

St Ambrose Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104672
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	367361
Inspection dates	14–15 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Judith Straw

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	251
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr E Cain
Headteacher	Mr Tony Buckley
Date of previous school inspection	30 January 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 18 lessons and observed 10 teachers. They held meetings with pupils, members of staff, the learning support mentor, the educational welfare officer and representatives of the governing body. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents including the school improvement plan, monitoring and progress reports and safeguarding policies and procedures. They also looked at the school's tracking data to assess the progress made by all groups of pupils as well as the work in pupils' books. Inspectors analysed 84 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, and questionnaires returned by 33 staff and 91 pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How well pupils' reading and writing skills are improving and the use pupils are making of their literacy skills in other subjects.
- The pace of learning in lessons throughout the school, particularly in Key Stage 1.
- The quality of pastoral provision.
- The effectiveness of the school's promotion of attendance.
- The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation procedures and the contribution all leaders and managers make to school improvement.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized primary school. The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average but steadily increasing. Most of these pupils are Polish. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is nearly twice the national average. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The school holds numerous awards including Healthy School status, the School Travel plan award, National Clean Air award, Basic Skills Quality Mark and International School award.

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: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. It is a happy, vibrant and safe place for children to learn. Some aspects of its work are outstanding. Parents and carers are very positive about the school. One parent, speaking for many, wrote, 'All members of staff from the headteacher to the caretakers are very supportive and friendly...I would advise anyone to send their children here'. Inspectors found care, guidance and support to be outstanding. This is the foundation upon which pupils build their success and enjoyment of school. Adults know pupils very well and are alert to their needs. Pupils trust the staff, say they are confident that they are very safe in school and know that they will always be supported to overcome problems and be successful. Excellent pastoral care has led to outstanding outcomes for pupils in their understanding of healthy living and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

By the end of Year 6, pupils reach average standards and in some years, for example in 2009, attainment was well above average. Pupils start school with skills well below what is expected and because of good and sometimes excellent teaching, and the school's nurturing ethos all pupils make at least good progress and achieve well. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language are very well supported, with the result that they make the same good and occasionally outstanding progress as that of others.

Teaching is consistently good and occasionally outstanding. Teachers plan lessons which are pacy, practical and engaging. Pupils relish working hard and rising to the challenges set. They receive high-quality feedback on their work and effective pointers on how to improve. The school is about to begin the process of reorganising the curriculum to take even more account of the important basic skills and to develop a more thematic and creative approach.

Outstanding leadership has been key to the school's success. A strong sense of purpose and determination drives things forward with middle managers taking an active role in evaluating the work of the school and designing improvements. Leaders and managers have an excellent awareness of what can be improved, for example, attendance, which is now average, and set a high priority on tackling any barriers to learning. Members of the governing body are fully supportive of the school while holding it to account. The strengths in leadership, improvements since the last inspection and the maintenance of some outstanding outcomes in pupils' personal development demonstrate good and sustainable capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further embed key skills across the curriculum by:

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- reinforcing pupils' technical writing skills such as punctuation and spelling
 - setting higher expectations for the presentation of pupils' work
 - developing the confidence of pupils in using mental mathematics
 - devising a more structured approach to the teaching of calculation.
- Consolidate and build on recent improvements in attendance by:
- keeping pupils involved in deciding how good attendance can be promoted
 - working with parents and carers to reduce the levels of absence for holidays during term-time.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those who speak English as an additional language, achieve well and make good progress because they feel safe and happy in school. In the past there has been a gap between the achievement of girls and that of boys but leaders have taken decisive action and the gap is rapidly narrowing. In all classes pupils work hard because they are clear about their targets and they want to please their teachers. They enjoy the challenges and targets set and are confident that they will be supported to reach them. Their eagerness to learn makes lessons buzz with excitement and activity and pupils are rightly proud of their progress.

Pupils' good and sometimes excellent behaviour and the excellent relationships between adults and pupils across the school ensure that lessons run smoothly and are enjoyable. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and healthy and many are involved in health promotion activities. They make a good contribution to their school community and enjoy working with other schools across the city. The school council plays an active role and two pupils regularly attend the school's parliament. The pupils are keen fundraisers and are always eager to help those beyond their school who may need support. Pupils have a strong sense of responsibility to the community and are becoming active young citizens. Their well-developed social skills are an asset to pupils, but while attendance remains average and attainment is average, preparation for future economic well-being is satisfactory.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Good teaching is based on thorough and detailed planning which takes account of each pupil's previous learning. Lessons have pace and variety and often include a good range of practical activities. This keeps pupils motivated and working hard. Very good use is made of modern technologies to add interest to lessons. Teachers know their pupils well and have a good understanding of what interests them. For example in Year 6, pupils were engrossed in writing articles about the London Blitz in 1941 while working as teams of news reporters with some playing the role of editors. When teaching is outstanding the level of challenge is very high. In all classes teaching assistants make a very good contribution to learning because they are highly-skilled, well-prepared and ensure that pupils learn and think for themselves. Support for pupils who are at an early stage in learning English is strong, as is the support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Assessment was an issue at the last inspection but it has now become a strength. Marking is always good and often exemplary because it tells pupils exactly how well they have achieved and what they need to do next to improve. Sometimes, however, teachers have lower expectations for the presentation of pupils' work and accept weaker spelling and grammar.

