At the time of the inspection, the headteacher had been in post for less than a year and the deputy headteacher had been in post for less than a term. There have been considerable improvements to the school building since the last inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory quality of education. It is popular with parents, who appreciate the way in which the school is increasingly involving them in their children's education and the good pastoral care it provides for their children. This is illustrated by parents who said, 'I really like this school – it's like a big strong family' and 'Teachers are very approachable and helpful.' The school is a calm and orderly place where pupils make good gains in their personal development.

When they start at the school, children have levels of skills and abilities that are below those expected nationally, especially in language and communication. By the time they leave the school, standards are broadly average. Pupils make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. There are two reasons why overall achievement and standards are satisfactory and not good. The first is that too few pupils are reaching the higher levels in Key Stage 1. The second is that although pupils make good progress in English and satisfactory progress in mathematics in Key Stage 2, standards and progress in science are well below average, but they are beginning to improve.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Behaviour is consistently good especially during whole school assemblies when the school's strong religious ethos is evident. Pupils have a good understanding of how to eat healthily, but have limited opportunities to exercise in school. They know how to keep themselves safe and demonstrate this in the way they conduct themselves in school. Pupils make a good contribution to the school and local community through links with the Church and by raising funds for a range of charities each year. Their ability to work constructively with others, and their satisfactory progress in literacy and numeracy, mean they are soundly prepared for their next school and later life. Pupils enjoy school, but some are not excited by their lessons. Pupils of all ages are offered few opportunities to make decisions for themselves. Attendance, which was very low last year, has rapidly improved, and is now good.

Teaching is satisfactory and not consistently good because the pace of lessons is sometimes too slow. Pupils are too passive in lessons and have few opportunities to engage in practical investigative activities or show initiative in their learning. This is affecting standards in science and pupils' ability to develop independence in their learning, which is limited. Standards in science are also affected by a lack of confidence in some staff to teach the subject and assessment that does not consistently identify individual pupils' skills and abilities. Pastoral care is good and the school is working to improve the satisfactory academic guidance pupils receive, so that pupils are more involved in checking whether they have reached their targets.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher is involving all the staff more in leading and managing the school and this is raising expectations. Subject coordinators have been given increased responsibility and they are beginning to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects. The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve. It is not good because some of the ways in which the school leadership checks on the quality of provision need to be more sharply focused, in order to provide better feedback to staff on what they need to do to improve. Governance is weak. The governors are poorly informed about the school's performance and have little insight into the day-to-day working of the school. They are not involved in monitoring standards and achievement, and fail to challenge the school to do better. In addition, some statutory requirements are not fully met.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage due to satisfactory teaching. Recent changes in the way they are introduced to letters and sounds are enabling children to make good progress in early reading and writing. The staff work well as a team to ensure children feel safe and enjoy being with their friends in school. Sometimes the children spend too long sitting and listening to the teacher, when they could be more active and talking about their learning. Most of the children's activities are directed by the teacher and they have few opportunities to make choices for themselves. Role-play is used effectively to promote creative development but work in art is limited. The outside area provides restricted opportunities for the children to play and extend their learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in Key Stage 1 by increasing the number of pupils who reach the higher levels, and raise standards in science throughout the school by improving the subject knowledge of staff, providing more opportunities for pupils to investigate for themselves and improving assessment, so the work set stretches pupils of all abilities.
- Improve the pace of lessons and provide more creative and exciting activities for the pupils.
- Involve leaders and managers more in monitoring, evaluating and improving the work of the school, and improve governance.

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 the next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

By the time children move to Year 1 standards are generally in line with national expectations, although still below those expected in early reading and writing. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 1. By the end of Year 2, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are broadly average, although few pupils are reaching the higher levels. Progress in Key Stage 2 varies from subject to subject, but is satisfactory overall. Progress is good in English where pupils reach above average standards. Pupils make satisfactory progress in mathematics and reach average standards. Progress in science has been slow for the past two years and, as a result, standards are well below average. Actions taken by the school to raise standards in science are bringing about improvement. Pupils with learning difficulties and those from minority ethnic backgrounds make satisfactory progress. The small number of pupils with English as an additional language are well supported and make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are very well mannered, friendly and considerate of others. They value each other's achievements and are loyal to their friends. Pupils have a strong moral conscience and understand how to behave because expectations are consistently high. Pupils appreciate the good relationships they have with their teachers and other adults working in the school. They adopt safe practices when moving around the school. They love singing and sing really well. Pupils enjoy the extra responsibilities they are given when acting as helpers, but are offered

