

St Marys Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111335
Local Authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	325354
Inspection dates	15–16 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Kevin Johnson

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	124
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter McNulty
Headteacher	Miss Helen Pile
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Belgrave Avenue Congleton Cheshire CW12 1HT
Telephone number	01260 274690
Fax number	01260 297366

Age group	5–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average sized school. Most pupils are White British. A very small number of pupils are at an early stage of learning to speak English. Few pupils are eligible for free school meals. A small minority have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage begins in Reception. Pre-school and after-school care on site are inspected and reported separately. Among the school's achievements are the Healthy Schools and Activemark awards as well as the Eco Schools Green Flag for pupils' contribution to environmental work.

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 good school with outstanding features. As a result of good leadership, pupils are exceptionally well cared for, their personal development is excellent and they achieve well.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Relationships are excellent and pupils are very mindful of others' needs. Pupils are polite and well mannered and show exemplary behaviour in and around the school. Incidents of bullying and racism, pupils say, are rare. Their well above average attendance is a reflection of their enjoyment of school. Pupils are fully aware of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. They are very active in the playground and equally enthusiastic about sports after school. Their flourishing vegetable plots (one for each class) are witness to their appreciation of a healthy diet. Important life skills are developed through the wide range of responsibilities which pupils willingly accept, and which help the school to run smoothly and safely. For example, the school council gives all pupils a voice in school affairs and eco-council members conscientiously oversee the development of the school's excellent outdoor learning environment. Enterprising projects, such as organising a shoe-polishing 'business' through which pupils raise funds for charities develop financial and communication skills extremely well. By the time pupils leave the school they are well prepared to face their future challenges.

Standards are above average and pupils achieve well. Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 rose significantly in 2008 and have been maintained in the current year. There was a dip to average standards at Key Stage 2 in 2008. Progress for that cohort faltered due to a period of unsettled teaching. However, standards have rallied during the current year and there has been commendable improvement, especially in mathematics. This is due to teachers' rigorous, frequent and effective evaluation of each pupil's step-by-step progress in that subject. This practice, which enables teachers to respond rapidly when an individual's learning speeds up or slows down, does not yet extend to all subjects. Progress is good throughout the school. A small number of parents expressed concerns about their children's rate of progress but investigation found no evidence from assessment records or pupils' assessed work to uphold those views. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well supported and their progress is often rapid. Pupils for whom English is an additional language benefit well from personalised provision. They settle quickly, grow in confidence and achieve well. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good and accounts for pupils' good achievement. Lessons are planned well and pupils' varying abilities are provided for effectively through different tasks or additional support within the classroom or in groups. Teachers' imaginative use of electronic whiteboards and music, for example, adds interest and increases pupils' enjoyment of lessons. The school has taken pupils' views on board in planning a rich and varied curriculum. There are good opportunities for pupils to work creatively in art and music as well as to practise skills more purposefully across a range of subjects.

The headteacher's impact on school improvement has been immense. In a relatively short time, the overall quality of teaching and learning has been raised, highly effective systems for checking pupils' progress as they move up through the school have been installed, and the curriculum has been improved. In addition, there has been remarkable improvement in provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The impact of all this work is seen in improved standards. The school's expectations have been raised and challenging targets are set accordingly. Senior staff and subject leaders fulfil crucial roles in monitoring the school's work and contribute well to its extremely accurate and effective self-evaluation. Equality of opportunity is central to the

school's ethos and care is taken to ensure that every child's needs are met. Links with the local community and with local schools are strong. The school is aware of the need to establish links with schools in the United Kingdom and overseas, to improve pupils' knowledge and understanding about life in different communities. Governors provide good support for the school. They actively check on the school's progress and challenge its outcomes in terms of pupils' learning. Finances are managed well to ensure good value for money. Given the strengths in leadership and the rate of recent improvement, there is good capacity for the school to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage get off to an excellent start. Provision for their learning and development is outstanding and is expertly managed. As a result, they make extremely rapid progress. Children's skills are broadly typical for their age when they enter Reception though early reading, writing and mathematical development is sometimes lower than expected. Nevertheless, by the time they transfer to Year 1, almost all are working securely within early learning goals in all areas of learning and a significant minority exceed those levels. Activities are very well planned. They take account of things which the children themselves want to learn. For example, a topic about farm animals, which included the children being 'visited' by some ducks, was inspired by a child's wish to find out more about horses. Excellent use is made of the outside classroom. Activities are geared up to encourage children's independence and curiosity for learning. This contributes greatly to their outstanding personal, social and emotional development. Teachers are very skilled at encouraging language skills by engaging with the children in role-play. Activities are punctuated by conversation which encourages children's imagination and challenges them to explain what they have learned. Provision for children's welfare is outstanding. There is exceptional care for the most vulnerable children. All staff members are watchful over their particular groups and all help to evaluate progress and plan next steps. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive. They share in their children's education by contributing to their assessment records.

