

St Robert Bellarmine Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104906
Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	377147
Inspection dates	12–13 March 2012
Lead inspector	Diane Auton

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	226
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anne-Marie Pennington
Headteacher	Mairead Dowell
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2006
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Introduction

Inspection team

Diane Auton
Louise Murphy

Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited eight teachers in their classrooms and observed 13 lessons. They listened to pupils read and observed the teaching of letters and sounds in Key Stage 1. They held meetings with members of the governing body, staff, groups of pupils and parents and carers. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school development plan, safeguarding and equality policies and minutes of the governing body meetings. Parents and carers have not yet responded to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in sufficient numbers, so their views have not yet been summarised on the Parent View website. However, inspectors reviewed information provided by parents and carers in 57 completed questionnaires. They also took into account the views of pupils in Key Stage 2 and those of staff expressed in the questionnaires they returned.

Information about the school

The school is similar in size to most other primary schools. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is average. The proportion of disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs is also average. Most pupils are White British, with a very small proportion from other minority ethnic backgrounds, and all have English as their home language. The school meets the current government floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

Since its previous inspection, the school has renewed its Healthy School status; it has also achieved the Extended Schools Mark, the Information and Communication Technology Mark, the Dyslexia-Friendly Mark and the Basic Skills Quality Mark; the governing body has renewed its accreditation under the Financial Management Standard in Schools. The school provides a breakfast club each morning during term time. Additional wrap-around care sessions are provided each afternoon for children who attend the nursery class in the morning.

An extensive programme of refurbishment and extensions to the building has been carried out since the previous inspection, providing additional space for teaching and learning and for community activities. A new reception classroom has linked the existing nursery accommodation to the main school building, creating an Early Years Foundation Stage suite with new outdoor areas for both classes.

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	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key Findings

- This is an outstanding school where pupils achieve exceedingly well. Most children’s skills are below expectations for their age when they join the nursery class; from these low starting points, they go on to make excellent progress throughout their time in school and attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 has been consistently high for the past four years. Although a very large proportion of pupils reached the higher level in reading at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2011, the proportion that did so in writing was average. Actions are currently being taken to ensure that more-able pupils achieve as well as possible in writing and inspection evidence shows that pupils are already on track to meet ambitious improvement targets in writing in the current year.
- Outstanding teaching is a key factor contributing to these very positive outcomes for pupils. Teachers continuously review and develop their methodology and practice to ensure that pupils’ learning needs are met. Individual learning targets are used very effectively and marking is predominantly extremely constructive and helpful. Sometimes, however, writing is not marked as strategically in pupils’ topic work as in their literacy books; because teachers focus mainly on the content of written work, errors in writing are not always picked up.
- Pupils thrive in an environment where every child is known, cared for and valued; this is helping them to progress very well in both their academic and their personal development. They feel extremely safe and secure in school. Their behaviour is exemplary and they are considerate and well-mannered.
- The headteacher provides extremely effective leadership. With the support of able senior staff and well-informed governors, she has created a strong team ethos, with a clear focus on continuous school improvement. A vibrant curriculum engages pupils’ interests very well and provides memorable experiences for them. Regular and very effective monitoring assures the high quality of teaching across the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Reinforce the drive to increase the proportion of higher level achievement in writing in Key Stage 2 by ensuring that writing in topic work is always marked to the same rigorous standards that are currently applied to pupils' written work in their literacy activities.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' achievement is outstanding. They are highly-motivated learners, eager to offer their ideas in discussions; they listen carefully to instructions and take pride in presenting their work well. They work together productively with a partner or in a group. They use their excellent information and communication technology (ICT) skills very well in research and investigations.

Children's attainment is in line with age-related expectations by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. This is the result of excellent progress in the nursery and reception classes, where children develop interest, curiosity and positive, confident attitudes to learning. Attainment rises rapidly as pupils move up through the school and it is high when compared with the national average by the end of Key Stage 2. In 2011, attainment in writing at the end of Key Stage 1 was significantly above the national average for the first time. All of this represents significant and on-going improvement in outcomes for pupils since the time of the school's previous inspection. In the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1, daily, well-targeted teaching of letters and the sounds they make is giving pupils the tools they need to move their learning forward. Daily guided reading sessions for older pupils keep up the momentum of improvement across the school. As a result, attainment in reading is above average by the end of Year 2 and well above average by the end of Year 6. In 2011, all of the pupils in Year 6 reached the nationally-expected level in writing. Effective action taken by the school in the current year means that the proportion of pupils in Key Stage 2 who are working at above average levels for their age in writing is rising rapidly.

Evidence from the school's assessment data, from lesson observations and from scrutiny of work in pupils' books confirms that pupils in all year groups are making excellent progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs also progress outstandingly well, as a result of the very well-targeted support the school provides for them. Parents' and carers' responses indicate that they are extremely happy with their children's progress and attainment.