few opportunities to make choices for themselves. For example, the timetable identifies when pupils will have moments for reflection in the Prayer Room or the Prayer Garden, when the older ones could decide this for themselves. In addition, there is scope for the school council to be given more opportunities for pupils to express their views and run their council themselves.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers show strong commitment to all pupils and manage behaviour well. Relationships are good and lessons proceed in a calm and orderly fashion. Teaching assistants are well deployed and are an important part of the teaching team. Writing is taught well, and there are good examples of writing skills being developed progressively in other subjects. Day-to-day record keeping is effective in numeracy and literacy, but not yet in science. Too much time is given to teachers talking to the whole class and there are not enough opportunities for pupils to apply their developing skills in practical activities. Consequently, pupils are not always challenged in lessons and learning is slow. Some teachers lack confidence in teaching science, and on occasions, opportunities for fun and enjoyment in lessons are missed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Although the curriculum is satisfactory overall, the range of activities provided for the older pupils is not sufficiently broad or balanced. Work in Year 6 is too narrow and has too great a focus on English and mathematics. Opportunities for exercise in lessons are limited and pupils say they would like more. The curriculum provides pupils with good opportunities to practise writing skills in other subjects, and this makes a good contribution to the above average standards in English. Provision for mathematics and information and communication technology is satisfactory. All Key Stage 2 pupils have French lessons each week and this adds breadth to the curriculum. The school provides a satisfactory range of school clubs and educational visits are used well to bring learning alive for the pupils. Theme days, such as 'World Book Day', when all the pupils dressed as pirates, provide good enrichment and promote enjoyment. The curriculum makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development through activities such as the visit of the 'Life Caravan', where they learn how to make healthy life choices, as they get older.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pastoral care is good. Links with parents and outside agencies are rapidly improving. A recent review of most policies and procedures is having a positive impact on the quality of care the school provides. For example, risk assessments are now in place for school activities, and the monitoring of attendance and punctuality has been very effective. In addition, the school carries out the necessary checks to ensure the adults working in school are suitable to work with children.

The school is working to ensure academic support and guidance is more effective in all lessons and in all subjects. The quality of academic guidance that pupils receive is not yet consistent across the school. In some classes, targets are being used well to promote learning, but this is not always the case. Teachers conscientiously mark the pupils' work, but do not always provide

clear guidance to pupils about what they need to do next to improve. Pupils have few opportunities to assess their own work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has ensured that all staff are increasingly involved in setting challenging targets and this is raising expectations. New systems have been introduced to check on standards, but these need further refinement to enable the school to know about the progress individual pupils are making. Self-evaluation processes are satisfactory and these enable the school to have a secure picture of the quality of teaching and learning. Self-evaluation is not good because some of the monitoring of pupils' work lacks rigour and does not provide the feedback staff need to help them improve. In addition, some of the improvement targets the school sets for itself are too general and it is unclear as to how the leadership team and the school governors will measure the school's success. Financial planning is secure and improvements to the school building have substantially improved the accommodation.

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Annex A

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

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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?	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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	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?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

10 March 2008.

Dear Children

Inspection of St Margaret Mary RC JI School, Birmingham B23 7AB

I would like to start by saying a big thank you to everyone for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school recently to see your work and talk to your teachers. We really enjoyed seeing you all dressed as pirates and hearing how well you all sing. We also liked your new classrooms and the Prayer Garden.

Your school provides you with a satisfactory education. All the staff work hard to look after you all and keep you safe in school. They help you to make good progress in your literacy work and, because everyone is so friendly, your school is a welcoming place for everyone to visit. You all behave well in school and you have really improved your attendance since September. Well done and keep it up. You told us you enjoyed the school clubs and like you, we think the school should provide more PE lessons.

We have asked your school to do these things to help it improve.

- The first is to help more of you reach the higher levels in Key Stage 1 and to help you all to improve your work in science by training the teachers so they plan more lessons where you investigate things for yourselves.
- We have asked your teachers to plan more exciting activities for you to do, and to increase the pace of lessons, so you get more work done in the time available.
- Finally, we have asked your headteacher to continue to involve more teachers in checking how well you are doing in your work. We have also asked the governors to improve the way they oversee the work of the school.

You can help by continuing to come to school every day and remembering your targets whenever you are doing any work. You can also help by checking your work for yourself to see if it is as good as it can be.

Thank you again and good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely

Andy McDowall Lead inspector