



St Mark's RC Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105956
Local Authority Salford
Inspection number 277452
Inspection dates 22–23 November 2006
Reporting inspector John Coleman HMI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Queensway
School category	Voluntary aided		Clifton, Swinton
Age range of pupils	3–11		Manchester, Lancashire
			M27 8QE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0161 7943876
Number on roll (school)	233	Fax number	0161 9211124
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Philip Royle
		Headteacher	Mr M Platt
Date of previous school inspection	16 October 2000		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3–11	22–23 November 2006	277452

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves the community of Pendlebury and the parish of St Mark's. It is oversubscribed. There is considerable variance in the composition of year groups by gender. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is about average. The vast majority of pupils are White British.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Mark's is an outstanding school. It is a happy place where pupils greatly enjoy learning and take pride in their achievements. The quality of education in the Foundation Stage is good. The staff provide excellent role models and expect high standards. Pupils respond very positively to the school's provision. They are enthusiastic learners who are polite, respectful and considerate. They make extremely good progress and reach very high academic standards.

In lessons across the school pupils show excellent levels of concentration and interest. This is due to the very high quality of teaching. As a result, although many pupils begin school with skills which are below average, they make outstanding progress so that standards are well above average in English, mathematics and science by the time they leave Year 6. Pupils in a Year 5 mathematics lesson are a good illustration of the strengths in teaching: they were engrossed as the teacher adopted a fun and lively style. The pace of learning was unrelenting and pupils smiled as they succeeded: they told the inspector, 'We enjoy maths very much because the teacher plays games, makes it interesting and helps us to understand. She quickly helps us if we don't understand.'

The school successfully delivers a curriculum which effectively develops a high level of basic skills in literacy and numeracy. There are themed weeks to enrich the curriculum such as an 'arts week' which was taking place during the inspection. The curriculum does not consistently provide appealing and interesting experiences to stretch and challenge the abilities of all pupils in all subjects. Computer facilities have been much improved and heavily invested in by the school. Teachers use them to good effect in lessons.

Assessment systems are rigorous and, as a result of excellent monitoring of pupil's attainment, provide very good information about their progress. The school targets the expectations of pupils' performance in a systematic way which places high expectations on all. Senior staff have an accurate overview of the school's performance and this is shared by governors. These systems are instrumental in the school improving standards to a level which demonstrates sustained excellence. Targets for what pupils should achieve are communicated to parents and pupils are knowledgeable about these.

The school council has a positive impact on developments as shown in their determination in purchasing benches and playground equipment at the request of their classmates. Pupils' positive contribution to the community is seen in the many fundraising events which support charitable causes such as Children in Need and St Joseph's Penny. Pupils develop as mature confident young people with high self esteem. This is no surprise since everyone who works in the school is totally committed to achieving this. Pupils feel safe and are able to turn to someone if they need help. They are developing healthy lifestyles aided by their school which has taken over the running of school meals to improve healthy choices. Lunchtime staff are passionate in encouraging pupils to eat and drink sensibly.

Parents overwhelmingly view the school highly. Inspectors received many responses from parents which are typified by these two comments, 'Fantastic, I think that sums up everything about the school and 'Brilliant.great job, I wouldn't want my child to be taught anywhere else.'

Superlative remarks from parents, children, governors and the local authority are the result of sustained and outstanding leadership from the headteacher and staff. Improvements have been achieved in many areas, standards have risen significantly and pupils' achievement is amongst the best in the country. Since the last inspection improvement is first class and the school gives outstanding value for money. The capacity of the school to make further improvement is excellent.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the curriculum engages pupils by activities that consistently develops and stretches them and appeals to their interest.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Most pupils enter Nursery with skills which are below those found nationally, especially in communication, language and literacy. In Nursery and Reception they make good progress so that by the end of the Foundation Stage standards are average. Pupils' progress in Key Stage 1 is good and they achieve above average standards by the end of Year 2. During Key Stage 2 pupils make exceptional progress and standards are well above average in English, mathematics and science by the end of this key stage. Standards in Year 6 have remained very high in recent years when test results show the school consistently in the top 5% nationally. From a low starting point this represents outstanding achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well being are excellent. From the moment pupils enter the Nursery the school does its utmost to develop their social skills and is very successful in this. Strong positive relationships are coupled with pupils' exemplary behaviour and attitudes. They are courteous and well-mannered, showing respect to each other and adults. Within the school's safe, happy and caring atmosphere all pupils achieve exceptionally well and make outstanding progress in acquiring the numeracy, literacy and social skills which will help in later life. The prefects take their role seriously, assisting in the smooth running of the school. Pupils' attendance is above the national average and their punctuality is good. The enthusiasm for sporting activities demonstrates pupils' very good awareness of healthy living. Pupils are encouraged to choose healthy food at break and lunch times.

Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is excellent. They are sensitive to inequalities and respect each other's views. The school's link, through fund raising

activities, with the Magadi Mission in Kenya further raises awareness of other cultures. The pupils take pride and interest in their well presented work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding overall, though stronger in Key Stage 2 than earlier in the school. In the Foundation Stage good teaching is based upon a strong understanding of how young children learn best. Good preparation and planning mean that activities are well matched to the needs of every child. In Key Stage 1 teaching is also good, with a firm focus on providing differentiated activities which cater for the widening range of pupil's abilities and interests. Outstanding teaching in Key Stage 2 is due to the teachers' very high expectations of what pupils can achieve. A high level of pupils' interaction in their learning stems from engaging and stimulating teaching which enthuses pupils with a desire to learn. In all lessons seen by inspectors there were very strong and warm relationships between teachers and pupils and behaviour was excellent. Teachers consistently use the results of pupil's assessments to inform the next steps in their learning. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively in lessons by all teachers to deliver pupils' learning experiences.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum, which is well balanced, matches pupils' needs and interests well and fully meets statutory requirements. Pupils find the curriculum enjoyable. Good provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT is enhanced by thorough assessments and clear targets for improvement.

In the Foundation Stage much work has been done recently to create an environment in which there is an equal balance of teacher directed and child chosen activities. The outdoor area greatly enhances the quality of learning and is used very effectively. Throughout the school themed weeks, such as 'Arts Week', 'Poetry' and 'Multi Faith Week' enable pupils to study topics in greater depth. The school has good plans to develop more links across subjects and to provide more learning experiences to stretch pupils of all abilities.

In several subjects learning is enriched by exciting visits out of school, such as to Ordsall Hall and Crucial Crew. These offer added dimensions to pupils work in these subjects and in personal, social and health education. The variety of stimulating visitors such as The Music and Performing Arts Service adds to this provision. The school offers a wide range of sporting extra curricular activities but needs to expand opportunities in other areas.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Provision for pupils care, guidance and support is outstanding. 'St Mark's is a friendly and caring school', sums up many parents' views. Pupils feel secure and are closely supervised, both in and out of school, with risk assessments conducted whenever needed. Child protection requirements and health and safety procedures are firmly established and understood by all staff. Procedures for settling new pupils into school, and on transfer to secondary school, are very good. Almost all pupils transfer to the same secondary school. Parents and carers feel welcome in the school. The school takes excellent care of its pupils. They trust the staff and know who to turn to if they are troubled.

A noteworthy feature is the academic guidance pupils receive. Through the process of marking and the setting of targets all pupils are challenged and supported to go further in their learning. The comments made by teachers clearly explain what the pupil has achieved and what needs to be done to improve. Pupils have many opportunities for self assessment. The system for interpreting data, setting targets and tracking progress is excellent.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. High expectations from the leadership and management team are evident in every subject and across all key stages. The headteacher and deputy head provide an outstanding steer in a truly collaborative partnership. All contributions from staff are highly valued. Under this very effective leadership team subject managers are extremely productive in their monitoring role. They provide very good evaluative reports to inform governors and senior staff about pupils' standards and plans for development and improvement. Communication systems are strong and support a staff culture of teamwork focused on pupils' wellbeing and raising their academic attainment. Governance is excellent and the governing body is led by a chair who has an exceptional knowledge of educational issues. The governing body is well informed by the reports and presentations from school staff. There are good links between individual governors and subject managers. Governors visit the school regularly and they successfully monitor its progress first hand, in order to challenge the school effectively where appropriate. The school's self-evaluation is a very accurate reflection of its strengths and areas for improvement with which inspectors agree.

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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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

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 behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
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?	1

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

Following our visit to your school we would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome and for talking to us about your experiences. We would like to tell you what we found out about your school.

- Pupils and parents told us that St Mark's is a fantastic school and we agree.
- You all work hard and are very well behaved.
- Teaching is excellent.
- Your headteacher and all the staff want the very best for you and are very successful in achieving this.
- Governors get involved in school: they know what is really good and what could be improved.
- You make excellent progress and, by the time you are ready for secondary school, you reach high standards in your work.
- You very much enjoy being at school.
- You told us you feel safe in school and that staff are approachable, caring and helpful. We agree.
- We have asked the school to improve the range of interesting activities in lessons so that you are challenged to achieve even more highly.

Thank you for helping us so much with the inspection of your school. We hope you will carry on enjoying learning and helping your teachers to make St Mark's Roman Catholic Primary School a fantastic school.