The curriculum provides effective opportunities for learning. The school has plans to further develop the cross-curricular approach so that subjects are linked together more effectively and contribute more to the reinforcement of key skills. Leaders are aware of

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the need to develop pupils' confidence in numeracy and are developing a strategy to ensure numeracy objectives occur across the curriculum. Pupils enjoy a wide variety of enrichment opportunities relating to arts, drama, music and sport. Residential visits are available for most year groups. Information and communication technology (ICT) is promoted well in all subjects and pupils develop good computer skills. International School status is broadening pupils' horizons and all classes learn Spanish. Through religious education and termly 'Other Faith Weeks' pupils learn about religions and cultures other than their own.

Staff know pupils very well and as a result, provide outstanding care. Nearly all parents and carers confirm this. Care is not limited to nurturing those pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. There is a culture of respect that infuses every aspect of this school. Targeted support ensures that all pupils who receive it are better able to achieve and their progress accelerates. Transition arrangements enable pupils to move easily and happily into new classes. Strong partnerships support pupils' learning. The school works hard to promote attendance and punctuality with increasing success.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and assistant headteachers lead by example and model clear expectations of best practice for all staff. The setting of challenging academic targets and those for improving attendance fittingly reflect their ambition. Leadership at all levels has been developed well. There is a common sense of purpose so that all staff are keen to play a role in helping to improve the school. Middle leaders regularly take part in monitoring, observations of lessons and marking and scrutiny of pupils' work. This has helped to improve teaching and so raised outcomes for pupils. Teachers are open to new ideas and always seek to add new challenge or excitement to learning. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and is robustly supported by a sophisticated tracking system which has enabled the school to maintain some outstanding outcomes and ensure good and sometimes excellent progress for all pupils, whatever their background or ability. The gap between the performance of boys and girls is narrowing rapidly and the school does not tolerate discrimination of any kind. For these reasons the school's promotion of equal opportunities is excellent.

The governing body is well-informed on all aspects of school life and takes very seriously its responsibilities to ensure that the school fully meets the requirements for safeguarding children and has good systems for ensuring the health and safety of pupils and staff. Management of risk is well-established in the curriculum.

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The school enjoys good relationships with parents and carers and exploits to the full a range of partnerships to support pupils' learning and well-being. The inclusive and caring ethos of the school promotes a cohesive school community which confidently reaches out to the local, as well as wider communities. The school has international links with Poland and Africa. The school deploys its resources well and achieves good outcomes for pupils so that it provides good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children flourish in the Early Years Foundation Stage which comprises the Nursery and Reception classes. The great majority of children enter with skills well below those expected, particularly in communication, language and literacy. They make good progress in most areas to reach broadly average attainment by the time they enter Year 1 but with weaknesses in reading, writing and calculation. Children are encouraged to make decisions about their learning, for instance in role-play where they pretend to be film directors and they develop very positive attitudes to learning. Relationships are very strong, children are happy and enthusiastic and behaviour is excellent.

The very effective collaboration between the Nursery and Reception teachers effectively promotes good learning and progress. Indoor and outdoor environments are vibrant and stimulating with a wide range of activities linked to the main teaching focus. Planning is shared and differentiated with an appropriate split between times when adults lead activities and times when children can choose their own activities. Adults are good at questioning children to extend their learning. Teaching assistants play an important role but sometimes are not used effectively to promote greater challenge. Children's progress is closely monitored through frequent observations and regular assessment.

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Leaders and managers are focused on achieving the best they can for children and ensuring good progress. Parents and carers are fully involved in contributing to their children's learning through weekly log books and regular newsletters. Links with other providers are positive and proactive and ensure the safety and well-being of children. Leaders have a clear understanding of areas for development and there is good collaboration between all adults. They are working towards formalising an action plan to develop greater consistency in the tracking systems used by Nursery and Reception classes.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The very large majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire were very positive in their praise of the school. There was particular mention by several parents and carers of their appreciation of the enthusiasm and dedication of the staff and the quality of school leadership. A very small minority felt that more-able pupils might be held back so that class support could be given to lower-ability pupils. Inspectors endorse the positive views of the parents and carers and found that lessons are differentiated well so that more-able pupils receive the right level of challenge to stretch them.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Ambrose Catholic Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 84 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 251 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	64	76	19	23	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	58	69	25	30	0	0	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	42	50	38	45	3	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	44	52	37	44	1	1	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	60	71	24	29	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	55	65	25	30	2	2	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	59	70	24	29	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	48	57	32	38	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	50	60	33	39	0	0	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	40	48	38	45	4	5	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	35	42	43	51	5	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	53	63	29	35	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	60	71	23	27	0	0	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and 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.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



June 16th 2011

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of St Ambrose Catholic Primary School, Liverpool, L24 7SF

Thank you for your friendly welcome when we inspected your school recently. You were polite and helpful and made our work a real pleasure. We appreciate the time you spent talking to us and showing us your work. Many of you told us that you enjoy school and feel very safe. You also told us that most lessons are fun and said 'staff really take care of us', and we agree.

We judge that St Ambrose is a good school and some of its work is outstanding. All the adults who work with you know you well. They are doing a good job and make sure that good teaching helps you to reach average, and sometimes above-average, standards. The school takes excellent care of you. You showed us how well you understand how to keep safe and live healthily and also impressed us with your kindness and understanding towards each other. We saw how well you all get on together and look after each other. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage also make really good progress and get on well together.

Part of our job is to see what your school could do better. We have asked the adults to make sure you develop strong key skills in writing and mathematics and to keep on working hard to improve the rate of attendance.

You can help by attending every day, taking good care in the presentation of your work and regularly practising your mental mathematics.

Thank you again for making our visit such a lovely experience. On behalf of the inspection team I wish you and all your friends well, and we send you our very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Judith Straw

Lead Inspector

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