Quality of teaching

The overall quality of teaching is outstanding. Lessons are planned very well to take the range of pupils' needs into account and the pace of learning is always brisk; this is helping pupils to progress extremely well in lessons. Teachers have very high expectations of pupils and, because this is communicated effectively, pupils learn to have high expectations of themselves. Well-trained teaching assistants make a very strong contribution to all pupils' learning and progress and particularly to that of pupils with additional needs. Excellent

relationships in the classroom mean that pupils are secure and happy and ready to learn. Parents and carers, without exception, indicate that they are delighted with the quality of teaching provided for their children.

The school employs a wide range of strategies to support effective learning. Individual learning targets are known and understood by pupils. Marking is often of very high quality and usually gives excellent guidance to help pupils improve their work. In some of the work seen in pupils' topic books during the inspection, however, the main focus of marking was the content of their written work; opportunities to guide improvement in the technical aspects of their writing were sometimes missed.

Teachers' curriculum-planning often contributes very well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and innovative teaching strategies often bring learning to life for pupils. For example, in a very well-taught lesson related to their topic on the Great Fire of London, Year 2 pupils were exploring the impact of a major tragic event on ordinary people's lives. Four pupils, in role and in the costumes of citizens of the area where the fire first broke out, responded to questions from their classmates about what had taken place and how the experience had affected them. Pupils showed they had gained a depth of knowledge and understanding from work already done on the topic. They listened very well to each other and framed and answered questions pertinently and often eloquently. They also showed a mature ability to reflect on and to empathise with the suffering of others.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour is excellent. They have great trust in the adults in school. They say that school is a safe place and that help is always on hand if they encounter any problems. Pupils are caring and polite and show a good awareness of how they can help and support each other. They describe their school as 'a friendly environment' where pupils look out for each other and 'grown-ups listen'. They have a well-developed understanding of different types of bullying and were able to explain clearly why they believe that there is no bullying in the school and that any falling out between pupils that may occur is quickly dealt with. Parents and carers indicated in their responses that they consider that the school deals effectively with behavioural issues.

The school works effectively in partnership with the parents and carers of potentially vulnerable pupils to help to break down barriers to learning and progress that some pupils encounter. The well-attended breakfast club gets the day off to a happy start. Flexible arrangements for additional care sessions for nursery children are especially appreciated by working parents and carers. Attendance has improved significantly since the time of the previous inspection and is now above the national average figure for primary schools.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and the leadership team are very active and strategic leaders. Staff and the governing body wholeheartedly share their firm commitment to continuous improvement and their unrelenting ambition to achieve the best possible outcomes for pupils. Staff at all levels contribute very well to helping drive forward improvement initiatives. Constructive monitoring and a well-planned programme of continuous professional development ensure that the quality of teaching is outstanding, overall, and never less than good. The school chooses and plans appropriate actions for raising attainment and promoting pupils' learning and progress. Regular and rigorous reviews of pupils' progress during the year are managed

exceptionally well. Very well-developed systems ensure that the information gained from the reviews is clear and accessible to all stakeholders and that it is used effectively to identify under-achievement and to help plan interventions and support where they are needed. Areas for improvement are relatively minor; leaders have correctly identified them and actions are already under way to address them. The actively involved and well-informed governing body challenges and holds the school to account effectively. All of these factors, together with the skills and talents of leaders and staff, mean that the school has outstanding capacity to continue to improve.

The school complies well with statutory requirements for safeguarding through well-managed procedures and through an ongoing review of their effectiveness. Its inclusive ethos supports excellent promotion of equal opportunities and access to educational entitlement; discrimination of any kind is not tolerated. The curriculum is outstanding. It is rich and varied. It has been substantially overhauled since the previous inspection and is the subject of continuous review to ensure that it is responsive to pupils' interests and learning needs. Subjects are brought together in topics that are relevant and engaging for pupils. The curriculum is very well enriched by opportunities for pupils to develop skills in sports, music and the arts and to learn a modern foreign language. After-school activities have a high take-up; they are provided each day and cater for all age-groups, including lunch-time activities for children in the Reception class. A wide range of visitors and visits, including several residential trips, contributes effectively to promoting pupils' academic, personal, social, health and citizenship education. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. They understand and adhere very well to the school's code for behaviour. They show an excellent understanding of the sound moral and social values the school promotes. There are many opportunities in lessons and assemblies for them to reflect on and discuss important issues and they show mature and thoughtful attitudes in their discussions.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



14 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St. Robert Bellarmine Catholic Primary School, Bootle, L20 6ED

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspectors when we visited your school. We enjoyed our visit very much and it was a great pleasure to meet you all.

We found that St. Robert's is an outstanding school and that it is a very happy place for you to learn in and grow up together. Your education gets off to an extremely good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and you carry on making excellent progress all the way through to the end of Year 6. Standards of achievement are very high at St. Robert's and they are continuing to rise. This is because you are taught extremely well and your school is led and managed very well. It is also because you are such hard workers! It was lovely to see how much you enjoy your lessons and how well you all get on with each other. You are caring, polite and well-behaved young people. Keep up the good work!

This is something we have asked the school's leaders to do, because we think it will help you to build on the improvements in your writing that are already taking place:

- make sure that teachers always mark the written work in your topic books in the same helpful ways that they mark your literacy work.

You can help with all of this by continuing to be happy, hard-working learners. Thank you once again for a very enjoyable two days and best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Diane Auton
Lead inspector

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