

# St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Aston-le-Walls

## Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Unique Reference Number</b> | 122040           |
| <b>Local Authority</b>         | Northamptonshire |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 327628           |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 9 June 2009      |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b>     | Mike Capper      |

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.

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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 (total)                                                                         | 95                                                    |
| 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                                                     |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>                                                           | The governing body                                    |
| <b>Chair</b>                                                                           | Deborah Thorneycroft                                  |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                                                                     | Janice Hamilton                                       |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b>                                              | 4 July 2006                                           |
| <b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>                              | Not previously inspected                              |
| <b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>                                           | Not previously inspected                              |
| <b>School address</b>                                                                  | Main Street<br>Aston-le-Walls<br>Daventry<br>NN11 6UF |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                                                                | 01295 660258                                          |

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|--------------------------|-------------|
| <b>Age group</b>         | 4–11        |
| <b>Inspection date</b>   | 9 June 2009 |
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**Fax number**

01295 660258

**Age group** 4-11

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**Inspection date** 9 June 2009

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

## Description of the school

Pupils come to this small rural primary school from the local village but many travel from much further afield. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The number of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a single-age Reception class. The headteacher was previously deputy headteacher and was appointed substantive headteacher in April 2009.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Parents and pupils are justifiably proud of this good school that is moving forward quickly under the strong direction of the newly appointed headteacher. The school already has many outstanding features and there is a clear understanding of the main priorities for further improvement. Staff are working together closely to implement the necessary changes. Pupils' personal development and well-being are being supported extremely well by very high quality pastoral care. Pupils very happily talk about and celebrate their faith and they develop an exceptionally strong spiritual awareness.

Good teaching means that pupils achieve well. Children make an excellent start in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where provision is particularly strong, and then make good progress in the rest of the school. By the end of Year 6, standards in national tests are exceptionally high in most years in English, mathematics and science. This builds successfully on the well above average standards reached by pupils at the end of Year 2. However, these high standards are not always reflected in pupils' everyday written work, especially in science, history and geography. Whilst pupils enjoy these subjects because teachers plan many interesting, hands-on activities, their recorded work is not always good enough. This is because on occasions, teachers do not expect enough of pupils or provide them with the right level of challenge. In addition, pupils do not always take enough care to do their best work and their handwriting is sometimes untidy.

Teachers have excellent relationships with the pupils and support and guide them well in their learning. There is a very strong focus on developing pupils' confidence and self-esteem and on teaching them good values. Consequently, pupils quickly learn to respect each other and adults. They are very polite and courteous and develop extremely positive attitudes towards their learning. Pupils' exemplary behaviour is a major factor in their successful learning and creates a very positive atmosphere in lessons. Pupils are very keen to take responsibility and do so very sensibly. School- and eco-councillors are very conscientious and they help pupils to make an excellent contribution to the community.

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school, especially the excellent variety of trips, clubs and visitors that enrich the already good curriculum. With the exception of handwriting, basic skills are promoted well, and the school very successfully teaches pupils the importance of staying safe and healthy. For example, all pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 undertake first-aid training so that they know how to respond in an emergency.

The school's contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory. Leaders have helpfully carried out an audit of provision in this area of the school's work. This has rightly identified that whilst pupils take a very good part in local activities and raise funds for charities in Africa, their understanding of life in multicultural Britain and beyond is less well developed and consequently is a priority for improvement. The school has already made a start to tackling this by establishing a link with a school in Sierra Leone and by teaching pupils about life in France during French lessons.

The school is successful because it is well led and managed. The headteacher and other members of staff are passionate about doing the best for the pupils and they are working determinedly to tackle the areas for development. Self-evaluation is good. The headteacher has significantly improved the range and use of information about how well pupils are doing so that staff can respond more quickly to any minor dips in progress as they arise. Subject leaders are enthusiastic

and they support their colleagues well, although some weaknesses in provision have not been picked up quickly enough because many responsibilities are shared between relatively few staff. Governors have managed a period of transition in the school extremely well and there are ambitious plans for further school development. Leaders have already demonstrated in the way that they have maintained high standards and managed change that they are well placed to realise their aspirations.

