

St Dominic's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	124363
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	380874
Inspection dates	22–23 March 2012
Lead inspector	Alwyne Jolly

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	196
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Clare Adams
Headteacher	Francesca Devine
Date of previous school inspection	29 January 2007
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Introduction

Inspection team

Alwyne Jolly

Additional inspector

David Westall

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 14 lessons delivered by eight teachers. Inspectors met with staff, pupils and members of the governing body. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed the school's work, looked at school self-review and planning documents, policies, minutes of the governing body, school performance data, safeguarding procedures and the work of pupils in lessons. They considered the results of 125 parental questionnaires, 102 pupil questionnaires and 20 staff questionnaires.

Information about the school

This is a smaller than average-sized school which serves mostly Catholic families in the local and wider community. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is broadly average. The school meets the current floor standard. It has gained the Science Mark. A breakfast club and after-school club, which were not in operation at the time of the previous inspection report, are provided and are managed by the governing body.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. There are excellent links with parents and carers, who are highly appreciative of all aspects of the school's work. The school is not outstanding because pupils make good progress and this has been uneven over time.
- An outstanding Early Years Foundation Stage sets pupils on course to reach above average standards by Year 6. Achievement is good and most pupils make good progress from their starting points. The achievement of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is good, due to the effectively tailored support. Pupils that are more capable do not always make as much progress as others in writing in Years 3 to 6.
- Good teaching across the school is characterised by a lively, stimulating content that engages pupils' interest well in lessons. Questioning is generally good although at times it is insufficiently probing to further pupils' understanding and progress. Teachers' marking is similarly good although, on occasions, insufficient guidance is given to help pupils to improve.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. It is particularly impressive in assemblies, which contributes to the outstanding promotion of their spiritual development. In lessons, pupils have positive attitudes, although on rare occasions when teaching is less than good, pupils are restless or passive. All pupils and their parents consider the school to be very safe.
- Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and governing body have steered the school well after an unsettled phase and have an accurate grasp of its strengths and weaknesses. Rigorous performance management arrangements have been an important factor in the management of teaching. Combined with thorough evaluation, this has resulted in effective actions to address previous weaknesses and set the school securely on a path of sustained improvement.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the most capable pupils in Years 3 to 6 always fulfil their potential in writing by:
 - increasing their skills in using appropriate advanced punctuation
 - providing these pupils with more stimulating writing tasks, particularly to foster creativity when writing more extended pieces.

- Ensure that the occasional instances of satisfactory rather than better teaching are eliminated by:
 - asking pupils sufficiently probing questions to check their understanding
 - ensuring that marking always provides pupils with clear guidance about how to improve.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' achievement is good throughout the school. Progress is outstanding in all areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage because teaching is excellent. Progress is particularly rapid in communication, language and literacy as a result of the systematic development of key skills together with the many stimulating learning opportunities that are promoted. Virtually all pupils reach the nationally expected learning goals and many do notably better and exceed expectations. In Years 1 and 2, more-able pupils are now achieving better than indicated by previous test results because of a clearer focus on the skills of investigation and more opportunities for independent work. In classrooms, the daily mathematics sessions show pupils displaying confident numerical skills of a better standard than usually found for their age.

There is a clear, effective emphasis on developing essential early reading skills, which reaps significant dividends with above-average standards at the end of Year 2 and almost all pupils attain expected levels in Year 6 with many exceeding them. Standards of reading are above average. Standards of writing are also above average throughout the school. However, the more-able pupils in Years 3 to 6 do not always achieve the standards of which they are capable, particularly related to their use of more advanced punctuation and more complex sentences. Standards in mathematics and science are at least above average in all year groups and pupils of all abilities flourish by the time they reach Year 6. The oldest pupils are clearly enjoying their current topic, which featured opportunities – working within groups – for body percussion, storytelling, researching details and dressing in costume within one single lesson, stimulating their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Achievement is not yet outstanding because there are pockets of slower progress reflecting less effective teaching over time.

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Pupils are well prepared for their next stage of education. Parents and carers, and their children, are extremely positive about the progress pupils make, confirmed by the above average standards in the books and the good quality of work undertaken in lessons. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress as a result of well-targeted support, so that they are narrowing any gaps with pupils nationally. Achievements in sport are particularly noteworthy with several pupils achieving high national rankings in athletics, taekwondo and indoor rowing where the school has won a national competition.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is good. This is a judgement endorsed by almost all parents and carers, of whom a number applauded the school's efforts to improve the quality of teaching. The relationships developed between adults and pupils are excellent, notably in Reception, so that pupils develop into confident, secure learners. In Reception, both the classroom and outside area, which was criticised in the previous inspection report, are well organised, providing rich learning opportunities. This reflects the teacher's astute understanding of how young children learn in the key skills of writing, reading and mathematics.

