

St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114574
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	338406
Inspection dates	23–24 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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 of pupils on the school roll	211
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christopher Rowe
Headteacher	Jane Smith
Date of previous school inspection	2 September 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 12 lessons and an assembly, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' work, teachers' planning and assessment information, the school development plan and the arrangements for safeguarding children. In addition, 54 parental questionnaires were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- how well pupils are achieving in classes across the whole school
- the effectiveness of the school's strategies for improving standards in mathematics, particularly for girls
- the impact of the new curriculum in promoting pupils' enjoyment and progress.

Information about the school

The majority, about two-thirds, of the pupils in the school are from White British families and the remainder consist of several minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language has increased since the last inspection and is well above average. More pupils than is found nationally join or leave the school in year groups other than Reception. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average covering a broad range of needs. At the time of the inspection, the Reception class was not full as children join the Early Years Foundation Stage on a staged approach throughout September. The deputy headteacher has recently taken up the post which had been vacant for two years. Since the last inspection, the school has achieved ActiveMark, Healthy School, Eco-School, International School, School Travel Plan and Dyslexia Friendly awards.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary is a good school where pupils achieve well and get off to a good start to their education. The school has built well on the sound foundations and existing strengths when it was last inspected to bring about further improvements in most aspects of its work. Staff and governors have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and development needs and how initiatives have impacted on pupils' progress and well-being. They use this knowledge well to plan for future development, aiding the school's good capacity for ongoing improvement. One of the school's greatest successes is the outstanding level of welfare and guidance it gives to pupils. Staff and pupils are rightly proud to be part of the school.

The key strengths of the school are:

- Pupils reach average levels in their work because they make good progress through the school, which has been the pattern for several years. Pupils therefore do well, since their attainment when they join is below the expectations for their age.
- Pupils are very positive about the school and enjoy learning because of the interesting, themed curriculum which effectively combines in-depth subject study while developing pupils' basic skills.
- Parents agree that their children are safe in school. Pupils have an excellent understanding of their own and others' safety and of how to live healthily.
- The school's ethos is based firmly on its faith status, and the consistency in high quality care by all adults contributes very well to pupils' personal development.
- Pupils who are at risk are cared for and supported exceptionally well and are fully included within the school's caring and supportive ethos: staff use links with external agencies to develop their expertise and develop areas of the school, such as setting up the 'Sanctuary' to give additional support for vulnerable pupils.
- The successful development of the school is a result of the strong leadership of the headteacher in ensuring that there is a shared understanding of where improvements can be made and how they can be achieved.

Staff are keen to build upon the good teaching and make it even better. There are plans in place for teachers to improve consistency across the school by sharing best practice further. Senior leaders agree that pupils are not always clear about what they are expected to do or how some adults can support pupils' learning, and also agree that teachers' marking has weaknesses.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding lessons to accelerate pupils'

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progress by:

- sharing best practice across the school
- making it clear to pupils exactly what they are expected to learn
- giving all groups of pupils tasks which build more effectively on what they already know and can do
- maximising teaching assistants' help by ensuring that they are fully involved throughout the whole lesson
- making sure that pupils have understood their teacher's guidance by giving them opportunities to check that they have mastered the required skill or knowledge referred to in marking.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' positive attitude to school helps them to achieve well academically and also prepares them well for the next stage of their education. Standards in the Year 6 national tests have been in line with national averages since the last inspection and, in 2009, they improved in mathematics, which had not been as strong as English and science. This represents good progress from pupils' starting points at the end of Year 2, where standards reached are a little below national averages.

Key features of pupils' outcomes:

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate	
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms	
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The school's involvement with a national programme to develop its creative curriculum, through use of 'learning journeys', has resulted in a more interesting curriculum taught more effectively than when the school was last inspected. The advice and support for all pupils are excellent, link well to the school's Catholic ethos and extend pupils' insights into the wider world. The school works extremely well with outside agencies to develop its own capacity and to bring in additional expertise to ensure that pupils are given the support they need to remove possible barriers to their learning.

