

St Mary Roman Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117560
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312653
Inspection date	12 June 2008
Reporting inspector	John Messer

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	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Jacek Obuchowicz
Headteacher	Mr Robert Dunbar
Date of previous school inspection	27 June 2005
School address	Melbourn Road Royston Hertfordshire SG8 7DB
Telephone number	01763242875
Fax number	01763248825

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the quality of provision in the Foundation Stage, pupils' progress in literacy and numeracy and the standards that pupils attain. Evidence was gathered from classroom visits, scrutiny of pupils' work, parents' questionnaires, discussions with staff, pupils and governors and examination of school documentation, including assessment data and the school's self-evaluation. 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 form, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This primary school is smaller than average. It has eight classes including a part-time Nursery class. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and a third are from minority ethnic families. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is in line with the national average, although several are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below average. Children's attainment on entry to the school is slightly above national expectations. The school has the Activemark award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school where pupils achieve well and attain exceptionally high standards. They make good progress in the Foundation Stage and by the time they enter Year 1, standards are above national expectations. They continue to make good progress in Key Stage 1 and, by Year 2, standards are well above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Progress in Key Stage 2 is good but uneven. It is much faster in Years 5 and 6 than in Years 3 and 4. By Year 6, standards are exceptionally high in English, mathematics and science. Pupils who find learning difficult are well supported and make good progress. Those who speak little English when they arrive quickly acquire language skills and are soon making as much progress as all the rest.

Teaching and learning are good and teachers are particularly good at motivating children. In all classes, pupils are bubbling with enthusiasm for learning. They love books and read a wide range of fiction. They are good at using non-fiction texts for research. They enjoy writing powerful passages by injecting their sentences with colourful adjectives and vigorous adverbs. They particularly enjoy the practical aspects of projects, such as making Tudor houses and using their knowledge of circuits to install lighting. Basic skills, such as learning tables and spelling rules, are taught systematically. Pupils enjoy working against the clock to see if they can, for example, complete a tables grid in three minutes. This helps to promote good pace in learning. However, there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. For example, some planning lacks precision and targets are not always set according to an agreed whole-school system. This is partly because the school has not developed an agreed teaching and learning policy that gives teachers clear guidance on exactly what is required to sustain high quality teaching. The good curriculum is enriched through a good range of educational visits, including residential visits. The school welcomes visitors to share their knowledge with pupils, and special events, such as Cultural Week, broaden pupils' experiences.

Pupils' personal development is good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Links with other schools, such as the pen pals initiative developed with a Jewish school in New York, gives them a very good insight into other cultures. Pupils are self-assured and become confident learners. They thoroughly enjoy school and attendance is good. They are courteous, well behaved and sensitive to the needs of others. They have enjoyed planning the prayer garden, which is developing as lovely area for quiet reflection. The school works in close partnership with others to promote pupils' well-being and enhance learning. Networking with other local schools is exceptionally well developed so that expertise is shared and schools can be mutually supportive. Pupils' understanding of how to stay safe, look after themselves and care for others is excellent. There is scope for encouraging pupils to become more independent and to use their initiative rather than being too dependent upon adults for guidance. Pupils make an excellent contribution to the wider community, as demonstrated by their wholehearted support of charitable fund raising events. The older pupils have good opportunities to share their work with their learning partners, who advise on how they might improve. This is proving a powerful force for learning. Pupils develop a good range of skills that prepares them well for the next stage of their education. Care, guidance and support are good. Safeguarding procedures meet requirements. Pastoral care and pupils' safety is a strong feature of the school. Pupils report that they would have no hesitation in sharing any worries with their teachers, classroom assistants or midday supervisors. Pupils know their targets and in some classes, the target setting process is particularly effective in accelerating progress by showing pupils how to reach the next stages in their learning.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has only been in post for two months and there is a sense of energy about the school. Teamwork is strongly encouraged and this is a key feature of the school's success. The site manager, for example, works closely with teachers in preparing excellent video resources to support teaching. Teaching assistants offer a good range of skills and are especially good at supporting those who find learning difficult. Governors and parents help in classrooms. Parents support pupils' learning at home particularly well. The overwhelming majority of parents are very pleased with the education provided for their children and one comment summed up the views of many, 'This is a very good school, academically, socially and spiritually'. A small minority have concerns about inconsistencies in the quality of teaching in Key Stage 2, but the school is well aware of this and is implementing plans to promote greater consistency. The governing body is becoming increasingly involved in monitoring the school's performance. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and pinpoints the most important priorities for improvement. The school's good track record of success demonstrates that it has good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children are warmly welcomed into the Nursery. The teacher and the nursery nurse make home visits before children start school and this helps children to settle in happily. It also establishes a lasting partnership in learning between home and school. The school's mission statement urges the school to 'Be a real family' and the exceptionally good social and personal development in the Foundation Stage puts this into practice. From day one there is a strong emphasis on teaching children the links between letters and the sounds they make. This helps children to get off to a flying start in developing early reading and writing skills. The Foundation Stage leader is bursting with ideas to further develop the curriculum. The outside area is not well developed as a learning resource but plans are in hand to develop it further. There are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and there is not enough emphasis on providing visual stimulus to support early learning. Nevertheless, children skip happily into school each morning and thoroughly enjoy their early learning experiences.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop an agreed teaching and learning policy that promotes consistently high quality teaching across the school.
- Develop the quality of teaching in the Foundation Stage to include more visual stimuli and develop the outside area so that it promotes a challenging and exciting learning environment.

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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?	2
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	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	2

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?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

13 June 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Royston, SG8 7DB

I thoroughly enjoyed the short time I spent with you. Thank you for being so friendly and helpful. You certainly appreciate how good your school is. When talking to a group of you one said, 'If I were to grade this school I'd give it ten out of ten.' You told me that you thought that the school was good because teachers make lessons interesting and all the staff are anxious to help you. I think that you are right but I also think that you and your parents make a strong contribution to the school's effectiveness. You are eager to succeed and your parents are keen to help you. One of the key strengths of the school is the sense of teamwork that has been established. As part of your mission statement says, 'Be a real family, warm hearted in your care for one another'. You certainly practise what St Paul preached. New pupils told me that you helped them to become part of the family very quickly indeed.

I think that you get a good start to your education. Your behaviour is good and you like learning new things. You work willingly but also enjoy having fun. Those of you who find it rather difficult to learn new things get lots of help and often do really well. Those who speak languages other than English at home get good support and are soon making as much progress as the rest of you. You achieve well and attain high standards in English, mathematics and science. You are good at sport and keep yourselves fit by having plenty of exercise. You know how to stay safe and look after yourselves and others. All the staff are keen to carry on improving your school and to make your lessons even more exciting.

I think that there are two main things that would help your school. I think that provision in the Foundation Stage could be improved, especially the outside learning area. I also think that the time is ripe for your headteacher to sort out teaching and learning policies so that everybody knows exactly they are expected to do. I know that you want to do your best and I am sure that if you continue to work hard the school will go from strength to strength.

I wish you every success in the future.

John Messer

Lead inspector