

St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124780
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328212
Inspection dates	4–5 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Ruth Frith

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	210
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	Mrs Pat Walmsley
Headteacher	Mrs Kate Marchant
Date of previous school inspection	19 January 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Kirkley Cliff Road Lowestoft Suffolk NR33 0DG

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	4–5 February 2009
Inspection number	328212

Telephone number
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School serves families from across Lowestoft and the surrounding villages and towns. It is similar in size to many primary schools. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. Children start school in the Early Years Foundation Stage and their attainment on entry is similar to that usually seen in children of this age. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average as is the proportion with a statement of special educational needs. Most pupils are White British. A small number of pupils come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. A few of these are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language with a significant number in the Reception class. The deputy headteacher has taken on the role of acting headteacher for the last year awaiting the appointment of a new substantive headteacher who is due to join the school after Easter.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's accurate evaluation that it provides a satisfactory standard of education. Satisfactory improvement has been made since the last inspection, for example in information and communication technology, to suggest that the school has satisfactory capacity to improve. Recent good work with the local authority and other outside agencies is helping to improve the quality of provision.

Over the last two years, instability within the school caused by several staff changes and difficulties in appointing a new headteacher has contributed to a dip in standards and achievement in Year 2 national assessments. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall but inconsistent within each key stage. Satisfactory progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage is built upon effectively in Year 1 but then slows so that by the end of the key stage recent standards have been below average overall. Pupils' progress continues to be quite slow in Years 3 and 4 and then rapidly improves in Years 5 and 6. Standards in Year 6 were above average in the 2008 national tests. Although systems are in place to check how well pupils are doing, the information is not always used systematically to set appropriately challenging targets and ensure pupils' best possible progress.

There is a need for more rigorous and consistent monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in order to raise the quality of teaching to good or better throughout. Currently, information from assessing pupils' work and progress is not always used effectively to plan work that matches their abilities. Consequently, learning is not as good as it could be, particularly for the more capable pupils. Recent developments to the curriculum that link areas of learning around a topic are proving successful and engage pupils' interests well because they find learning in this way more relevant.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils enjoy what they do at school and are interested in lessons. Consequently, their behaviour and attitudes are good and help to create a good basis for learning. Care, guidance and support of pupils are satisfactory. Pastoral care is good but pupils' academic guidance remains only satisfactory because staff are not yet fully using information about pupils to make clear what they should do to improve their work.

Leadership, management and governance are satisfactory and help to ensure that the school provides sound value for money. The acting headteacher, together with support from the local authority, is giving purposeful direction to school improvement. Key areas of strength and weakness are identified through the satisfactory self-evaluation of the school's work. However, not all staff and governors are included in this process. Suitable priorities have been highlighted and a clear action plan developed. Parents are supportive of the school as indicated in the following comment, which is representative of many parents, 'I could not wish for a better school for my child.' Pupils and parents greatly value the school's friendly, caring ethos.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children's learning and development are satisfactory. They settle well because good links with parents are encouraged and routines are clear. Staff place a high priority on developing children's personal, social and emotional skills and this results in good behaviour and attitudes to learning. Children gain confidence, work and play well with others and enjoy school. Planning is rather

complex. There is a good range of activities that children can choose from and planning for these is extensive. Activities that are directed by an adult are less well planned so it is not always clear what children are specifically expected to learn. Through regular observations and assessments, staff gain an understanding of children's needs and give effective support. Recording of children's progress is not so effective. Records are not always dated and they tend to outline what children have done, rather than what they have learnt. Effective support is given to children who find learning difficult and this results in good progress both socially and academically. Staff are working well to meet the needs of the increasing number of children who speak English as an additional language so that they are fully involved and make similar progress to others. Children achieve satisfactorily so that by the time they enter Year 1 most are working at the levels expected for their age. Leadership and management by the teacher and acting headteacher are satisfactory and helping to identify clear areas for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Fully involve all leaders, governors and staff in a rolling programme of monitoring and self-evaluation.
- Rigorously monitor teaching and learning to ensure that teaching and pupils' progress is consistently good or better.
- Extend the use of data so that staff can more easily track pupils' progress from entry to Year 6 and set appropriately challenging targets, particularly for more able pupils.
- Develop the use and accuracy of assessment so that teachers are aware of the levels pupils are working at and pupils are clear about how they can improve their work.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils make good progress in Year 1 but this is not built upon securely in Year 2. Standards have declined in Key Stage 1 over the last two years and, in the 2008 national assessments, were below average in reading and mathematics and low in writing. Senior managers are working with external consultants to improve this situation and standards in reading have risen. However, more still needs to be done, particularly to ensure that more capable pupils are fully challenged and reach higher standards. Achievement is broadly satisfactory in lower Key Stage 2 but accelerates rapidly in Years 5 and 6. Pupils are not always sufficiently challenged, particularly the more capable pupils, and particularly in science where standards were only broadly average. Currently, Year 6 pupils are working at levels above those expected for their age. Pupils with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress overall due to the helpful additional support they receive. Those with English as an additional language also achieve satisfactorily.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy coming to school and participate enthusiastically in lessons. They understand that to lead a healthy lifestyle it is important to eat a balanced diet and take regular exercise. They know how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations and are confident that the adults in the school will help them if they have a problem. The moral and spiritual values of the school are key features of the school's ethos and pupils have a clear understanding of what is expected

