

St Margaret Mary Catholic Primary School

Kirklands Road, Upperby, Carlisle, Cumbria, CA2 4JD

Inspection dates 16–17 April 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Good teaching and effective help in lessons enable all pupils to achieve well. Disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and those supported by pupil premium funding do as well as other pupils.
- In lessons and around school, pupils' behaviour is outstanding. All are eager to learn and are considerate, polite and friendly. Their highly positive attitudes are supported by their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The headteacher's crystal clear vision of just how successful the school can be is shared by governors and staff, who are all keen to improve.
- Together, senior leaders have ensured that the quality of teaching and learning has improved since the previous inspection.
- The good curriculum and interesting range of first-hand experiences meet the wide range of pupils' abilities and needs well.
- Senior leaders are increasingly assured and have a clear-cut grasp of school performance, because their checking systems are rigorous and accurate.
- Excellent relationships with parents make a highly positive contribution to their children's learning and development.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough outstanding teaching to sustain rapid progress and high achievement over time. Teaching does not always make certain that tasks for more-able pupils are hard enough or make them think sufficiently for themselves.
- Sometimes, opportunities are missed to use questioning to prompt and test pupils' thinking. Teachers' comments in books do not always provide clear steps for further improvement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 18 lessons of which five were joint observations with the headteacher. In addition, inspectors made a number of short visits to lessons and walks around the school site to check the quality of what is provided for pupils.
- Inspectors held discussions with: pupils, parents, members of the governing body, school staff, including senior leaders and those with responsibilities such as the leadership of a key stage and subjects, a local authority general adviser and the school Peer-to-Peer Support partner.
- Inspectors took account of the 41 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View).
- Inspectors observed the school's work and examined a range of documentation including the school's own records of pupils' current progress, records from the observation of lessons and checking of pupils' work and the school's improvement planning. Records relating to complaints, behaviour and attendance and documents relating to safeguarding were also taken into consideration.

Inspection team

Clive Petts, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Mark Hilton

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St. Margaret Mary is an average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly half the national average.
- Currently, an above average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding (which is provided by the government to support the learning of pupils who are entitled to free school meals, in the care of the local authority or the children of members of the armed forces).
- The large majority of pupils are White British. A few are from minority ethnic groups with none at an early stage of learning to speak English. A very few children are from travellers of Irish heritage. Higher-than-average proportions of pupils join or leave the school at other than the normal time.
- The school works in close collaboration with local schools and is currently participating with a local school in a Peer-to-Peer Support local authority partnership initiative.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
 - making certain that thought-provoking teaching methods enable more able pupils to think hard for themselves and ensure practical tasks are set at the correct level of demand
 - expecting even more of the quality of pupils' writing, especially in their creative and expressive extended writing
 - using questions to excite and stretch pupils' thinking and check what they know and can do
 - ensuring teachers' written comments in books make it clear just how pupils can improve the quality of their work quickly
 - making it clear to teachers how they can improve the quality of pupils' learning to ensure their rapid progress and high achievement.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start Nursery with skills much lower than those typical for their age. A significant proportion of pupils have underdeveloped speech, language, social and emotional skills. Children settle quickly and confidently on arrival in the happy, friendly and caring atmosphere.
- In both Nursery and Reception, children display good levels of concentration and develop excellent self-control for their age. A broad range of activities challenge children to think and work independently. As a result, they make good progress working towards the goals expected of them for their age.
- Pupils continue to make good, and occasionally rapid, progress in Years 1 to 6. Rates of progress in reading, writing and mathematics are accelerating and at times progress is rapid because teaching is increasingly challenging. By the end of Year 2, standards are broadly average for their age and at the end of Year 6 marginally above average in English and mathematics overall. In reading and mathematics, standards are higher than in writing.
- Currently, pupils in Years 5 and 6 are making brisk progress in English and mathematics. Increasing proportions are on course to exceed what is expected of them. Yet, opportunities are sometimes missed to challenge more-able pupils to work at an even higher level. For example, their extended writing skills are not developed with as much expression as they could be.
- Those pupils with disabilities, such as hearing impairment, and those with special educational needs also make the same good progress, because their needs are well understood by staff. Despite the frequent checking of pupils' progress, pupils' needs are not always precisely enough pinpointed when planning their work and lesson activity.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to add to the richness of learning. For example, it provides additional teaching, making use of the recently appointed Home School Link Worker and enables eligible pupils to take part in residential experiences. Although pupils were two terms behind in reading and writing at the end of Year 6 in 2012, current Year 6 progress information shows that gaps are closing quickly. In mathematics, Year 6 pupils are two terms ahead with current Year 5 on track to attain at least as well as their classmates.
- The excellent working relationships with families, including those traveller families, ensure that parents are increasingly involved in their children's development.
- Staff work hard to ensure that all pupils are involved and included and make intervention effective so that all pupils can achieve success equally well.
- Vitality is added to lessons by joining subjects together in interesting ways. For example reflecting on the plight of young workers in Victorian times, such as when a child worker travels in a cage down a dark mine shaft for the first time, soon after losing his dad in a mining accident. Despite the rich learning experiences that are provided for pupils, opportunities are not taken full advantage of to apply and practise their skills across all subjects.
- Good progress is made fostering a love of reading for pupils of all ages. Skills at the age of six are below those expected for their age nationally and although pupils are increasingly fluent, their skills linking of letters and sounds together to make sense of new words are not always consistently used. Older pupils in Year 6 talk animatedly about their favourite authors, such as when reading the books of Charles Dickens to add to their insights into Victorian life. Their skills are above average for their age.

