

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

High Road, Kells, Whitehaven, CA28 9PG

Inspection dates

4–5 March 2014

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- When young children join the school, most have skills that are less well developed than is usual for their age; markedly so with some. By the end of Year 6, standards are well above those found nationally. Pupils make excellent progress throughout the school. Achievement is outstanding.
- There is rapid progress in Nursery and Reception classes. By the start of Year 1, pupils generally have a level of development that is normal for their age.
- Pupils for whom there is additional funding (pupil premium) reach standards as high as those of others in the school and make at least as much progress.
- Pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs make progress from their starting points that is similar to that of other pupils.
- Teaching is outstanding and has ensured that pupils' learning has been excellent over time.
- Teachers cater very well for the needs of pupils of different abilities. Work in lessons and in additional sessions in school time and after hours enables all pupils to prosper, including those for whom learning is not easy. Teaching assistants make an excellent contribution to pupils' learning.
- The most-able pupils are generally given the chance to tackle more difficult things, although occasionally they could strive even more.
- Marking of pupils' work is exceptionally diligent. Pupils respond very positively to advice. Very occasionally, additional specific points, such as improving handwriting, could be pressed.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding in lessons and about the school. They are very eager to learn and unflinchingly considerate of others. They feel very safe and well looked after in school, and are aware of possible hazards in new situations.
- The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. Achievement and the quality of teaching have improved steadily over the last few years due to exceptionally careful checks on the school's work and the headway that pupils are making. Staff are highly committed and keen to do their best for pupils. There are excellent links with the local community.
- The school's improvement has been very well supported by the local authority.
- Governors carry out their responsibilities painstakingly and with impressive vigour. They have fostered the school's improvement very effectively.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 13 lessons for a substantial time; two lessons had shared observations with the headteacher. In addition, short sessions were observed in lessons for history, physical education and music. There were brief observations of sessions for younger pupils, for example where understanding of letters and their sounds was being developed. Inspectors made several brief visits to observe Nursery and Reception children indoors and in the outdoor learning area. An inspector attended part of the Ash Wednesday Mass and an assembly was observed.
- There was a meeting with two members of the governing body and also with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and other senior staff, and had discussions with pupils.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents. These included pupils' work in the current year, the school's recent and previous national assessment results, information on pupils' progress, and the school's evaluation of its own performance. Records on safeguarding procedures, behaviour and attendance were also examined. Inspectors listened to the reading of pupils from three year groups.
- Inspectors took account of 36 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and spoke with about a dozen parents as they took children to or from school; there was one letter from a parent. The 23 questionnaires completed by staff were reviewed.

Inspection team

Jim Bennetts, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Derek Sleightholme