of them. They understand the customs of others and treat each other with respect. They are keen to be involved in projects such as 'Operation Christmas Child' and to take on roles in school, such as play leader and lunchtime helper. These factors contribute to their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Bullying is rare but when it does occur, it is dealt with effectively by staff. Attendance is satisfactory and behaviour throughout the school is good. The pupils' personal skills and good basic skill development by the time they leave school give a good platform for success in their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are inconsistent across the school so remain satisfactory overall. They are particularly strong at the beginning of Key Stage 1 and upper Key Stage 2. Where teaching is most successful, planning is good and takes into account the varying needs in the class and the pupils' next steps in learning. Teachers are clear about what they want pupils to learn specifically and share this with them so pupils know what is expected of them and are confident in their learning. They are enthusiastic and keen to learn. Expectations are high, the pace of learning is brisk and the challenge provided ensures pupils can succeed. In less successful lessons, these elements are not so well established and pupils' progress slows. Teachers do not always have a clear understanding of the levels pupils are working at. Teaching is sometimes overambitious and activities too complex. In addition, the marking of pupils' work is not fully effective because it does not help to set high standards or show how pupils can improve their work. A successful feature of all teaching is the good relationships staff have with pupils and this, in turn, supports the good management of behaviour and supportive atmosphere in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Pupils receive a curriculum that they find interesting and enjoyable. It places correct emphasis on the development of basic skills and is enriched through specialist teaching in music, sport and Spanish. A good range of trips, including residential visits, are provided to broaden children's learning. However, the curriculum is not always planned well enough to meet the needs of all groups of pupils, particularly the more able. Also, although the provision is broad, its impact is not monitored effectively. Pupils value the range of extra-curricular activities, such as drama and opportunities to perform in events, such as the 'Gospel Show'. To enliven the curriculum further, the school is beginning to develop a more cross-curricular approach to teaching. This has led to some enjoyable special curriculum days, such as the Egyptian day in Year 5, where staff and children participate in a range of activities to learn about life in Ancient Egypt.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Staff are committed to the pupils' welfare and pastoral care is good. Additional help for pupils who find learning difficult is satisfactory; it is carefully managed and pupils receive a comprehensive programme of support. However, the impact of this provision is not always monitored and evaluated. Staff make good use of external agencies to ensure pupils' needs are met, including those who find it difficult to behave well without additional support. Procedures for safeguarding pupils and ensuring their health and safety meet requirements.

The use of assessment information to track attainment and progress across the school is inconsistent. Pupils' knowledge of the standards of their work and of the targets that they need to achieve is not well established.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The acting headteacher has recently gained an accurate and insightful understanding of the quality of teaching and learning, yet has been unable to ensure consistent good teaching throughout the school. The monitoring and evaluation by subject leaders is insufficient to identify clearly the effectiveness of provision in their subjects although they are beginning to have a better understanding of how to analyse data to identify strengths and weaknesses. Managers satisfactorily use challenging targets to raise standards. There have been improvements to the governing body since the last inspection but recently there have been significant changes in personnel. Currently, governors do not completely fulfil their roles in relation to monitoring the school's effectiveness and holding the school to account. The school has strengths in the way it promotes community cohesion within its own faith community both locally and abroad. It is less successful in raising pupils' awareness of diversity within Britain.

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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?	3
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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	3
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

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?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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 learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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**

6 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Lowestoft, NR33 0DG

You may remember that two inspectors recently visited your school and talked to you about your work. We enjoyed our visit and would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome. We think your school is satisfactory and improving. This is down to you, the staff and governors. If you read on you will see some of the things we found out.

You make satisfactory progress but you could do even better so we have asked your teachers to make sure that teaching and learning are always at least good so that you make good progress and reach higher standards. They will also concentrate on finding out how well you are doing from starting school to Year 6 in order to set appropriately challenging targets, particularly for those of you who find it easy to learn. They will also improve the way they assess your learning and mark your work. We know you will help by continuing to do your best and responding to the comments they make in your books.

We were pleased to see that you enjoy school and behave well. You get on well with each other and make friends. You have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and this is influencing what you eat and how much exercise you take. You feel safe in school because staff look after you well. You make a positive contribution to the school community by acting sensibly and taking on responsible jobs such as play leaders and school council members. You also think of others and raise funds for charities. Well done!

Mrs Marchant is working hard to manage the school until your new headteacher arrives after Easter. Staff and governors are helping her and they have all agreed to check regularly how well the school is doing so that they can tell when they have to change things.

Thank you once again. We wish you well in the future.

Yours faithfully

Ruth Frith

Lead inspector