

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107546
Local Authority	Calderdale
Inspection number	309429
Inspection dates	7–8 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Robert Robinson

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	324
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr David Smith
Headteacher	Mr Paul Copley
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2003
School address	Swires Road Halifax West Yorkshire HX1 2ER
Telephone number	01422 362365
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large Catholic primary school which serves a diverse community living in the Parishes of St Mary & St Alban, and St Columba. Most pupils are of white ethnic backgrounds with an increasing proportion of pupils of Eastern European and Asian backgrounds. A higher than average proportion of pupils is learning English as an additional language. A below average proportion is identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is an Investor in People. It has gained the Activemark, Artsmark (Gold) and Healthy Schools awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Mary's Catholic Primary School provides an outstanding education for its pupils. It serves its diverse community very well. The superb care, guidance and support and the personal development of pupils are key features of the school's success. Pupils achieve well because of the good quality of teaching and a very well thought out curriculum which meets the needs of all its pupils. The first rate leadership of the headteacher is complemented by very effective support from senior leaders and governors. Parents enthuse about the school. The following comments are typical of their feelings: 'St Mary's inspires children to learn.' and 'Staff take great care for every pupil's physical and emotional development.'

Pupils enter Year 1 with a wide range of attainment, particularly in basic skills in literacy and numeracy. The good start they have in the Foundation Stage (Reception) results in pupils being keen to learn. Throughout the rest of the school pupils build well on their previous learning and by the time they leave the school their standards are above average. This good rate of progress is because lessons are planned well and matched to pupils' capabilities. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively to help pupils. The support for the increasing proportion of pupils learning English as an additional language is particularly effective. For example, the employment of Polish speaking staff is assisting Eastern European pupils to settle extremely well and to make good progress. Members of staff have high expectations of work and behaviour and lessons proceed at a good pace. The marking of work is satisfactory though not consistent. In some age groups the marking clearly states how well pupils have done and how they can improve. However, in others the marking simply praises and does not provide helpful comments as to what could have been improved. It is rarely linked to pupils' individual targets for improvement.

Pupils enjoy school and attendance rates are consistently high. Behaviour is exemplary. Pupils have a very good understanding of how to keep healthy through opportunities in lessons and a broad range of out-of-school sporting activities. They are encouraged to eat sensibly and weekly awards are given to celebrate those having healthy lunches. Strong links with the local parishes provide pupils with many opportunities to assist others in the community as well as to consider others through fund-raising for worthy causes. Bullying and racial incidents are very rare because pupils care for one another exceptionally well. They know that staff will always listen to their concerns.

The strengths in the leadership and management of the school and the strong caring atmosphere provide it with exceptionally good capacity to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The quality of provision in the Foundation Stage (Reception) is good. Children enter the Reception class with a wide range of previous experiences and skill levels. Overall, their skills on entry are below that normally expected of children of this age. Good induction procedures help children to be ready for school. As a result they settle well and make good progress overall, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development. Support is particularly good for children learning English as an additional language, many of whom have very limited English and previous schooling. The teaching is good and the children enjoy the wide range of indoor

activities and make good progress. Too few opportunities are planned for children to extend their education outdoors in all the areas of learning.

By the time children leave Reception, standards are above expected levels in personal, social and emotional development, and below in mathematical development and in communication language and literacy. In other areas of learning standards are about at expected levels. Parents are very appreciative of their children's start to schooling. The following comment encapsulated their views, 'My child has settled well - enjoys lessons and takes a pride in the school.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of marking and focus it more closely on pupils' individual targets for improvement.
- Increase opportunities for outdoor education in all areas of learning in the Foundation Stage.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

For many years standards have been above average. In the 2007 national tests at the end of Year 6 standards were above average overall. Standards in mathematics and science were the highest since the previous inspection, reflecting the success of recent leadership initiatives. Standards in English were broadly average. Reading results were much higher than those in writing. However, teachers' assessments for writing shows that higher attaining pupils did not do as well as expected in the national tests. The present group of pupils in Year 6 are on course to reach above average standards with no significant differences between subjects. Pupils' achievement from entering the school is good. All groups of pupils, including those learning English as an additional language and those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make similar progress relative to their prior attainment. Targets set are demanding. In 2007, targets for pupils at the end of Year 6 were exceeded in mathematics though not quite met in English because of lower than expected pupils' performance in writing.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