The quality of teaching is good

- Almost all teaching is good with elements of thought-provoking and inspiring practice that enable pupils to achieve really well. Staff work tirelessly to encourage every pupil to work hard. This results in high levels of enjoyment with staff enjoying excellent relationships with pupils in the friendly and cheerful atmosphere in classrooms.
- A broad range of first-hand experiences help to develop pupils' skills well, although opportunities

are sometimes missed to increase the range of problem solving challenges and investigations in active and practical ways.

- Progress is more rapid and sustained when:
 - pupils are well aware of what they are going to learn
 - thoughtfully planned tasks closely match individual abilities and interests and continuously build on past learning
 - methods encourage pupils to think critically, work things out for themselves and write creatively and accurately
 - pupils are inspired to use their skills to make decisions in response to thought-provoking tasks.
- In those lessons in which progress is a little uneven:
 - activities are not always closely enough shaped to the abilities and needs of each pupil, especially those of the more-able
 - teachers' explanations and commentaries last too long, questioning is not thought-provoking enough and the more-able pupils mark time
 - insufficient opportunities are provided for pupils to tackle tasks in practical and active ways
 - written feedback in books does not provide well-defined steps for rapid improvement.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children are provided with a good range of opportunities to explore and find things out for themselves. Adults provide highly effective care and support, particularly for those potentially vulnerable children.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The excellent staff role models, exceptional care and support and clear boundaries for their conduct make certain that all pupils feel happy and safe. All parents and carers agree. Consequently, pupils arrive promptly, settle quickly, remain on task for lengthy periods in lessons and work hard.
- The exemplary behaviour of pupils is reflected in their considerate and kind relationships with each other. The mutual respect between adults and pupils is evident throughout the school day. Pupils report that 'adults teach them to be good'. The happy and cheerful breakfast club provides a positive, calm start to the day. All parents indicate highly positive views of behaviour in school.
- Pupils report that bullying 'hardly ever occurs' and that adults are always on hand and take time to resolve any worries or concerns individual pupils may have. Pupils are well-informed about risk and danger and understand how to keep themselves safe, such as when using new technology.
- Break and lunchtimes are well-supervised with sensible and safety-conscious attitudes actively encouraged. Pupils take great pride contributing to school improvement, such as helping to decide school rules. They thrive on the responsibilities that they are given, for example when older pupils listen to Reception children read. The school has worked hard to improve attendance which is consistently above average.
- Individual pupils whose needs are complex are extremely well supported. This includes effective collaborative working with specialist support agencies.

The leadership and management are good

- Since his appointment, the highly effective headteacher has ensured that all aspects of what the school provides have improved. The reflective and self-critical approaches of senior leaders make certain the school is constantly adding to the quality of pupils' learning. As a result, rates of progress are accelerating and achievement is rising.
- The staff are a tightly-knit, hard-working team. Those with responsibilities are developing their expertise and skills confidently. Overall, teaching is well led and managed. This includes effective

support of those newly qualified staff. Staff performance is closely monitored with targets for improvement linked to incentives and rewards.

- Well-thought out staff training programmes include the use of local authority know-how and expertise in the network of local schools. Despite this, teachers are occasionally a little unclear as to how they can make learning even more inspiring and exciting.
- Rigorous systems are now in place to check pupils' progress and development. Any slips or gaps in learning are quickly identified and the action taken to put them right is sharply targeted and effective. Opportunities are sometimes missed to match activities even more closely to individual needs.
- The interesting curriculum provides a variety of motivating experiences for pupils. Their personal development is exceptionally well catered for, such as providing residential experiences for older pupils. Imaginative methods inspire pupils, such as when the class question the feelings of a pupil who has taken on the role of Jack or his foe, the giant. However, there are times when opportunities are missed to develop and celebrate pupils' creative writing more and practise their literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects.
- The quality of school life is enhanced by a wide range of visits, visitors, school clubs, cultural and sporting activities. For example, using local business expertise to help raise pupils' aspirations and self-esteem and learning about ethical questions in discussions about environmental and trade initiatives. The school works very closely and effectively with parents. This includes providing after-school care and adult learning programmes.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements, with much best practice adopted to support the high quality of care, support and child protection arrangements provided for pupils.
- The school works successfully with the local authority, which provides effective support. This includes participation in their Peer-to-Peer Support initiative, a programme to foster both challenge and support amongst a group of local schools.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The shrewdly led governing body display a secure grasp of the strengths of school performance, including the quality of teaching and the pupils' progress. They hold leaders and staff to account in positive and constructive ways. Their regular training sessions and briefings enable them to interpret school performance information accurately. This includes checking the impact of pupils premium funding. They make certain that staff career progression is closely linked to performance.

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	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	112371
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	403183

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 of pupils on the school roll	239
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joan Hadley
Headteacher	Chris Wilkins
Date of previous school inspection	6 March 2008
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