The school has outstanding links with parents, who make a very strong contribution to their children's learning by helping in school, raising funds and working with them at home when they have been set targets. One parent summed up the almost unanimous views of all by writing, 'St Mary's is a wonderful place for my children to start their education and I consider myself very lucky that they come here.'

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 1**

'My son has flourished since starting in Reception.' This comment from a parent is typical of the very positive view that parents have of the Reception Year. When children start school, most are already working at or above the levels expected for their age, and they make excellent progress from these starting points. Consequently, standards rise to well above average levels by the end of the Reception Year in all areas of learning. Children achieve so well because they are very well cared for and teaching takes very close account of their different starting points. The most able pupils, including some who are already working at the levels typically found in Year 2, are provided with very good challenge and there is a very good pace to learning for all. There is an excellent curriculum that promotes personal skills very effectively, helping children to become confident, articulate and self-assured individuals by the time they move to Year 1.

Provision is exceptionally well led and managed. Data is used very effectively to check that all children are doing well enough, and members of staff work together to evaluate any areas that could be even better. For example, they are currently working to strengthen outdoor provision even further by developing a 'Forest School'.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve the quality of written work in science, history and geography by ensuring that teachers expect enough of pupils and always pitch work at the right level for all.
- Improve pupils' handwriting skills and ensure that pupils produce their best work all of the time.
- Give pupils more opportunities to learn about life in multicultural Britain and beyond.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' achievement is good. Children make excellent progress in the Reception class and then good progress in the rest of the school. Consequently, standards which are well above average at the end of Year 2 rise to exceptionally high levels in most years in national tests at the end of Year 6. Although pupils make good progress and respond particularly well when they are working on practical activities, in science, history and geography, written work is not always of sufficiently high quality.

There are no differences between the progress of boys or girls or those from different backgrounds. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make the same progress as

others. There are only a very small number of pupils in the early stages of learning English. They are supported well and quickly develop good language skills.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education and for later life. They make good progress in developing basic skills and develop high levels of confidence and self-esteem. They are sociable and articulate and their thorough enjoyment of school is reflected in their excellent attendance. Pupils especially enjoy the recently increased focus on learning through practical activities in subjects such as science, geography and history. Throughout the school, pupils support each other very well and they behave very sensibly both in and out of lessons. They work hard, although not all take enough care to do their best work when they are writing in some subjects.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Spiritual development is especially strong because of the excellent links with the church. Pupils learn to appreciate the wonders of the world around them, for example showing great excitement when their chickens produced their first egg. Pupils make an excellent contribution to school life. For example, it was at the suggestion of school councillors that areas for quiet reflection were developed in the hall and playground. Pupils show excellent concern and thought for the welfare of others by raising funds for charities and writing their own prayers. Pupils play a very active part in the local community. They sing to parishioners and help villagers in the annual 'village clean-up'. Pupils know a lot about their own cultural background, but their knowledge of life beyond the local community is less strong and this has rightly been identified as an area for development for the school.

Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. They make healthy eating choices and are very enthusiastic about the sport that they do at school. They understand the importance of exercise and know that 'rest is good for you'.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Throughout the school, teachers have good relationships with pupils. Pupils are encouraged to work at pace, reflecting the good expectations of teachers. Teachers are very conscientious about ensuring that pupils understand what they are expected to learn in a lesson and they use questioning well in whole-class sessions to involve everyone. Teachers make good use of resources such as interactive whiteboards to make work interesting. Skilled teaching assistants have a good effect on learning, especially when supporting pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Teachers usually plan suitable work that successfully builds on what pupils already know, especially when planning for practical activities. However, teachers' expectations are not always high enough when they ask pupils to write in science, history and geography. Too much work is worksheet-based and when all pupils complete the same piece of work, differing needs are not met well enough.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum provides every child with a very wide range of experiences, helping to ensure that they greatly enjoy school. Visits and visitors have a very good effect on learning. For example, in a literacy lesson in Years 5 and 6, pupils were able to make comparisons between a modern theatre and The Globe theatre because they have recently visited Covent Garden to see an opera. Pupils are encouraged to maintain their health and fitness through a very good range of sporting activities.

