

St Marys Roman Catholic Primary School

Aided

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108620
Local Authority	North Tyneside
Inspection number	309746
Inspection dates	7–8 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Moira Fitzpatrick

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	160
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr G Earley
Headteacher	Mrs C Gunning (Acting headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	1 September 2003
School address	Great Lime Road Forest Hall Newcastle upon Tyne Tyne and Wear NE12 7AB
Telephone number	0191 2008381
Fax number	0191 2007849

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than average. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and there are a few pupils who speak English as an additional language, none of whom is at an early stage of fluency. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average as is the proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with some good aspects. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. From a starting point that is above that typical for this age pupils make steady progress as they move through the school. Standards are above average. In the teacher assessments in 2007, pupils' performance was lower than in previous years. Pupils in Year 6 had good results in the 2007 national tests with exceptionally good performance in science because of the good proportion of pupils who exceeded the level expected for their age. However, too few pupils reached the higher level in writing.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils' enjoy school. They form very good relationships, are supportive of each other and behave extremely well. They are keen to take on responsibilities to help the school run smoothly. Pupils know how to live a healthy lifestyle and are keen to take plenty of exercise. By the time they leave, pupils are well prepared for future challenges. The school's provision for care, guidance and support is good. Parents are highly supportive of the school and praise its strong caring ethos and the way their children are taught to care for each other. Staff have warm, supportive relationships with pupils and are alert to changes in their pastoral needs.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall though there are examples of good and outstanding teaching. Generally, teachers plan work that matches pupils' needs, but weaknesses in assessment reduce the level of challenge for pupils in some classes. Teachers are conscientious in their marking but not all make suggestions for how to improve, which makes progress uneven across the school. The curriculum is good. Links with other schools and visits enhance pupils' experiences.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. While improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, there has been too little development of the role of governors and subject leaders in monitoring the work of the school. Self-evaluation is not robust and this has led the school to over-estimate its effectiveness in some areas. Nevertheless, the acting headteacher, who is well supported, on a voluntary basis, by an experienced member of staff, has made an accurate assessment of where the school needs most to improve. Actions taken this term are improving teachers' management expertise and the procedures for assessing pupils' learning.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Provision in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Children enter school with a range of skills that are generally above those typical for their age except in writing where they are below those typically found. By the end of the Reception year, they have made satisfactory progress to exceed the level typical for this age in all areas of learning, except in writing, where pupils' attainment is at the expected level. Children really enjoy being at school. Warm relationships and a good emphasis on personal and social development means children feel secure and settle quickly when they start. Music is used well to help establish and support routines. Teaching is satisfactory. A lack of a secure knowledge about the teaching of letter sounds slows down progress in this area of learning. The indoor environment is well-organised to give children a range of experiences but there are not always enough opportunities for child-initiated learning or for learning outdoors. Relationships with parents are good and a regular newsletter keeps

them well informed of what is happening. Leadership and management of the Foundation Stage are satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Enhance the expertise of subject leaders and governors to monitor and evaluate the school's effectiveness.
- Improve assessment procedures so that the tracking of pupils' progress is more rigorous and targets provide more challenge.
- Improve the teaching of letter sounds for children in the Foundation Stage.

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

Achievement is satisfactory. Standards are above average when pupils leave school. Children leave the Reception class with skills generally above those expected for their age. From this strong starting point pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2. In Year 2, standards are above average with more pupils working at the expected level for their age in reading, writing and mathematics than the national average. Teacher assessments in 2007 showed lower than usual standards in writing and this reduced overall standards to average. The school attributes this dip to staffing changes during the year which affected the learning of some pupils. Inspection evidence indicates that this group of pupils are now making good gains in their writing skills in Year 3.