A major factor in the success of the school is the very strong and effective emphasis on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is outstanding. As reported by a parent, 'The whole school is a very friendly place. It is like an extension of your family. All pupils greet each other with a smile.' Every child is valued as an individual so relationships are excellent as are pupils' attitudes to learning and behaviour. Pupils show high levels of enjoyment in learning and key life skills are established very well. Older pupils show high levels of care for younger pupils. They raise money for numerous charities, including supporting Catholic aid projects in other countries. Pupils also raise money for individuals and national charities. For example, they bought a wheelchair for a past pupil to help him to take part in competitive sports. The gaining of Activemark and Healthy School award demonstrates the pupils' very good awareness of ways to keep fit and healthy.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good and this is reflected in the good progress pupils make at the school. In lessons, the planning has a clear focus on what is to be learnt. It is carefully matched to individuals' needs. Very good management of pupils results in high levels of interest in learning. Teaching assistants provide valuable help to those learning English as an additional language so they can quickly gain English language skills and take a full part in lessons. Lower attaining pupils are given effective help to assist them to work towards catching up with other pupils. Occasionally, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to work independently or in small groups. The marking of pupils' work is variable from class to class. Some children are unsure of their next steps of learning. Progress towards individual pupils' targets is rarely commented upon in marking.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The all round development of the child is given paramount importance within the curriculum. Parents applaud this approach and state that their children thrive both academically as well as socially at St Mary's. Good provision in the basic skills leads to pupils making good progress. Information and communication technology is used extremely well to support learning in other subjects. Learning is brought to life through initiatives, such as those linked to the work of a national charity for senior citizens. Pupils visited a museum and examined old toys and artefacts, interviewed senior citizens and wrote letters of appreciation to these adults for the help they had given them to aid their studies. Links with local businesses are exploited to give pupils opportunities to read to adults. A strong approach to personal, social, health and citizenship education helps pupils to develop exceptionally good attitudes to learning and behaviour. The school has made good strides towards introducing the teaching of Spanish to all pupils. Extra-curricular activities are wide-ranging, from orienteering to table tennis, and they are thoroughly enjoyed by pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

St Mary's takes great care of all its pupils' well-being. Child safeguarding procedures are in place. Health and safety and risk assessments promote a safe environment. Parents and pupils agree that children are looked after very well. Relationships with parents and outside agencies are very strongly established to help all groups of pupils to make good progress. Support for those learning English as an additional language are very effective and enable them to settle extremely well into school life. The systems to ensure good attendance are very effective and have resulted in high attendance rates over time. Rigorous monitoring of pupils' progress and the senior managers' knowledge of the pupils and many of their families helps the school to meet the needs of all, both academically and pastorally.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Parents are very appreciative of the strong and caring leadership of the headteacher, supported by an able deputy headteacher. A parent spoke for many with the words, 'The headteacher leads his team very well and has created a quality caring environment where the children want to learn and do well. One could not wish for a better school.' The vision of the school, linked to its emphasis on developing each child as an individual within a Christian environment is shared by all. Professional development of staff is actively promoted. A senior management team, comprising of the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior leaders, is established with delegated responsibilities for different aspects of the school's work. They fulfil their roles well to ensure the smooth running and further development of the school. The monitoring of teaching and learning is thorough and has enabled the maintenance of good teaching and learning despite changes of teachers, including senior staff, and the changing ethnic mix of pupils. The school is very aware of what it needs to do to improve. It is not complacent. For example, it has worked to improve standards successfully in mathematics and science. It is also developing improved systems to monitor pupils' progress in order to identify efficiently any underachievement so speedy help can be provided for individuals and groups of pupils. Governors play their part extremely well in maintaining the continued success of the school and holding the leadership rigorously to account.

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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?	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?	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	1
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?	2
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	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Halifax, HX1 2ER

Thank you for welcoming the inspection team to your school. We enjoyed the days we spent with you. Your school provides you with an outstanding education because it is led and managed extremely well. The care provided by the school and your personal development are outstanding.

We were impressed by your excellent behaviour and interest in lessons. At all times you were polite and courteous. We were pleased that you all get on so well together and that your attendance is really good. To improve the school further we have asked the school to make sure children in the Foundation Stage (Reception) have more opportunities to learn outdoors. Your achievement during the time you are at the school is good. The standard of your work by the end of Year 6 is above average. To raise standards even further we have asked your teachers to make sure you have a better understanding of how to improve your work through consistent marking which is linked to your targets for improvement.

We appreciated talking to you about your work and watching you learn. We trust that you will keep doing your best and working with the headteacher and other staff to help them to continue to improve the school. We wish you well for the future.