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This primary school is of average size.
- The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage. None are learning to speak English as an additional language.
- About half of the pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which is double the national proportion. (The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children who are looked after by the local authority.)
- The proportion of pupils whose learning needs are supported at the level known as school action is average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus, or with a statement of special educational needs, is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- Pupils are usually taught in separate year groups, but for part of the time some Nursery and Reception children work together.
- Some pupils arrive early to school and are looked after by school staff in a 'breakfast club'. There are after-school clubs and, for older pupils, there is some coaching in what is normally holiday time.
- At the time of the inspection, there were temporary teachers in two classrooms, although in one of them the usual teacher was present at times, following a period of leave from the school. Several staff have some leadership responsibility. In addition to her headship of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, the headteacher is Executive Headteacher of Oughterside Primary School.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' high achievement further by:
 - ensuring that the most-able pupils are, at all times, challenged as much as possible, especially in mathematics
 - pinpointing yet more closely specific ways in which individual pupils could improve their work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- When children start in the Nursery, most have skills that are less well developed than is usual, particularly with talking and listening to what others say and with counting. For some, such skills are significantly underdeveloped. They soon settle and learn how to listen and learn. After only a few weeks, even younger children in Nursery can concentrate well. In Reception, children are keen to express preferences and are very attentive to advice, for instance with recognising that 'fourteen' is 14 and not 41. When they start Year 1, their levels of development are as generally expected nationally. Young children make rapid progress.
- Younger pupils' learning about how letters represent sounds (phonics) is very secure and by the end of Year 1 the screening check in these skills shows standards that are much better than national. By the end of Year 2, standards overall are above average in reading, writing and mathematics; in 2013 hardly any pupils were below average in any of these subjects. In 2013, the proportion at the highest level (Level 3) with writing was double the national proportion. Teaching is very effective, with high expectations of all aspects of pupils' learning, especially their imaginative writing. In a Year 1 lesson, with correct spelling and well-formed handwriting, a pupil wrote of a witch: 'Her hair was as stinky as snail slime even.'
- In 2013, Year 6 pupils were, overall, about two terms ahead of national standards, with a consistent picture across reading, writing and mathematics. In each subject, about two thirds reached a high level (Level 5), and over three quarters reached that standard in spelling and grammar. A few had the highest possible standard (Level 6). With the present Year 6, half the pupils have already reached a high standard (Level 5) in each of the main subjects. Pupils can write poems in particular styles (acrostic and diamante) and use evidence well in presenting accounts of issues in the Second World War.
- Assessments of pupils' standards are reliable and show that, throughout the school, pupils are currently making impressive progress from their individual starting points. This is consistent for boys and girls in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards are higher than at the previous inspection five years ago and there has been steady improvement, particularly with writing.
- In 2013, those entitled to support from pupil premium funding, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, reached the same standards as other pupils in national tests for Year 2 and Year 6. For such pupils in Year 6, their progress from Year 2 to Year 6 was better than that of other pupils.
- Results of national tests show that pupils in Year 6 who were disabled or who had special educational needs made more progress from their starting points than others. Currently, throughout the school these pupils and those vulnerable due to their circumstances make strong progress in all classes. Teaching assistants provide excellent support for them in lessons and in small groups. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds have equal chances for success.
- The large proportion attaining high standards indicates that the most-able pupils do very well overall. Occasionally, there is not as much opportunity as there could be for them to break further new ground, especially in mathematics. Skills such as alternative ways of multiplying two and three digit numbers are well advanced. However, there are limited opportunities for learning to find patterns in numbers or to apply mathematics to problems calling for a sequence of operations and possibly with more than one correct answer.
- High standards are evident across the curriculum. In history, Year 3 pupils do well in figuring out how people lived in the past, making sensible inferences about how certain artefacts from ancient Egypt might have been used. Year 6 pupils know how to make beer and have made graphs about the behaviour of yeast. Hand and eye coordination and agility are being developed well, for instance with throwing and catching in Year 1 and in Year 5 through tennis practice. Year 3 pupils were making good headway with varying the pitch from guitar strings.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Outstanding elements of teaching were seen on a substantial number of occasions. No teaching seen was less than good. Pupils have an impressive enthusiasm for learning. The impact of teaching over time has been outstanding.
- Excellent relationships ensure that staff identify individuals' capabilities and needs accurately, and enable pupils to feel free to seek help. Prompts provided as pupils work help them to improve. In Year 5, a pupil wrote '...a majestic knight', and was rewarded with praise for choice of word and a prompt about the spelling. Meanwhile, another pupil, minded to use the word 'stubborn', was keen to ask what exactly it meant.
- Pupils are pressed for fuller and further responses. In Nursery, as children listened to *Ten in a bed*, their number skills were extended: 'We had ten and two have fallen out; how many now?' In Year 2, words for the start of sentences developed well. To begin with, 'First'. The question, 'What are we going to have for the next sentence?' was followed with a clear response 'Then'. Another child suggested 'However,...' When pressed to provide an adverb, a pupil grasped the notion of modifying a verb and suggested: 'moving slowly'.
- Activities are generally very appropriate for pupils' capabilities. Effective planning in Year 3, with equivalent fractions, had the most-able multiplying the top and bottom of fractions by the same factor, taking for instance $1/3$ to $2/6$, $5/15$ etc. Meanwhile, others arranged biscuits to demonstrate fractions: three chocolate and nine plain ('for lent', they laughed), making a fraction of $1/4$. The most-able pupils were proud to show off their work to others, but had not been challenged to their limits by, for example, testing whether $8/25$ is equal to $1/3$.
- Marking is very painstaking. Pupils value the pink highlighting of the strong points in their writing, and the identification of things that are not quite right. Spelling slips are usually corrected with particular emphasis on pupils correcting frequently used words and those involving an important spelling pattern. In one book, the pupil wrote corrections for 'spotted' and 'dropped', while for the moment the teacher did not insist with 'cherries'.
- At pupil-progress meetings staff generate lists of 'next steps' for each pupil to address; pupils know these targets and work at them conscientiously. Very occasionally, in marking points are not picked up. For instance, an able pupil had copied a set of statements in 'active voice' and 'passive voice' and it was clear from subsequent work that he had not understood, but that was not on his 'things to master' list.
- The school devises a range of opportunities where selected pupils work in small groups, sometimes apart from a class, or outside normal hours. This work, often in the hands of the skilful teaching assistants, is closely tailored to the needs of individuals. It is a key component in successful learning for pupils across the ability range. Pupil premium funding is used in a very well-focused way.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. They enjoy school. Attendance has improved to above average. Logs show no unpleasant incidents. Parents and pupils are adamant that behaviour is of high quality. In lessons, pupils are eager to contribute and value the contributions of others. They almost always take great pride in the presentation of their written work. They are avid readers, have an enthusiasm for learning and show a vigorous commitment to self-improvement. Some work of excellent quality, for instance with use of computer publishing software, has been produced in after-school clubs. The morning-club provides a wholesome start to the day.
- As they work and live together, pupils are forever courteous and respectful of others. On corridors and in the dining hall, manners are impeccable. A palpable sense of calmness and good will pervades the school. Pupils know that there can occasionally be a tiff between individuals, but say that everyone is sensible and differences are soon made up. They say there is never anything that amounts to bullying in any form. Any hint of discrimination or hurtful criticism of others would be abhorrent to them.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. There is opportunity to learn from experts about hazards such as those with electricity, fire and water. Pupils take risk