Results in national tests in 2007, for Year 6 pupils, were above average overall and significantly above average in science and English, where reading standards are especially high. The school's performance in science was high because nearly three quarters of pupils exceeded the level expected for their age. However, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher level in writing was disappointing given their strong starting points. Pupils currently in Year 6 are on course to reach high standards in the tests at the end of the year. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who have English as an additional language are well supported and make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Good personal development and well-being ensure that pupils are successful learners. Behaviour is excellent. Attendance is well above average and pupils say they enjoy coming to school because staff look after them and keep them safe. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils understand right and wrong and demonstrate care and consideration for others. They are well mannered and polite young people who relish taking on responsibility, for instance by being special friends for younger pupils. They understand about healthy lifestyles and how to stay safe because they are taught about these from when they start in the Reception class. Members of the school council, who are democratically elected, say the school acts on their suggestions. As a result, more playground toys are being purchased though pupils say there is still room for improvement in playground facilities. Pupils very good basic skills, added to these personal qualities, prepare them very well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall with some good and some outstanding aspects which have not yet had time to impact on standards across the school. Pupils are enthusiastic and confident learners who respond well to the challenges offered. Generally, lessons are thoroughly prepared with clear learning intentions which mean that pupils know what is expected of them. The best lessons have high expectations, a fast pace and appropriate challenge for all learners. Pupils are fully engaged by tasks that build on previous learning and are absorbed in what they are doing. In other lessons insecure subject knowledge limits progress, particularly in learning letter sounds, which has an impact on the progress made in writing. There are inconsistencies in how well assessment is used to support planning, leading to a lack of challenge for some more able pupils. Marking ranges from satisfactory to very good. Where it gives feedback on how to improve, it promotes good progress but inconsistencies across the school prevent this from being sustained year-on-year. There is good support for the relatively small number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those with English as an additional language.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and meets requirements. It effectively meets the needs and interests of pupils. Planning for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology are adequate though more able pupils would benefit from higher levels of challenge. Planning to link learning between subjects is developing well and the introduction of the teaching of thinking skills is having a positive impact on pupils' speaking and listening abilities. The effective programme for personal, social and health education supports pupils to stay healthy, teaches them about personal safety and contributes well to their good personal development.

Some aspects of the curriculum are particularly good. For instance, the school has many links with other schools, the church and outside agencies which enhance pupils' learning well. Links with schools in India and Africa extend pupils' understanding of life in other cultures as well as providing them with opportunities to offer support through fund-raising for specific projects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care, guidance and support for pupils. Suitable arrangements for safeguarding, child protection and health and safety are in place. Very good relationships between staff and pupils create a warm, secure environment within which pupils flourish. Pupils say they feel safe and happy in school and know who to ask for advice if they are troubled. The school's good links with external agencies are much appreciated by parents of children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, as is the good support given to their children in school.

Academic guidance is satisfactory and improving this term in the wake of new developments introduced by the acting headteacher. Procedures are now in place to increase the frequency of assessments so that they become more regular and rigorous. Guidance for pupils on how to improve their work is not consistent enough to ensure that pupils are supported to make good

progress year-on-year. Pupils are beginning to take responsibility for their learning by assessing their own work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since the last inspection, subject leaders have not had sufficient professional development to acquire the full range of skills needed to lead and manage improvement effectively. School self-evaluation is only satisfactory because there has been too little opportunity for subject leaders and school governors to monitor the work of the school. This has led to the school making some inaccurate judgements about its effectiveness and to setting targets that are not challenging enough for some pupils.

The acting headteacher has made a good start in re-assessing what the school needs to do to raise standards and improve pupils' achievement. She has been ably supported, on a voluntary basis, by the teacher who carries responsibility for literacy and assessment. They have correctly identified the most important priorities for this year, one of which is to improve the expertise of subject leaders. At the time of inspection, the governors had not made provision to fill the vacant post of acting deputy headteacher. Consequently, the responsibilities carried by the acting headteacher are too onerous and impose too many tasks for her to discharge to full effect. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The school's capacity for further improvement is also satisfactory.

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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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	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 disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
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 the learners' needs?	3
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?	2

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?	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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

9 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School Aided, North Tyneside, NE12 7AB

We would like to thank you for the kind welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. Your good manners and excellent behaviour made a big impression on us. We thought you would like to hear what you helped us to find out about your school.

St Mary's is providing you with a satisfactory education. We found out that you all work hard and that you reach high standards. You told us that your teachers care for you well and help you with your work. We agree with you and the school is going to help you even more by telling you how to improve your work when it is marked. Younger pupils would get on better with their writing if they knew their letter sounds really well and the school is going to see to this.

You showed us what good citizens you are becoming by the work you do to help your school improve and in helping those in other countries who need a bit of support for certain projects. It was very nice to see Year 6 pupils looking after the youngest children in the playground. We know the school council has some good ideas and we agree that the playground would be better with more toys and games.

Your school has had a number of staff changes this year and you have coped well with these. We want you to know that your teachers and the acting headteacher are coping well with them too and are working closely to improve your school further. Your acting headteacher has found ways to help you reach even higher standards and you may notice you have extra assessments to find out how well you are learning in the future. The governors are going to appoint someone to help her organise these changes.

We know you will continue to work hard and will do your bit to help your school become even better.

Our very best wishes to you and your teachers.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Moira Fitzpatrick and Mrs Ruth McFarlane

Inspectors