

St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108840
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	324844
Inspection dates	11–12 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Margaret Shepherd

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)	463
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 Maureen Dale
Headteacher	Mr Sean Brown
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Meadowside Sunderland Tyne and Wear SR2 7QN
Telephone number	0191 5536087

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves an area with more favourable social and economic circumstances than usual. There are fewer pupils who are eligible for free school meals than average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is smaller than average, as is the proportion of pupils with English as an additional language. Fewer pupils than usual join or leave the school at other than normal times. There has been a change of headteacher since the previous inspection.

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. The headteacher is working hard to increase academic achievement, which is satisfactory. Personal development and well-being are good. Parents are positive about the school. A typical comment was, 'My children know that they're going to a friendly, safe place when I take them to school and they enjoy their education.'

Standards at the end of Year 2 in the 2008 national assessments were average and have been falling over time. This represents inadequate progress over Key Stage 1 because pupils enter Year 1 with standards that are above average. The school has increased the number of staff in these year groups with more focused teaching in group work. This has increased the rate of progress in Years 1 and 2, which is now satisfactory. Progress is satisfactory through Key Stage 2 but accelerates in Year 6 due to the good quality teaching and learning in this year group. By the end of Year 6 standards are above average. Although teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, part of the reason for the uneven progress is inconsistencies in quality. The pace in lessons varies considerably, as do the expectations of different teachers. The curriculum is satisfactory with good provision for sporting and creative clubs out of lessons. It does not consistently match the needs of different groups of pupils and in Years 1 and 2 there are not enough opportunities for practical learning, which is contributing to the slower progress.

Personal development and well-being are good because the care and support pupils receive is good. Pupils understand the importance of safe and healthy living and they enjoy their learning. Their behaviour is very good. They make positive contributions in their own school community and in the locality. The school council works well and councillors represent pupils' views effectively. The school action teams are enthusiastic and their work results in accolades, such as the Bronze Eco Award. Pupils' preparation for their future lives is satisfactory. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with particular strengths in their spirituality.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. A strength of the school is the educational vision of the headteacher and his determination to increase achievement. Middle managers monitor teaching and learning but do not identify areas for improvement well enough. Governance is satisfactory. The school has made satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection and has a satisfactory capacity to improve in future.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is satisfactory. It is good in the Nursery. Children enter the school with skills and knowledge that are above those typical for this age group. By the end of Reception standards overall are above average; they are higher in communication, language and literacy, but lower in mathematical development. This represents satisfactory achievement overall. Personal development is good and children make consistently good progress in both the Nursery and Reception in this area of learning. This is due to the very good relationships that staff establish with each other and the children, together with the good levels of welfare in both age groups. In Nursery, learning and development are consistently good with good quality planning focused clearly on learning across different groups of children. The teaching team in Reception have only just begun working together. They are both very enthusiastic and have made a good start in developing provision. Their new organisation of the four different learning bases is working well, with the outdoor learning area providing a

stimulating range of activities. They are now in a good position to provide different levels of challenge to match children's varying needs and to track their progress more closely in independent learning. Leadership and management are satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase achievement through the school in English, mathematics and science.
- Improve the consistency of teaching and learning particularly in raising expectations and increasing the pace in lessons.
- Match the curriculum more closely to different groups' needs and extend the range of practical learning in Key Stage 1.
- Improve the quality of the monitoring of teaching and learning by middle managers.

