

# St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Bicester

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	123207
<b>Local Authority</b>	Oxfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	314540
<b>Inspection dates</b>	27–28 November 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Steven Hill

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	260
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Ian Inshaw
<b>Headteacher</b>	Miss Patricia Pickering
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6 May 2003
<b>School address</b>	Queen's Avenue Oxfordshire OX26 2NX
<b>Telephone number</b>	01869 252035
<b>Fax number</b>	01869 252035

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This primary school is slightly larger than average, resulting in a number of mixed-age classes through the school. Pupils come from a wide area across the town, with a few who live in the surrounding villages. Their social and economic circumstances cover a wide range, but are better than average overall. About three quarters of pupils are of White British origin, with the rest from a wide range of minority ethnic heritages. An increasing number of pupils have a home language other than English, currently about 10%, which is slightly more than in most schools. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average. There has been considerable disruption to staffing in the last two years, through both illness and maternity leave. A new headteacher and deputy took up post in September 2006.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

St Mary's is a happy, thriving community where pupils enjoy learning. They have good relationships with each other and with adults, and are friendly and polite to visitors. They behave well, work hard in lessons and take a pride in their achievements. They develop very good collaborative skills that greatly help their learning, for example, when they share ideas in science. They have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles, and try to put this into practice.

Achievement is good and standards are above average. Children get off to a good start in the Reception class, and build on this well in Key Stage 1. Standards at the end of Year 2 are consistently above average, although writing is not as good as reading. Pupils are now making good progress in Key Stage 2. However, assessment records show that, up to 2006, many pupils of this age were making insufficient progress given their starting points. The achievement of pupils who left at the end of Year 6 was inadequate, and was particularly low in mathematics. Under clear guidance from the new headteacher, staff worked together very effectively to address this issue. As a result, pupils who left Year 6 in 2007 made up a lot of lost ground and made good progress. Progress also improved considerably in other age groups. However, results in mathematics still lag behind those in English and science, and writing results are not as strong as in reading.

Teaching is good. Teachers have high expectations of work and behaviour, which pupils try hard to meet. Teachers explain ideas well, often making good use of interactive whiteboards to clarify things and to gain pupils' interest. A major factor in the improved achievement last year was the introduction of a better system to assess pupils' progress, to enable teachers to match work more accurately to the needs of individuals. This is generally done well, although at times tasks need to be more challenging for some pupils. An increased number of teaching assistants, who provide effective help in lessons, also boosts pupils' progress. A major push has been to involve pupils more in their own learning, by giving them clear criteria for success, and pointing out in marking how they can improve. These are emerging strengths of the school, although they are not yet consistent between classes and subjects.

There is a good curriculum, with an ever-expanding range of enrichment activities. This supports pupils' good achievement as well as their enthusiasm for learning. The pastoral care for pupils is strong, so they feel safe and happy in school. Strong links with parents and with the Parish support this. The academic support and guidance for pupils is improving rapidly, and helped raise achievement last year.

The school is led and managed well. The headteacher and her deputy provide strong educational direction and support to colleagues. Improved self-evaluation gives a clearer picture of strengths and weaknesses, and good teamwork from staff is addressing issues well. This means the school is well placed to continue improving. The monitoring of lessons is accurate and provides clear feedback to teachers to help them improve their practice, although subject leaders are not yet fully involved in this. The tracking of pupils' performance is improving, but systems are somewhat unwieldy, and do not give subject leaders and senior managers a clear enough overview of provision.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 2

On entry to school, most children attain levels of knowledge and skills that are in line with expectations for their age, and some do better. They make good progress in the Reception class so attainment is above the levels expected by the time children start Year 1. This is due to good teaching and a strong focus on preparing for the next stage of learning, especially in literacy. Interesting tasks encourage children to engage and select their own activities, whilst the carefully focused teaching of groups develops their skills well. Staff identify children's individual needs early, and their progress is monitored carefully. Children's personal development is particularly good. They settle happily into school, and quickly become familiar with class routines. They develop good self-confidence, happily using the school hall and the computer suite for aspects of their learning. Good management ensures that strong links are made with parents to keep them informed about their children's education. There is a good outside learning area, but the school has rightly identified the need to provide cover, so that it can still be used in bad weather.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Make teaching more consistent to raise achievement, particularly in writing across the school, and in mathematics at Key Stage 2.
- Improve the records of pupils' progress so that they provide a clearer overview for managers, to inform their decision-making.
- Involve subject leaders more in the monitoring of provision.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Achievement has improved over the last year and is now good throughout the school. Weaknesses in pupils' progress at Key Stage 2 have largely been eliminated. Standards are above average at each key stage. Better provision to support pupils who struggle with their work has helped raise standards. Pupils for whom English is an additional language are given extra help so they learn English quickly and make the same good rate of progress as their classmates. Pupils are now achieving well, regardless of gender, ability or ethnic origin.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Pupils are articulate, behave well and have positive attitudes. They talk about their school with great pride. Their good attendance demonstrates their enjoyment of school. Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good including pupils' spiritual development. Christian values are central to the school's work and exemplified by a parent who praised the schools '...strong moral foundation and caring ethos'. Pupils' strong social skills and their good understanding of other cultures derive from the good curriculum for personal, social and health education.

Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles, eating fruit at break time and participating enthusiastically in a wide range of sports and other physical activities. They know how to keep safe, explaining why they should not speak to strangers, for example. Pupils contribute well to the community, including through the school council, the buddy system, and raising money for charity. Pupils

are confident that they have their say in the life of the school. Their good standards and social skills prepare them well for their future lives, in school and beyond.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Teachers manage classes well. Good relationships, and clearly established routines and expectations, ensure that lessons are orderly and productive. Pupils like their teachers and are keen to please them by working hard and behaving well. Pupils in Year 2 confirmed that they enjoy learning because teachers make lessons '...fun and exciting.' There are some inconsistencies in teaching, for example in how well work is matched to different pupils' needs, and in how clearly pupils are given criteria for success. There are some excellent opportunities provided for pupils to discuss their work together, clarifying their ideas and improving their teamwork and their speaking and listening skills, although occasionally opportunities are missed to do this.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

Staff are developing a 'creative curriculum' to ensure that pupils are fully involved and engaged in their learning. Pupils are consulted about what they would like to explore, and their ideas are incorporated in teachers' planning. An outline of each unit of work is sent to parents in order that they too, can contribute to their children's learning. For example, parents were involved in 'The French Cafand;eacute;' unit of work by cooking French food with the pupils. A wide range of extra-curricular activities and visitors to school, including authors and journalists, enhance pupils' personal development and enjoyment well.

Music provision has much improved since the last inspection. Music is taught as part of the creative curriculum so that pupils learn music in a meaningful context. Pupils have the chance to play a wide range of musical instruments, participate in music festivals and sing in the school choir. Information and communication technology (ICT) skills are taught well in other subjects. Older pupils benefit from regular opportunities to learn French.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 2

Many parents rightly praise the good standard of pastoral care provided. Procedures to safeguard learners are in place and effective. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities receive good support and do well. There are good links with other agencies, such as the autism service and the behaviour support team, to ensure that individuals' needs are met. Good induction procedures help pupils who speak English as an additional language, including those who arrive other than in Reception, to settle in quickly and take a full part in school life. Pupils say that 'Bullying does not happen here and if it did it would be dealt with very seriously.' They are also very clear that if they had any problems they would turn to an adult for help.

Academic support for pupils has improved considerably, and is now generally good. Work is usually matched well to individuals' needs. Some pupils are clear about their individual targets and how to achieve them, and the best examples of teachers' marking show pupils how to improve. However, there are inconsistencies in this between classes and subjects.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

Strong leadership from the headteacher and senior management, and good teamwork from staff, have maintained high standards in pupils' personal development, and have raised achievement significantly in the last year. Improved systems to monitor provision in classrooms mean that teachers receive clear feedback on their work, so they can build on strengths and address any weaknesses. This has had a significant effect on how assessment is used, and on raising standards. Performance management procedures, which had lapsed, now meet statutory requirements and targets are linked to the school's priorities.

The school tracks pupils' individual progress carefully, and new systems have given staff a better basis for matching their teaching to individuals' needs. However, the systems do not provide a clear, school-wide view of how different groups and classes are doing. Subject leaders provide helpful guidance to colleagues. They have improved the monitoring of standards in their subjects, through better assessment systems. However, they are not yet fully involved in checking up how things are going in the classroom. Plans are in hand to implement this.

Governors have a secure understanding of the school, have provided good support in driving recent changes, and are able to act as a 'critical friend' by holding the school to account for its performance when appropriate.

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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?	2
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 <sup>1</sup> 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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
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	2
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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	2
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**

6 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Bicester, Oxfordshire, OX26 2NX

Thank you all for your very warm welcome when we visited your school. You told us that you think St Mary's is a good school, and we agree. These are the most important things we found out.

You are all making good progress because your teachers are good at helping you learn. You get to good standards, although you are not quite as good at writing as at reading, and the older pupils are not as good at numeracy as they are in other subjects. We have asked your teachers to help you get even better in these subjects. You get lots of exciting things to do, and we could see how much you enjoyed all the special events in book week.

Your behaviour is good, you work hard and you all get on well together, and with the adults. We thought you were very friendly, polite and helpful. You help make the school a happy place, especially through your work with the school council and by being buddies to younger children.

The staff try to keep a very careful eye on how everyone is getting on, and to give people extra help if they need it. We think that the systems for keeping this information are not very easy to use, and we have asked the staff to improve them, so they can help you even more.

The headteacher, the other staff and governors are good at organising the school, and they made a lot of improvements last year. They are keen to make things even better this year. To do this, we have suggested that the teachers spend more time in each other's lessons, so they can share their best ideas and help you learn even more. You can help by carrying on working hard, behaving well and being so helpful to each other. We hope that you carry on enjoying school.

Best wishes,

Steven Hill

Lead Inspector