

St Margaret Mary Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112371
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	310868
Inspection date	6 March 2008
Reporting inspector	David Earley

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	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	226
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Joan Hadley
Headteacher	Mr John Myers
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2004
School address	Kirklands Road Carlisle Cumbria CA2 4JD
Telephone number	01228 607540
Fax number	01228 607541

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- progress in Key Stage 1
- the effectiveness of the curriculum in helping to raise standards
- the impact of leadership on the raising of standards.

Evidence was gathered from the observations of lessons, discussions with staff, pupils and governors; examining pupils' work, school assessment data and documentation including the school's self-evaluation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school serving an area of social deprivation. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is above average. Most pupils are of White British backgrounds. A small number of pupils learn English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school has achieved the Activemark and Investors in People awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good and improving school with some outstanding features. In a very short space of time the newly appointed headteacher has provided a clear vision for raising standards and improving provision, building on the existing good practice. He is well supported by his deputy, staff and governors who share a strong commitment to improve. One parent, speaking for many, commented, 'it's a fantastic school, it's like having another family.'

Achievement for all pupils, whatever their background or ability, is good. In 2007, standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 were significantly below average. Currently, pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1 and standards in Year 2 are higher and pupils are on track to reach average standards. Standards are rising because the quality of teaching and resources has improved and the introduction of teaching assistants has provided good support for pupils of all abilities. Results for Year 6 in 2007 were broadly average in English and mathematics and significantly above average in science. Current standards show a similar picture and indicate that pupils in Year 6 make good progress and are expected to reach average standards. At both key stages the progress of boys in reading and writing lags behind that of girls. Although the school has started to narrow the gap the impact of their actions is not yet showing success in test results.

Personal development is excellent. The confidence and self-esteem shown by pupils by the time they leave the school is exceptional. Relationships are excellent. Pupils are constantly reminded to take pride in themselves and in the work that they do. This has a positive impact on the progress they make. Pupils have a very good understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles. Attendance is average. Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school because learning is interesting and they feel safe and well cared for. Pupils have many excellent opportunities to accept responsibility and contribute to the local and wider community. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and reflects the school's very strong Christian values. There is a strong focus on developing skills in English and mathematics and, together with their increasing maturity pupils are very well prepared for the next stage in their education.

Teaching and learning are good and this is a significant factor in the good progress pupils make. Because pupils are increasingly involved in setting their own targets they have a good understanding of their own learning and this helps them to know how they can improve. Lessons are typically lively and interesting so that pupils are fully engaged in their tasks and want to learn. In the excellent teaching seen in Year 2, pupils became engrossed in improving their writing skills when one teacher adopted the role of a character in a story and another, working with lower ability pupils in the same class, very carefully rehearsed their inferential skills. In a similarly excellent lesson in Year 6 the teacher's outstanding subject knowledge, her relentless drive to raise standards and the pride which she and her pupils took in their work enabled them to identify and use exemplary features of good writing.

The curriculum is good. There is a good focus on the provision of practical experiences through visits and visitors which help to give a relevance to learning and deepen understanding. This is further extended by a good range of popular extra-curricular activities. There is a strong focus on literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, (ICT) although key skills such as problem solving and working with others are not used sufficiently well in all subjects. A particular strength of the curriculum lies in the provision of specialised movement lessons which help to develop learning as well as physical and emotional well-being. There are

good links with other schools and outside agencies, such as the local council and professional sports teams, to extend the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support are good. There is a very strong family atmosphere in school where every one is well known and highly valued. There are very close links with parents who are overwhelmingly supportive of the care and guidance provided by the school. The additional help provided for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the support for pupils who learn English as an additional language enable these pupils to progress at the same rate as their peers. Child protection, risk assessment and health and safety arrangements are fully implemented and government recommendations for safeguarding pupils are in place. Very effective assessment and tracking systems give teachers and pupils a very good understanding of what needs to be done in order to improve.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides strong leadership. Through a careful analysis of standards and provision he has identified areas for improvement and refinement which are helping the school to build on its existing strengths. The vision for improvement is shared by staff and governors so that they work well as a team. This leads to a caring and inclusive atmosphere with good achievement and excellent personal development. Evaluation of performance is realistic and development planning is clear and well prioritised. Many subject leaders are new to their positions and need more opportunities to extend their skills in monitoring what is happening in lessons so that they have a full picture of how to make improvements. Governance is good. Governors are very supportive and know the school well. Governors who are new to the role are developing their skills in holding the school to account for its performance. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection. Good leadership, a strong commitment to raise standards and a thorough and realistic appraisal of performance, gives the school a good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good. Children get off to a flying start because relationships are excellent and there are very close links with parents. This is enhanced by the happy and challenging surroundings in which children learn. When children enter the Foundation Stage their attainment is usually below what is typical for their age. Teaching is good and children make good progress and achieve well. By the time they start Year 1 many are working at the level expected for their age. The curriculum is stimulating. It is very well planned to give lots of practical experiences and to enable children to develop in confidence and independence. The school makes good use of visits to places in the locality such as, the bakers, florist and park in order to widen children's horizons and deepen their understanding. The Foundation Stage is well managed and the school plans to provide easier access to the outside areas for children in Reception in order to extend the curriculum.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the standards reached by boys in reading and writing.
- Provide more opportunities for subject leaders to monitor lessons to gain a clearer picture of how to further improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Improve the use of key skills, such as problem solving and working with others, to all subjects.

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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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	3
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	2

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?	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?	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 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	2
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

7 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Margaret Mary Catholic Primary School, Cumbria, CA2 4JD

You were very kind and helpful when I came to visit your school. Thank you very much. Your school is good and some parts are outstanding. I was very impressed with the way you know about the importance of lots of exercise and a healthy diet in helping to keep fit. I also think that the play leaders, buddies and school councillors do an excellent job in helping others and in trying to improve the school.

These are some of the things your school does well:

- lessons are interesting and your learning is good
- you have lots of visits and visitors and after-school clubs and this helps your learning
- teachers keep a good check on how well you are doing to help you to improve
- your school is very caring and you are well looked after
- your behaviour is excellent and you get on well with each other
- the school helps you to become extremely proud of yourselves and your work.

These are some of the things I have suggested to help the school to get even better:

- help many of the boys to improve their work in reading and writing
- teachers are going to visit classrooms more often to see how lessons can be improved even further
- you are going to learn more about how to work together and to solve problems in all the different subjects.

Thank you once again for your kindness and courtesy. I enjoyed sharing your enthusiasm for gardening and hope you have a good crop of vegetables this year.

Yours sincerely

David Earley

Lead inspector