

St Mary's RC Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105957
Local Authority	Salford
Inspection number	308994
Inspection date	11 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Sarah Drake

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	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	251
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr Brian Murphy
Headteacher	Mrs M Dolan
Date of previous school inspection	7 July 2003
School address	Milner Street Swinton Manchester Lancashire M27 4AS
Telephone number	0161 7944028
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the particular strengths in leadership and management that underpin the school's success; standards and achievement in writing; quality and standards in the Foundation Stage; how the curriculum enhances the quality of pupils' learning. Evidence was gathered from: national published assessment data; the school's self-evaluation, assessment records, policies and minutes; observation of the school at work, including lessons; discussions with governors, members of staff and pupils; the questionnaires returned by parents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This school is slightly larger than average. Due to its denominational nature, it takes pupils from a relatively wide area. Pupils come from mixed social and economic backgrounds. The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage and few speak English as an additional language. The proportions of pupils that are eligible to receive a free school meal or that have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are below average. The school operates a full-time Nursery. It holds the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school where pupils are encouraged to believe that they can do anything and are given the skills that will help them to achieve their ambitions. This is due to high quality leadership that brings out the best in both staff and pupils and ensures that the school does not rest on its laurels. A wide range of partnerships with others greatly enhances the pupils' well-being and all-round education. Parents and parishioners regularly volunteer their help in school. Ready access to outside support services means that those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities swiftly have the extra help they need, as identified by staff observations and careful tracking of their progress. Links with other schools increase pupils' understanding of other cultures and ensure a smooth move to secondary school. Parents are delighted by their children's happiness at school, making comments such as, 'I would have no hesitation in recommending this school to anyone who cares for their child's future!'

Children's overall skills on entry to the Nursery are typical for their age, although they are below expectations in reading, writing and some elements of mathematical knowledge. For the past four years, standards at the end of Key Stage 1 have been rising, with a big improvement in 2007 to well above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Over a five year period, standards at the end of Year 6 have been consistently high, with sustained, exceptional performance in mathematics. In 2007, around two-thirds of pupils gained the higher Level 5 in reading, mathematics and science, which is well above average. Pupils of all abilities and those for whom English is an additional language all achieved exceptionally well, placing the school among the top 5% in the country for the second year running. Currently, pupils' work shows similarly high standards. There is evidence of very good progress in writing, resulting from the successful implementation of strategies to improve this aspect of pupils' work.

Alongside high quality teaching and excellent support for individual pupils, the richness of the curriculum underpins their academic success and outstanding personal development. Displays throughout the school, especially those relating to the arts and sports, encourage pupils to think about their own and others' work and lives and to celebrate each others' achievements. Pupils regularly win competitions. Recently, they spent the financial prize won for creating a poster promoting environmental awareness by choosing books for the school library. All Year 4 pupils learn to play a stringed instrument and will be performing at the local theatre. From the Nursery to Year 5, pupils learn Italian from a native speaker, whilst Year 6 pupils are taught French or German by a teacher from the secondary school to which most transfer. Holiday homework and competitions help to maintain high standards in literacy and numeracy. Many experiences, visits and visitors, ranging from a six-week water sports course, to a choreographer and a trading standards officer, open pupils' eyes to opportunities and help them prepare to make the most of their future lives. Staff fully exploit all such experiences when encouraging pupils to develop, for instance, their health awareness, writing or information and communication technology skills.

Pupils explain their great enjoyment of school by saying that it is 'friendly, fun and exciting because staff are very helpful and provide lots of interesting activities for us to do.' They, too, are keen to be helpful, whether as 'Guardian Angels' for younger pupils or when organising fund-raising events such as a recent talent show. School council members have sourced playtime resources using the Internet. In addition, their suggestions have led to the establishment of a highly successful homework club for older pupils. Pupils are very supportive of each other and they politely welcome visitors. Their excellent behaviour means that playtimes are very safe

and happy and, as parents comment, 'a certain calmness' pervades the school. It also means that lessons run smoothly. Pupils pay good attention to their teachers and try hard with their work. Lessons move at a good pace and the teaching often challenges pupils' thinking as, for example, in a Year 2 debate about how to reduce traffic jams or a Year 3 lesson where pupils evaluated the quality of each others' letter-writing skills. Pupils are very clear about what targets they are aiming for in their work.

The school knows itself very well and as a result, has an excellent capacity to improve further. Outstanding leadership and management at all levels, including the governors, ensure that staff work together extremely well as a team, with a very clear sense of direction and determination to improve the school's performance. Guided by the exceptional headteacher, leaders are astute in prioritising the most important areas to improve and are very effective in implementing strategies to bring about that improvement. These include careful checks on the quality of teaching and of pupils' work and progress which lead to prompt action to eliminate any areas of relative weakness, for example, in pupils' mental calculation skills. Work is very well adapted to individuals' interests and needs, whether they are particularly able or have difficulties with some areas of their learning. Procedures are in place to ensure child protection, and health and safety.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage so that the great majority join Year 1 with the expected skills or above in all areas of their learning. Their personal development is particularly strong and they make good strides in their reading, writing and mathematical skills. Many parents comment very positively about the warm, welcoming atmosphere in the Nursery that helps their children settle quickly into routines and begin to enjoy school. The Nursery and Reception classrooms both have free access to the outdoors and provide well-resourced, flexible areas in which children learn through investigation and experimentation. For example, Reception children were having great fun sharing resources outside and explained patiently that they were wearing wellingtons 'because we're pirates, of course!' They speak confidently with adults. Staff are skilled at building on children's interests and extending their thinking. They track children's progress through incidental observations as well as more formal assessments. However, the information gained from such observations is not always used to full effect when planning sessions, nor is what children are expected to learn from the activities always made clear. This means that children in the Foundation Stage do not make the exceptional progress seen elsewhere in the school. Staff in the two classes work well together and the new leader is establishing good systems to strengthen provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that in the Foundation Stage, planning makes good use of the information gained from checking on the progress children make and helps to clarify the purpose of activities.

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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?	1
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

(Thank you for the very warm welcome that you gave me when I visited your school recently. You told me that yours is a friendly, exciting school where everyone is helpful, and I agree. I also agree with many of your parents and with school staff who say that the school is outstanding.

One of the main reasons for this is that the school helps you to make very good progress in your work and you do really well by the end of Year 6. You also grow into confident, thoughtful young people who are interested in what life has to offer and who want to help others. You have very good relationships with each other and with staff and your behaviour is excellent. You enjoy your lessons because teachers organise interesting things for you to do and are very good at helping you to think hard about your work. You pay good attention to your 'Incredible Writer' and 'The Numerator' targets. Your teachers help you to use your skills in lots of subjects and make sure that, for instance, you pay as much attention to your punctuation when writing about history or science as you do in English.

You are very lucky to be offered so many different, exciting experiences, such as water sports and learning to speak Italian and also to have staff who look after you so well and make you feel special. Children in the Foundation Stage also have a really good time but I have suggested that when the teachers there plan their work, they make sure it is well suited to all the children's needs and that everyone is clear about what the children should learn.

Your headteacher, senior teachers and the governors run the school extremely well and are always trying to make it better. I am sure that you will help them to do this too by continuing to work hard and enjoy your learning.