

St Mary's Catholic Primary School Marple Bridge

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106123
Local Authority	Stockport
Inspection number	324337
Inspection date	26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Geoff Lawrence

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	234
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 V Major
Headteacher	Mrs Fionuala Boucher
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Lowry Drive Marple Bridge Stockport Cheshire SK6 5BR

Age group	3–11
Inspection date	26 February 2009
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Telephone number
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: pupils' standards and achievement; the quality of the academic guidance pupils receive; and the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Evidence was gathered from the school's judgements about attainment on entry, test results, teachers' records, observations of teaching, scrutiny of pupils' current work and discussions with the headteacher, staff, pupils and governors. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school situated in an area of social and economic advantage. As a church school, it serves a community more widespread than its immediate surroundings. Almost all pupils are of White British background with no pupils requiring additional language support. The proportion claiming free school meals is below average, as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of a Reception class and a part-time Nursery class. The school operates an After-School Club, run by a voluntary management committee. It holds the following awards: Activemark, Healthy School Award, Artsmark and the Football Association Charter Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Mary's is an outstanding school that justifies its fine reputation. It has the overwhelming support of parents as evidenced by the extremely large number of questionnaires returned with comments praising the work of the school.

An important reason for the school's success lies in the inspirational leadership and management, not least by the headteacher, who has the highest expectations of pupils, staff and herself. She provides clear direction with an unwavering focus on pupils attaining the highest standards possible. The school sets very challenging academic targets but never loses sight of the importance of pupils' personal and social development. As a result, an ethos of mutual respect exists throughout the school, which enables pupils to feel valued. This quality is widely acknowledged and highly prized amongst parents who typically expressed views that 'children are treated as individuals' and, 'it's a supportive and inclusive school community'. The first-rate support given to pupils, and the unremitting commitment of everyone in the school to community cohesion and equality of opportunity, lead to pupils' outstanding personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. These attributes help to create very well-rounded, mature and confident young people whose behaviour is impeccable in class and around school.

Other leaders provide outstanding support to the headteacher and, together, they form an impressive team with a shared vision. Very knowledgeable and well-informed governors play an important role through their energetic support of and challenge to the school. The success of the leadership stems from rigorous tracking of pupils' progress and regular evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning. These enable the school to evaluate its effectiveness efficiently and improve the provision in order to rectify any relative weaknesses. This explains why the school has maintained its very high achievements over recent years and confirms that it has an excellent capacity to improve and provides excellent value for money.

Typically, children start in Nursery with skills and knowledge that are expected for their age. They make excellent progress during their time at school, as year-on-year they build very successfully on their previous achievements so that they often reach exceptionally high standards by the end of Year 6. This position has been maintained over a number of years. In 2006, standards dipped slightly in mathematics from their usual highs but the school's prompt and effective actions secured rapid improvement and an immediate return, the following year, to the previously high standards. Assessment information and scrutiny of pupils' work indicate that current Year 6 pupils are working at exceptionally high standards in mathematics, English and science. Armed with these skills, pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education.

A feature of the outstanding teaching and learning is the unyielding commitment to enable each pupil to achieve his or her full potential. Teachers know and understand their pupils extremely well; this helps them to form an accurate picture of each individual's performance, allowing them to set appropriate and challenging work. Teachers are relentless in getting pupils to think about and explain what they are learning. This stems from high expectations and helps the pupils to make rapid gains in learning and to achieve well above average standards. The school provides excellent support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and, as a result, they make the same outstanding progress as other pupils.

Pupils say they feel very secure and they speak passionately and articulately about how much they enjoy school and their lessons. They are involved in setting their learning targets, know them well, and understand the reason for them. A typical comment being, 'We have targets to achieve, they help us to develop our skills.' They are also highly motivated by the lively and engaging lessons on offer, making comments such as, 'work here is fun'. As a result, their attendance is well above average and they have outstanding attitudes towards learning. Pupils assume responsibilities confidently and eagerly, promoting very good relationships by acting, for example, as prefects or as the Special Friends that are created by linking each Reception child, on entry, to a Year 6 pupil. This is a good demonstration of the very caring attitude that pupils show towards one another. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are in place. Consequently, from an early age they know how to stay safe and have an excellent understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, including the importance of a healthy diet. They enjoy sport and there is a high rate of participation in the good range of extra-curricular activities that supplement an excellent curriculum.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good induction procedures coupled with excellent relationships with parents enable adults to gather a good range of information about children before they start school and this helps them to settle into the Nursery quickly. Together with good teaching, this helps them to make good progress so that by the time they leave the Reception class, they possess skills and knowledge above those expected for their age, particularly in the areas of mathematics, language and personal development. The latter is exemplified by their excellent behaviour and the way in which children socialise and cooperate with each other. Partnerships with parents are very strong and the vast majority support their child's learning at home.

Welfare requirements are met and adults provide a secure and safe environment in which children receive a high level of care. This gives them confidence to talk to adults about what they are learning and what they enjoy in school. Teachers make good use of the resources at their disposal and are effective in planning activities based on the children's needs.

Although the leadership has been successful in helping children to make good progress, the monitoring and evaluation procedures are not as rigorous as in the rest of the school. This is because the leader is not currently based in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Consequently, she has insufficient time to use her good knowledge of early years practice to evaluate the provision in-depth, thus limiting her ability to effect the necessary changes to make the provision outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage are as rigorous as in the rest of the school to improve provision further.

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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?	1
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	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
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?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

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

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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
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?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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**

Thank you so much for the marvellous welcome you gave my colleague and me when we inspected your school recently. We judged your school to be outstanding.

We know you and your families are very proud of your school. You develop into mature and sensible people and your behaviour is excellent. We noticed that you try hard in lessons and you make excellent progress in all your subjects because your teachers and teaching assistants are outstanding. Those of you who sometimes find the work a bit hard make just as much progress as your classmates because you get so much support in class and often in small groups outside lessons. All the adults in school take extremely good care of you.

You told us your teachers find ways to make learning fun and help you to reach very high standards in your work. You are right here, too. You also know what a healthy lifestyle is and how to keep yourself and others safe.

Your headteacher and all the other staff work very hard indeed to make sure that you enjoy coming to school, and they know just how to make your school go from strength to strength. Those responsible for leading and managing the school do their job extremely well. Within all of its outstanding work, we identified one thing they could do to help make your school even better. We have asked the leaders to look as closely at the Early Years Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception classes) as they do the other key stages so that they can quickly identify ways to make it even better than it is now.

Thank you once again for helping us. We enjoyed our time with you and your teachers. We hope you that you continue to work hard and enjoy school.