The curriculum is well planned but does not include enough opportunities to celebrate the cultural diversity of modern society. Recent improvement in the curriculum has placed a strong focus on making learning more enjoyable by planning a greater number of practical activities than in the past. Basic skills are promoted well, and there has been a recent focus on improving pupils' handwriting. Leaders are aware that this has not yet had a sufficient impact on improving the skills of all pupils.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

In this small school, its size is its strength. Adults know every pupil extremely well and treat them all as part of the 'school family'. Pupils rightly say that they feel safe and secure and they know what to do if they have a worry. At the time of the inspection, safeguarding arrangements were fully in place. When necessary, the school works extremely well with outside agencies and parents to help pupils who are finding life difficult and to safeguard their well-being.

Academic support is good. Teachers give targets to pupils so that they understand how to improve. This has had a good effect, especially for older pupils, who talk confidently about the next stage of their learning. Systems for tracking pupils' progress have been significantly strengthened this year, and they give a clear picture of progress over time, especially in English and mathematics where they have been established longer than in science or other subjects. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified quickly and are given clear targets to help them improve.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The newly appointed headteacher has brought fresh ideas to the school and there is a strong drive for further improvement. There have been many helpful recent initiatives that are already having a positive effect. For example, recent investment in new computers has improved provision in information and communication technology, and the headteacher has strengthened systems for finding out how well the school is doing by making better use of assessment data to identify and tackle any minor dips in achievement as soon as they arise. Because the school is small, responsibility for managing subjects falls on a few shoulders, and this means that on occasions, weaknesses in provision, especially in science, history and geography, have not been picked up quickly enough. The school is aware that it needs to think through how a subject is monitored if the subject leader does most of the teaching.

Governance is excellent. Governors have very successfully managed a period of transition, providing extremely good support and challenge during this period. They are kept well informed

by the headteacher but also do a lot for themselves to check on the school's work so that they can take a full part in planning for improvement.

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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 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|

### 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 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 <sup>1</sup> 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/or disabilities make progress                           | 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.

## Personal development and well-being

|                                                                                                               |   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| <b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>                          | 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 | 1 |

## The quality of provision

|                                                                                                    |   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| <b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>       | 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

|                                                                                                                                              |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <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 eliminated                                                                   | 2   |
| 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                                                  | 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**

10 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Daventry, NN11 8UF

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and for showing us your work. You were very polite and friendly and you behaved exceptionally well. We are pleased that you come to a good school and are able to learn in such a lovely setting.

- Some of the things we found out about your school.
- You learn new things very quickly in the Reception class, where you are taught extremely well.
- In the rest of the school, good teaching helps you to learn well so that you reach very high standards by the end of Year 6.
- You are taught all the things you should be and you thoroughly enjoy school, especially the many clubs, visits and visitors.
- You have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. It is great that you are learning to grow your own food.
- There are excellent links with the parish church.
- All adults in school are very kind and caring and they give you good help with your work so that you know how to improve.
- Your headteacher and governors are leading the school well and are working hard to make it even better.
- Your parents and carers are very pleased that you come to this school.

What we have asked your school to do now

- Make sure that teachers pitch work at the right level and expect enough of all of you when they give you written work in science, history and geography.
- Improve your handwriting skills.
- Give you more opportunities to learn about life in multicultural Britain and beyond.

You can help you teachers by taking more care with your written work so that it is neat and well presented.

We thoroughly enjoyed talking with you about your work and watching you learn. We wish you all well for the future.

Yours faithfully

Mr M Capper

Lead inspector