

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Old Mill Lane, Marnhull, Sturminster Newton, DT10 1JX

Inspection dates 19–20 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Since the last inspection the headteacher has rigorously and successfully addressed the quality of teaching, assessment and the curriculum.
- There have been significant changes to staffing. Teaching is now good in almost all lessons and outstanding in some and meets the needs of all groups of pupils. As a result progress is improving rapidly and attainment is rising especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2.
- By Year 6, pupils make good progress in reading and writing and standards are above average. They make the expected progress in mathematics, and attainment is average but it is not yet as good as in English
- Pupils feel very safe and are very well cared for. They are well behaved and keen to come to school because the new curriculum is full of exciting learning opportunities. Consequently attendance has improved.
- The headteacher's robust leadership and the strong partnership she has forged with the new deputy headteacher are drawing together an effective staff team committed to the vision for further improvement.
- The new governing body is challenging the school to develop rapidly and is supporting the headteacher well in making the necessary changes.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- There has not yet been time for the good and outstanding teaching to secure for all pupils the progress of which they are capable, especially the more able.
- Teachers do not ensure that pupils take pride in their work and present it to a high standard.
- Attainment and progress in mathematics are hampered by low mental mathematics skills and insufficient use of practical equipment in lessons.
- There are not enough opportunities for pupils to practise their mathematical skills in other subjects.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited nine lessons and observed five teachers. She also talked to pupils about their work and heard pupils read, including individual pupils from Years 2, 3, 4 and 6.
- A wide range of documents were scrutinised, including systems for checking progress, records relating to behaviour and attendance, safeguarding procedures, the school's self-evaluation and planning for improvement. Records of monitoring the quality of teaching and the minutes of governing body meetings were also examined.
- The inspector looked at samples of pupils' work across a range of subjects and ages.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing body, school staff and groups of pupils. Individual pupils were spoken to in lessons and around the school. A meeting took place with the school adviser from the local authority.
- Questionnaires from seven members of staff were analysed. The inspector took account of the views expressed by parents and carers in 15 responses to the online questionnaire Parent View, a letter from a parent or carer and comments during informal meetings with parents and carers before school.

Inspection team

Anna Sketchley, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mary's is a smaller than average-sized primary school. Pupils attend from the local area. All pupils are taught in mixed-age classes.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils, those with special educational needs supported at school action plus and those with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (which provides additional funding for children in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils with a parent or carer in the armed services) is average.
- There are a small number of pupils from ethnic minority groups, a very small minority of whom are in the early stages of learning English.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- There are breakfast and after-school clubs run by the governing body.
- There has been a very high turnover of teaching staff and a new governing body since September 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or outstanding in all classes by:
 - sharing the outstanding practice that already exists within the school
 - developing more strategies to extend more-able pupils
 - ensuring that pupils take a pride in their work and present it to a high standard.
- Improve attainment and progress in mathematics so that they are as good as in English by:
 - improving pupils' mental mathematics skills
 - ensuring that appropriate practical equipment is provided to support pupils' mathematical understanding
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to practise their mathematical skills in other subjects.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Most children join the school with the levels of knowledge and skills expected for their age, although in some aspects of language, literacy and mathematics skills are below expected levels.
- Reception children make good progress because teaching is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. This is built upon in Years 1 and 2 and because of continuously outstanding teaching the progress of these pupils is now rapid and attainment is above average.
- Letters and sounds are taught effectively and pupils benefit from being taught daily in small groups according to their needs across the infant years. As a result all pupils use their knowledge well to sound out and spell words for their reading and writing.
- By Year 6 standards in English are above average. The school is building a strong reading culture with a good selection of books. The introduction of reading journals requires pupils to complete a wide variety of books. Pupils enjoy reading and competently use the strategies they have been taught to tackle unfamiliar words. They make good progress and by Year 6 they read with fluency and expression and readily discuss various authors and books.
- The school realises that the teaching of mathematics is not as good as that of English and this is affecting achievement. Pupils do not practise their mental mathematics skills enough and in some lessons teachers do not use practical equipment to help pupils understand difficult concepts.
- However, the recent appointment of an experienced mathematics teacher is already making a difference. The whole school enthusiastically took part in a challenging number song at the end of assembly to improve their skills. Years 5 and 6 pupils, especially a small group of those more able, made rapid progress when learning about negative numbers because of outstanding teaching.
- Although there are currently too few opportunities for pupils to practise their number skills across other subjects, improvements to the curriculum since the last inspection are capturing pupils' interest, especially for boys. Exciting topics present pupils with a carefully planned reason for talking and writing. The first day of the inspection was very lively as the whole school took part in a 'Pirate Day' during which the headteacher was dramatically captured. Pupils made good progress because they were offered a stimulating way to improve their writing skills as they learnt to sequence their writing correctly while using adventurous language.
- St Marys is a very inclusive school where all pupils are warmly welcomed. Pupils whose circumstances might make them vulnerable, those who are disabled or who have special educational needs and those who are at the early stages of learning English are very well supported. A system of one-to-one help from a teacher as well as very small learning groups and well-trained teaching assistants is ensuring that these pupils make similar progress from their starting points as all other pupils.
- Interventions and staff training for pupils eligible for pupil premium funding, such as support for emotional health and well-being and small-group work to learn key skills in reading and writing, are enhancing provision. Pupils' progress is at the two levels expected between Years 2 and 6 and their attainment is similar to that of all other pupils. Consequently there is no gap between their achievement and that of all other pupils.
- Older pupils do not show sufficient pride in the presentation of their work and it is often untidy.