What the school should do to improve further

- Embed and extend the good practice in assessing pupils' progress in mathematics so that a similar impact is seen in all subjects.
- Extend links with contrasting schools in the United Kingdom and abroad.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils begin Year 1 with broadly expected skills for their age. They achieve well as they move through the school and attain above average standards by the end of Year 6. Progress has picked up throughout the school and is currently good. Assessments show that most pupils are on track to achieve, and a significant number to exceed, their end of year targets in reading, writing and mathematics. Particularly noteworthy is the rapid improvement in Year 1 pupils' calculation skills after it was identified as an area to improve. There is also commendable progress by pupils currently in Year 4, who have made up considerable ground from entering Year 3 with skills below expectations for their age. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress overall. Some make very good progress; their learning and additional support are well planned and their progress is regularly checked to make sure their

pace of learning does not slacken. The very few pupils from minority ethnic groups achieve equally well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils are very proud of their school and delight in showing visitors around. They are particularly enthusiastic about their school grounds and how their ideas have helped to steer recent developments. They are always courteous and well able to adjust their behaviour to suit different occasions such as in assemblies or when taking part in singing and instrumental performances. Pupils are extremely aware of how to stay safe. When asked what they like most about their school some pupils reply, 'everything'. Pupils' unfailing willingness to contribute to the life of the school, whether by looking after younger pupils or as house captains, is outstanding. Pupils really enjoy working with other local schools and opportunities to participate in local events and festivals. Their good academic progress and exceptional ability to work together as confident young citizens prepare them well for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Some is outstanding. Teachers' expectations are high so lessons are challenging and there is a brisk pace to learning.

Teachers' subject knowledge is good. It is used very well to plan lessons in which pupils use different skills to achieve their learning objectives. An example was the exciting geography lesson for pupils in Years 3 and 4 which took them on a simulated flight to Lagos. They watched a PowerPoint presentation about Lagos during their 'flight' and afterwards researched the answers to their questions. This combination of literacy, geography and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) resulted in outstanding learning. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. They know pupils well and work effectively with class teachers to ensure support is given where it is most needed. Teachers' day-to-day marking is consistently good and provides good guidance for pupils as to how they can improve their work. The rigorous and frequent checking of individual pupils' progress and standards in mathematics has had a positive impact over the current year but the practice is not yet sufficiently embedded to encourage the same rapid pace of learning in other subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and enables pupils to achieve well. Planning has improved significantly, especially in enabling pupils to practise their skills across a range of subjects. This is having a good impact on standards and achievement but the work to draw together learning is not yet complete. There are increasing opportunities during and after school for pupils to learn creatively. The exceptional variety of habitats within the school grounds, for example, is an exciting starting point for scientific investigation. The range of activities planned to enrich pupils' learning and promote their personal development is outstanding. These are very purposefully linked to learning in school. Provision for pupils' personal, social, health education and citizenship is well established. The school curriculum, enhanced by support from outside agencies such as theatre groups, helps pupils to recognise and deal with potential hazards they may face, and, for

example, the importance of sensible relationships. By the time they leave the school, pupils are well prepared to make informed decisions about their personal well-being.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Parents are almost unanimous in their view that pupils are well cared for and supported. Pupils confirm that they are extremely well looked after and that there is always an adult to turn to when needed. Procedures for safeguarding pupils fully meet current government requirements. Staff members could hardly do more to support the most vulnerable pupils in the school. There is special help for pupils who experience emotional difficulties caused, for example, by sudden changes in their lives. Specific training is undertaken to cater for pupils' particular needs. The school works very closely with social services and other support agencies to ensure the best possible care. Guidance for pupils about relationships is clear and pupils understand how to stay safe. Attendance is monitored very effectively. The school reaches out to parents and carers, especially those who may have recently arrived in the country, to ensure they share fully in relevant information about the school. Academic guidance is good. Systems for assessing pupils are very thorough and provide an accurate picture of academic progress as they move up through the school. Assessment is particularly effective in mathematics.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership has made St Mary's an effective school. The vision for the school's future, shared by staff, governors and parents has set it on a clear path to improvement. The headteacher is the driving force. Her incisive analysis of the school's needs has resulted in strategies which have built upon existing strengths and effectively tackled weaknesses. She has established a cohesive, hard working staff team. All understand how they are accountable for standards and quality in the school and are fully committed to whole-school improvement. Governors support the school well and work hard to ensure its good standing in the community. The school makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion. Links with the church and wider local community are strong. There are very productive links with the feeder high school, but the school recognises that pupils would benefit from having greater insights into the lifestyles of different communities throughout the world.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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?	1

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	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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

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

Thank you for making me so welcome when I inspected your school recently. You gave me a very warm welcome and it was a delight to be able to talk to you. I must give a special word of thanks to the members of the eco-council who showed me around the wonderful school grounds in such a charming way. I would also like to thank Year 5 pupils for their very moving singing performance. What lovely voices you have!

I was very impressed by your politeness and good manners. You behave extremely well and get on really well with each other. I also noticed that your attendance is excellent. All of those things are very important so do keep them up.

St Mary's is a good school and there are some things that are outstanding. Children in Reception get off to an excellent start and the grown-ups in school take extremely good care of you. You reach good standards in your work, especially in mathematics, and all of you achieve well. That is because your teachers and headteacher plan exciting ways for you to learn.

You told me that you really like school. Well, your teachers, school governors and parents like it just as much as you do and they would all like it to be even better. For that to happen I have asked the school to speed up your progress in all subjects as much as it has in mathematics and to plan more ways to help you to know and understand how people live in different communities throughout the world.