

St Mary's Catholic Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102994
Local Authority	Sutton
Inspection number	308188
Inspection date	1 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Michael Chisnall HMI

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	7-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	262
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs A Walsh
Headteacher	Mrs C Mayhew
Date of previous school inspection	29 September 2003
School address	Shorts Road Carshalton SM5 2PB
Telephone number	020 8647 4342
Fax number	020 8647 3474

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the progress of pupils in a range of subjects; strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching and learning; the effectiveness of provision for pupils who are vulnerable; and how effectively leaders at all levels are raising achievement. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector 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

St Mary's is a little larger than most junior schools. It draws its pupils from a relatively wide area within Sutton; almost all pupils have attended the linked Catholic infant school. When they start at the school, pupils' attainments represent the full range of ability but, taken overall, they are well above average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic heritages is a little higher than average. No one group predominates and a small number speaks English as an additional language. Very few pupils are eligible for free school meals. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a little below average. The school has gained awards for Investors in People, Healthy Schools and Gold Active Mark Sports as well as the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

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 some outstanding features. It has improved significantly since its last inspection and its capacity to bring about further improvements is excellent.

One of the school's most striking features is the outstanding personal development and well-being of its pupils. The behaviour of almost all pupils is first-rate. They are polite, confident and a credit to their families and the school. Their attitudes towards learning are extremely positive; they enjoy lessons and the wider life of the school very much. One pupil summed this up when she said, 'You feel special here; it's friendly and a lovely environment.' The school has put a lot of work into helping pupils understand how to live healthy lives and this has paid off. Pupils demonstrate high levels of awareness in this area and know, for instance, the importance of diet, sport and exercise in being healthy.

Pupils accept responsibility very well indeed and play their part in school life, whether as a member of the school council or acting as a 'buddy' for Year 3 pupils. This sense of responsibility comes across particularly in lessons, where pupils work hard and know that they have to listen, think and learn. They play responsibly, but happily, resulting in an environment where they feel very safe from bullying and harassment. The management of the school plays its part in promoting this strong sense of well-being by thorough vetting of staff and in regular health and safety checks on the premises.

The impact of all of this is evident in the standards the pupils reach in their learning; these are very high and well above national averages. They make good progress from high starting points and achieve well. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and they, too, progress well and reach standards that are at or above average levels. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher level (Level 5) in English and science is well above average, but this is less marked in mathematics, although still above average. Standards in art, design and technology (Dand;T) and information and communication technology (ICT) were unsatisfactory at the last inspection. They are now exceeding national expectations because of more thorough planning and better assessment practice. Academic targets are challenging and met or exceeded.

The principal reason for pupils doing so well is the consistently good teaching they receive. In particular, lesson planning is thorough and teachers provide interesting lessons that are intellectually challenging and make pupils think. As one pupil put it, 'Teachers have a good method of teaching; they make it fun but they get their message across.' Teachers use a good range of questions to probe pupils' understanding and make accurate assessments about what they have learnt. An outstanding feature is the focus on 'thinking skills' across the school. This plays a significant role in teaching pupils how to learn effectively. It is an important factor in the good progress they make and in their preparation for secondary school and later life. Some teaching is outstanding, but this is not yet consistent across the school.

The school provides a curriculum that is varied and interesting. A particularly good feature is the way in which links are made across subjects so that pupils understand the relevance of what they are learning. For instance, ICT skills are used in plotting and interpreting data in science, and the making of Tudor-style purses enables pupils to make links between history and Dand;T. The curriculum is enriched through themed events, such as the creative and Dand;T days, as well as visits to places of interest. The range of extra-curricular activities is wide and offers pupils opportunities to pursue special interests; pupils described these with great interest and

noted that they added to their enjoyment of school. There is a little room for improvement in ensuring that the curriculum consistently stretches all pupils in all subjects.

Pupils' progress is tracked very carefully so that the school has very accurate knowledge of which of them are at risk of not achieving as well as expected. As a result, very good provision is made for pupils who need extra support, helping them to keep up and make good progress. As well as the academic support provided, the school also does an excellent job in supporting pupils' personal development, significantly enhanced by the school's religious character, so that they grow as confident individuals with a strong sense of worth and community.

At the heart of this successful school are good leadership and management, where there are some outstanding features. The leadership of the headteacher and senior team is very strong, setting a clear vision for high standards in teaching and learning and promoting ways of raising achievement still further, such as the 'thinking skills' programme. The senior team is well supported by year and subject leaders who have a strong focus raising standards and a track record of success. Recent improvements in both the curriculum and pupils' achievements in art, Dand;T and ICT are as a direct result of their efforts, as well as the maintenance of high standards in other subjects through some staff changes.

Managers monitor the work of the school regularly and systematically so that they know exactly where strengths and weaknesses lie, resulting in accurate self-evaluation and effective plans for improvement. While much attention is given to how staff teach and how pupils learn, there is not enough emphasis on exactly what pupils are learning and whether there is room for raising standards still further. Similarly, targets for improving subject areas are not sharply enough focused on what pupils will be expected to gain from new initiatives.

The vast majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed significant satisfaction with the school, especially in relation to standards and ethos. However, too many parents have reservations about the way that the school communicates with them. The governing body, whose work for the school is otherwise excellent, is aware of this issue and, with the headteacher, is looking at ways of improving this, for instance through parent representatives for each year group. The budget is managed carefully and the school provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning still further so that even more is outstanding.
- Ensure that there is a clear focus on what pupils learn when evaluating lessons and in planning for improvement.
- Improve communications with parents.

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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	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ 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 disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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
How well 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 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?	1

¹ 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

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 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	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Junior School, Carshalton, SM5 2PB

Thank you very much for making me so welcome when I visited your school recently. I was especially grateful to you for the way in which you shared your views with me. In return, I want to tell you what I thought of your school.

Yours is a good school with many excellent features. Your attendance and behaviour are both outstanding. I was very impressed with the friendly and polite way that you talk to each other and adults. You work hard in lessons and enjoy your learning. As a result, you make good progress and reach standards that are better than in most schools. In particular, the work you do on thinking skills really helps you to learn well and to be responsible for your learning.

You told me that teaching is good and I agree. Some of it is exceptionally good and I have asked the staff to find ways of giving you even better lessons. Perhaps you have ideas about what would help you to learn even better that you can share with staff. The school provides you with lots of interesting activities to do in lessons and clubs, and these really add to your enjoyment of school. The support that you get from staff is first-class, whether it is extra help when you need it or in helping all of you to know how well you are doing.

The headteacher and senior staff work well to give you a good education and to decide where things could be better still. I have asked them to look a bit more closely at what you are learning and how that can be even better, when they visit classes or look at your work. You told me you were proud of your school and many of your parents said the same. Some of your parents think that communication between school and home could be better so I have asked the headteacher and governors to look at ways of improving this.

I am sorry I was not able to stay longer but in the short time I was in school, I could see what a special place St Mary's is - well done for helping to make it like this!

Yours sincerely

Michael Chisnall

Her Majesty's Inspector