The quality of teaching**is good**

- The high level of respect and very good relationships between pupils and their teachers create a very positive climate for learning. Pupils are attentive, concentrate well and work hard, which contributes considerably to their good progress.
- Teachers ensure that pupils develop their social skills well by giving them many opportunities to work together, discussing ideas with their talk partners and supporting each other in their learning.
- Since the last inspection teachers have received significant training in the use of assessment and this is now used successfully in most lessons to plan challenging tasks for different groups of pupils.
- Teachers make it very clear to pupils what they are going to learn in the lesson and give them good guidance as to how they can check their learning for themselves as the lesson progresses.
- Rather than relying on 'hands up', teachers often target pupils with particular questions, skilfully checking and probing understanding. This enables teachers to assess the level of pupils' knowledge and move the lesson on at a good pace.
- Very occasionally, where teaching and learning are less successful it is because teachers either plan lessons that are over complicated or because tasks are insufficiently challenging. This results in pupils not making as much progress as they could.
- Marking is a particular strength. Teachers follow the marking policy consistently and tell pupils very clearly how to improve their work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**are good**

- Pupils get on very well together and older pupils really enjoy the responsibility of looking after younger pupils in the dining room at lunchtime. They take a pride in other jobs around the school such as answering the telephone and attending to the music in assembly.
- These opportunities are a part of the excellent provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. Cultural development is less well provided for and as a result pupils do not have a full enough understanding of the different cultures that make up modern Britain today.
- There has been one short, fixed-term exclusion since the last inspection and incidents of bad behaviour or bullying are extremely rare. Pupils are well behaved and polite in lessons, around the school and in the playground. Comments from pupils, parents and carers fully support this view.
- Anti-bullying weeks and internet safety training are good examples of the way in which the school ensures that pupils have a thorough understanding of the different types of bullying and how to deal with them should the need arise. Pupils are very clear about to whom they should go if they experience a problem and they know they will be listened to.

The leadership and management**are good**

- Since her appointment two years ago the headteacher has demonstrated extremely determined leadership following a period of exceptional turbulence for the school.
- Since the last inspection, a new senior leadership team and a new, supportive but challenging governing body has been established. Everyone is now working extremely well with the headteacher and all are fully committed to raising achievement further.
- The headteacher has taken swift action to eradicate underperformance in the quality of teaching. Her exceptional skills, with some support from the local authority, have secured good

improvement since the last inspection.

- Using the national teaching standards the headteacher has managed teachers' performance rigorously. Identification of individual and whole school professional development needs is providing focused training.
- New methods for assessing progress help teachers accurately plan pupils' next steps in learning.
- Rigorous monitoring of all aspects of its work has ensured that the school knows exactly what must be done next to secure further improvement. Three appropriate priorities with very clear action plans are driving forward developments.
- Previous initiatives have successfully brought about good progress and rising attainment for pupils, especially in reading and writing. Improvement has been rapid in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Years 1, 2 and 3.
- All of these measures demonstrate that the school has a very good capacity for further improvement.
- The creative way of teaching pupils the skills they need to learn in different subjects is significantly enhanced by visits and visitors. Pupils talk animatedly of their memorable experiences such as the 'Horrid History' topic and their visit to a local wild animal park.
- Learning is also enriched by a good variety of clubs such as sports and music. Parents and carers are very appreciative of the safe, calm and enjoyable breakfast and after-school care the school offers.
- The new sports funding is being particularly well used to ensure, among other activities, that all pupils learn to swim.
- There are very productive partnerships with other schools, the local community and the church and external agencies, all of whom support pupils' learning and development well.
- Equal opportunities for different groups of pupils are promoted well and the school does not tolerate any form of discrimination. The governing body and the school staff ensure that safeguarding procedures are followed rigorously and all requirements are fully met.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The new governing body has worked hard to develop a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They have undertaken a significant amount of training to ensure that they fully understand their role. They are involved both strategically and operationally and monitor the work of the school closely, undertaking observations, analysing data and asking challenging questions about pupils' achievement. They receive detailed information about teacher's performance and pay progression and ensure that the headteacher's performance is rigorously assessed through annual objectives. Governors carry out their statutory duties very diligently, especially those related to safeguarding. They are well informed about the use of the pupil premium and its impact on the progress of more vulnerable pupils.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors. A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.

School details

Unique reference number	113825
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	426750

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	61
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Co Chairs Tricia Blyth and Nicola Tarling
Headteacher	Angela Herrera
Date of previous school inspection	January 2012
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