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. Pupils enter Year 1 with standards that are above average. Standards have been falling in Key Stage 1 over time and were average in the national assessments in 2008. The headteacher has been working hard to reverse this trend. There has been an increase in staffing in this key stage and more focused teaching of pupils in narrower ability groups. The inspection judges progress to be satisfactory. Progress in Key Stage 2 is satisfactory and increases to good in Year 6 due to the better quality teaching. Standards by the end of Year 6 are above average. This represents satisfactory progress overall from the starting point of the children in the Nursery where levels are above those typical for their age. Achievement of more able pupils, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and pupils with English as an additional language is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils have a good understanding of keeping safe and healthy and appreciate the increase in the number of sporting clubs. They enjoy their learning and have positive attitudes towards their work, settling down sensibly to listen to staff in lessons. Pupils make positive contributions to the community. The school council is particularly effective and plays an important part in making decisions. Governors appreciate their termly meetings, where councillors keep them informed of pupils' views. The school action group works well to extend pupils' understanding of the local environment and are justifiably proud to have won the Bronze Eco award. The headteacher's initiative in developing links with two African schools is beginning to extend pupils' awareness of the global community. Attendance is satisfactory. Behaviour is very good, with pupils working and playing harmoniously together. Pupils' preparation for their future lives is satisfactory. They develop a good understanding of handling money through their fundraising projects. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with spirituality being a strong feature through the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. They are inconsistent through the school. All staff manage behaviour well, which results in a positive context for learning. The pace in lessons varies considerably. In the best teaching there is a clear sense of urgency evident from the very beginning of the sessions and a strong focus on the learning objectives, whereas in other lessons the pace is too slow to provide consistent challenge. Teaching assistants are developing specific areas of expertise well and are enthusiastic about extending this further. Teachers' marking identifies the strengths of pupils' work effectively but does not consistently identify ways for pupils to improve in future. There are some good initiatives for pupils to evaluate their own work through using a traffic light system and this develops their understanding of their own learning well. Teachers' expectations of pupils' vary too much; whilst they are sometimes well matched to pupils' needs sometimes they are too low and do not move pupils' learning on.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets statutory requirements. The school is beginning to enrich the curriculum by extending the use of visits and visitors and using theme weeks. Pupils say that they enjoy these, for example when learning was based around mythical beasts. Opportunities are missed to develop the basics skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) in other subjects. The curriculum does not consistently match the needs of all groups of pupils, particularly the more able pupils and the over use of worksheets exacerbates this weakness. The recent initiatives to extend the curriculum for gifted and talented pupils are effective. The curriculum for personal development is good with the religious education programme providing very effective opportunities for developing spiritual awareness. For example, pupils in Year 6 wrote sensitive prayers for the people of Sunderland. The curriculum in Key Stage 1 does not include enough practical learning for pupils, with too much time spent on whole class discussion and on writing tasks. This is reducing the rate of progress in these year groups. The school's partnership with the church and the local community enriches the curriculum well, as does the increase in the number of clubs outside of lessons, which are very well attended.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, support and guidance are satisfactory. The school provides good quality care, personal guidance and support but academic guidance is satisfactory. Partnerships with others are good, particularly with parents. Parents appreciate the work of the school, particularly the headteacher's initiatives to raise standards and the information that is provided in the weekly newsletters. Safeguarding systems are in place, including child protection and risk assessments. The tracking system for academic progress ensures that the school sets challenging targets but the individual guidance for pupils is not consistent across the school. Children know what their curriculum targets are but do not understand how these relate to their daily work well enough in order to meet them. There are strong links with the secondary schools, which ensures that transition for pupils is smooth.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher sets a very clear educational direction to the work of the school and is determined to improve provision. He has brought in key improvements and sets challenging targets that are beginning to increase progress and raise standards. The middle managers carry out monitoring but are not rigorous enough in identifying key areas for improvement. Self-evaluation is satisfactory. The school is working well to extend community cohesion, particularly pupils' understanding of the global dimension, through the connecting classroom projects with Kenya and Zambia. Administrative systems are efficient. Governance is satisfactory. Governors know the community well. They are now in a good position to extend their involvement in monitoring the daily work of the school. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory and the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve in future.

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 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?	2
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	3

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**

15 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Sunderland, SR2 7QN

Thank you for being so very welcoming to us when we came to inspect your school. You were all so friendly and helpful in answering our questions. We are writing to let you know what we found out.

You go to a satisfactory school where the staff take good care of you. You get a good start in the Nursery and the staff in Reception are working hard to help you use all the different spaces for your learning. Overall you make satisfactory progress as you move through the school and that gets faster when you reach Year 6. We have asked your school to help you to achieve better, particularly in English, mathematics and science. We have asked some of your teachers to make the learning quicker in lessons and to expect you to do better when you carry out your activities. Your school is beginning to organise the curriculum in interesting ways, like the themed weeks you have had. We have asked teachers to make sure that the curriculum challenges every group well and in Years 1 and 2 that you have more practical tasks to do. You can do your best when these things happen.

Your personal development is good. You have a good understanding of how to keep safe and healthy. You told us how proud you are about your school council and your school action teams and we think you are right to feel that way. Your headteacher is working hard to make your school a better place. We have asked some of your other leaders to help identify ways of improving teaching and learning through the school. So when they ask you about your work, you can tell them what work is easy for you and what is hard.

Yours sincerely

Maggi Shepherd

Lead inspector