Key features of provision:

- The vast majority of lessons observed were good or better.
- Most lessons promote a good pace, making good use of modern technology and practical resources.
- Teamwork between teachers and other adults in lessons is good, but sometimes teaching assistants' skills are not fully utilised by involving them throughout the whole lesson.
- Most, but not all, lessons identify clearly for pupils exactly what they are learning, often through learning intentions to guide pupils' efforts.
- Marking is detailed and gives pupils good guidance on how to improve; however, they are not always given follow-up activities to practise skills identified for improvement.
- The good links forged between subjects makes learning and the practice of basic skills interesting for pupils; the school's development of its new curriculum has a further two years to run to capitalise even more fully on this approach.
- One of the needs of a few pupils joining the school is to strengthen their English and the school provides well for them through its links with the local authority services and its own resources.
- The school has excellent expertise in identifying individual need and uses this effectively to plan its provision; for example, the breakfast club and a wide range of specific programmes effectively develop pupils' social skills and emotional resilience.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1
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How effective are leadership and management?

Leadership at all levels, including headteacher, deputy headteacher and curriculum leaders, is very focused and is effectively improving the progress made by pupils. The school's self-evaluation is honest and accurate. It is used well to set challenging targets for the future and focus development on action to achieve them. Leaders recognise that there is more to be done to iron out inconsistencies, for example in teaching, to bring all practice up to the standard of the best.

Other key features of leadership and management include the following:

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children begin the Reception class with a wide range of pre-school experiences. A few children begin with little or no English. Overall, children's skills are generally below those normally found for their ages, with some children having particular weaknesses in communication and language skills. The information held by the school shows that in previous years, children made good progress in all their areas of learning although overall standards by the time children join Year 1 remained below average in most years, especially in the development of early literacy skills.

Key features of the Early Years Foundation Stage:

- The gradual introduction of children into the Reception class successfully enables

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them to adjust to their new surroundings because adults give each child the individual attention needed to learn new routines.

- There is a good range of activities for pupils to develop their own interests through play and activities led by adults; the close links with parents help staff to understand children's development when they join and staff build well on this knowledge to take their learning forward quickly.
- Children who speak English as an additional language make good progress in developing their English because of the additional support provided.
- The focus on developing children's literacy skills, through letters and sounds and introducing a cursive handwriting script, proved effective last year; already this year, some children choose writing activities for themselves, for example when making notes on clipboards outside.
- Adults take great care of the children so that Reception is a happy and secure environment.
- The outdoor area has been developed well since the last inspection to provide good opportunities for children to learn outside, and there are plans to extend the accommodation indoors to make it even more conducive to learning.
- The aspect is well led and managed across this stage and Key Stage 1, leading to a smooth transition into Year 1, although the school has identified that more could be done to ensure that approaches to learning and personal development are more closely co-ordinated.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The large majority of parents regard positively the school and their children's progress and well-being, and almost all say that their children enjoy school. A few parents made specific supportive comments, emphasising the school's strong caring ethos, the focus on art and creative activities in the curriculum, and the strength of the headteacher's leadership. A very small minority of the parents indicated that they were unhappy with the way the school deals with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors found that behaviour is good in lessons and around the school, and that the behaviour of pupils with identified difficulties is managed well by adults so that it does not disrupt the learning of others. A few commented on their children's particular needs, the progress made and communication. All these issues formed part of the discussions with the school are

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commented on positively in the report.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 54 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 211 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	23	55	18	43	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	27	64	15	36	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	16	38	25	60	1	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	16	38	23	54	3	7	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	17	41	23	55	2	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	16	38	25	60	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	16	38	23	55	3	7	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	16	38	23	55	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	15	36	22	52	4	10	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	17	41	15	36	8	19	2	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	26	24	57	5	11	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	21	50	19	45	1	2	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	24	57	17	41	1	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



25 September 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School, St Leonards-on-Sea TN37 6UE

Thank you for being so helpful and friendly when we visited your school recently. You told us a lot about the school when we talked to you and want to let you know what we found out.

Yours is a good school where you feel happy and secure.

- We were impressed by your good behaviour which helps to give your school its special ethos.
- You are doing well in lessons because your teachers know you well and plan interesting things for you to do in your learning journeys.
- The staff take excellent care of you and those of you who need extra help are supported very well.
- Many of the older pupils take on extra responsibilities to make sure that everyone is involved. This helps you all to feel very safe.
- You have an excellent understanding of how to lead healthy lives and you help by gardening or as 'eco' club members.

The headteacher and the staff run the school well and have plans to make it even better in the future. We think they should make sure of the following:

- You understand exactly what you are learning.
- Teaching assistants help you through the whole lessons and not just in group work.
- You have activities to follow up on suggestions about how your work could be improved.

We hope that you all have a good year ahead. Remember that you can help by telling your teachers if your work is too hard or too easy, and keep up the good work.

Helen Hutchings

Lead inspector

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