assessment seriously; a Year 6 pupil, who is not very tall, could explain why it is not safe to go on some rides when at a theme park. They know about the potential difficulties with Internet social networks. The school ensures that safeguarding and its attention to child protection meet all requirements.

- The previous inspection considered care, guidance and support to be outstanding and a major strength of the school. Pupils' self-reliance, thoughtfulness and generosity of spirit reflect the school's care and attention to pupils' personal development established over many years. There are strong bonds with the community that the school serves. At the Ash Wednesday Mass for school and parishioners, pupils of all ages had a proper sense of occasion, and bore their palm-ash marks with humble pride.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher has been relentless in her drive to ensure that pupils have the very best chances in life. This ambitious intention underpins the improvements in teaching and pupils' achievement that have been accomplished in recent years. The headteacher's devoted and vigorous leadership has been the inspiration for all the improvement that has come about. Parents appreciate this greatly.
- At all levels, capable staff have been appointed, who have the best interests of pupils at heart. They are closely managed; teaching and the work evident in their pupils' books are carefully checked. The generous contribution that staff make to improvement in the work and life of the school is appreciated, successes are congratulated; and there is a firm pointer for further improvement, as and when appropriate. Staff have good opportunities for training and to take on devolved leadership roles. Pay progression is appropriately linked to the quality of work that staff do.
- Staff are overwhelmingly supportive of the headteacher and proud to be at the school. Those with roles for leadership of subjects and other aspects of the school's work are exceptionally diligent and committed in discharging their responsibilities.
- The progress of all individual pupils is checked regularly; an agenda for improvement is set out for each. In some cases, additional support or coaching is provided. This is highly successful in boosting the achievement of all pupils.
- The school sets great store by its commitment to Christian precepts. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a priority. Calming music (for example, *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*) plays on the corridor. In an assembly pupils thought reflectively about the plight of others. Displays feature, for example, racism in sport and the water-lily paintings of Monet. There are very good opportunities to learn by meeting visitors (recently, a Viking, with horns on his head) and to make visits, for example to York and to an archaeological dig. After-school activities flourish. The school is using recent sport funding prudently to enhance opportunities for pupils and to develop the expertise of staff. A very effective specialist sports coach visits each week. The school has a rich and vibrant curriculum.
- The local authority's adviser knows the school well. He has given timely advice for improvement and provided practical help with evaluation of teaching and arrangements for checks on assessment of pupils' standards. The school is very well supported by the local authority.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have been exceptionally painstaking in ensuring that everything within their power is done to facilitate the best possible learning and the highest possible achievement. They make sure that all safeguarding requirements are fully met. They spend earmarked funding for sport and the pupil premium wisely and check on the resulting outcomes. They are well-trained and understand data on pupils' progress and all the work of the school. Individual governors have links to particular subjects and classrooms. There is an effective committee structure. Minutes are very detailed and show proper attention to teachers' performance and pay. Perceptive questions are raised and thoroughly addressed. There is robust management of the budget; finances are controlled with foresight and a keen eye to best value. There is

shrewd consideration with staff appointments and the deployment of staff. Governance is exemplary.

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	112353
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	439566

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	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Helen Edwards
Headteacher	Susan Starkie
Date of previous school inspection	4 June 2009
Telephone number	01946 66356
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	admin@kells-stmarys.cumbria.sch.uk

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