Lessons throughout the school are almost always interesting so that pupils' attention is engaged. Teachers take every opportunity to relate pupils' learning to their own experiences. When discussing animal poetry in Year 1, for example, the pupils were delighted by every reference to the tiger they have adopted in the local zoo. Occasionally, in contrast, writing tasks given to pupils are insufficiently stimulating to enable them to produce imaginative pieces of extended writing. Teachers plan work which reflects the curriculum's focus on promoting the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and challenging pupils of all abilities. Brief and well-focused paired discussions, , increase pupils' involvement in lessons and enhance their social development. Questioning is thorough and directed at all pupils but occasionally it is insufficiently probing to develop and reinforce pupils' learning sufficiently. On the rare occasions where teaching is satisfactory, teachers' focus is less clear to pupils who either become restless or unresponsive to questioning.

Marking is generally good with some outstanding examples of thorough, helpful analysis of pupils' attainment and what they need to do better. However, over time pupils' books also reflect occasional examples of marking which gives them very little guidance on how to improve. Otherwise, pupils appreciate their target books and can identify what are their priorities to improve. The needs of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are well addressed through effective, targeted small group sessions and the constructive individual and group support provided by teaching assistants.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour has been clearly good over time which is supported by the comments of

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the vast majority of parents, carers and pupils. A very clear code of conduct and positive rewards and sanctions ensure that the school is an orderly community. Behaviour is exceptional in assemblies and contributes to the strong spiritual ethos that is promoted very effectively. Pupils are almost always well behaved in lessons and display positive attitudes. It is only occasionally in the few satisfactory lessons that pupils are restless before they start the main activity or unresponsive to questioning.

In discussions with pupils, they commented that any form of bullying, including cyber bullying, was rare and one added, 'Any problems are sorted immediately'. The school is a transparently happy and harmonious community. The school arrangements for keeping pupils safe are highly effective, both during the school day and in the breakfast and after-school clubs. Parents, carers and pupils all expressed the view in their questionnaire returns that the school is a safe place. The school safety audit has been externally recognised as of a high standard. Attendance is above average and improving as a result of effective policies and practice to reduce absence.

Leadership and management

Good, ambitious leadership has enabled the school to move in a firm, positive direction after an unsettled period where there were a few changes to the senior leadership team. The headteacher has maintained the support of parents and carers, staff and pupils to create a harmonious community with a strong commitment to its spiritual ethos and the promotion of equal opportunities. The school tracks the performance of specific groups thoroughly. Any underperformance is identified clearly, leading to the introduction of effective strategies to address any area of weakness and bring about improvement. It is clear that no form of discrimination is tolerated and no racist incidents have been reported. The governing body gives firm support but also questions where necessary to ensure provision and standards are what they should be. Arrangements for safeguarding fully met requirements at the time of the inspection. Monitoring arrangements are thorough and involve the senior management team, the governing body and external consultants. This leads to a continuing drive to improve teaching, using clear but rigorous performance management arrangements. Professional development has also been given a higher priority to further staff expertise.

The school's broad and balanced curriculum includes a developing 'creative' curriculum. Pupils enjoy this thematic approach and staff make detailed arrangements to cover thoroughly all subject areas over the academic year. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities and older pupils are given the opportunity of a residential visit to extend their learning. The curriculum ensures pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well fostered. A spiritual ethos permeates through all aspects of school life so that pupils are taught to reflect deeply on their lives and the world in which they live. The school has extended its curriculum to emphasise the range of cultures in different parts of the world. Although this has been successfully developed, pupils only have a limited understanding of the different cultures that make up Britain today.

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The school has a very accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses: for example, identifying the need to improve the quality of writing by older, capable pupils. The school development plan is a useful working document, although progress indicators are at times insufficiently specific to enable the accurate evaluation of the impact of initiatives.

The school has addressed all the issues in the previous inspection report, has sustained above average standards and improved the key area of the Early Years Foundation Stage. It, therefore, has a good capacity to improve further.

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.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
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.



26 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Dominic's Catholic Primary School, Stone, ST15 8YG

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you, listening to your views and seeing you in lessons. We found that St Dominic's Catholic Primary school is a good school and we know this view is shared by almost all of your parents and carers and yourselves.

This is what we found out about your school.

- The school is well led and managed.
- The vast majority of you attend well, are well behaved and enjoy your lessons.
- You told us that you feel very safe in school and that the staff care for you well and we agree.
- You have an outstanding start to school in Reception.
- You make good progress in lessons because of the good teaching.
- Your overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

The headteacher, staff and governing body are working hard to help you do better. This is what we have asked your school to do now:

- to make sure those of you in Years 3 to 6 who find work easier are given more help to write to the high standard of which you are capable
- to make sure that you are regularly asked more difficult questions and given clear advice when your books are marked to ensure you improve quickly.

You can help by listening intently to any advice offered and telling your teachers if the work is too easy or you don't understand what you need to do to improve.

I wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Alwyne Jolly
Lead inspector

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