

St Ambrose Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106115
Local authority	Stockport
Inspection number	377357
Inspection dates	2–3 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Shirley Herring

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	186
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anthony Martin
Headteacher	Helen Hilton
Date of previous school inspection	14 January 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed seven teachers in 16 lessons. They held meetings with groups of pupils, governors and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' books, all documentation regarding the safeguarding of pupils, assessments and tracking of pupils' progress, the analysis of the progress of different groups of pupils, the school development plan and reports from the School Improvement Partner. They scrutinised 62 questionnaires completed by parents and carers, as well as those completed by pupils and staff.

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

- How effectively assessment is used to promote achievement for all groups of pupils.
- How well pupils make progress and attain in writing.
- How well the curriculum and teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage promote boys' progress.
- The extent to which the actions of leaders are bringing about improvements in teaching.

Information about the school

The large majority of pupils in this smaller-than-average school are from White British backgrounds and about a quarter of pupils are from a range of minority ethnic groups. Approximately a third of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals, which is above average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average. The proportion of pupils at an early stage of learning English is broadly average and increasing. A higher-than-average proportion of pupils joins the school other than at the usual time. The school is part of the National Healthy Schools Award scheme and runs a breakfast club each day.

Several new teaching staff joined the school at the start of this school year.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school. Among its strengths are pupils' personal development, the curriculum, the care, guidance and support it provides and the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils are polite, friendly and well behaved and say they enjoy all the school has to offer. The school is a warm and welcoming place in which pupils feel safe and secure and there is good support for those pupils needing extra help.

Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Children make good progress, though the outcomes for girls are better than for boys. There is a wide range of activities indoors to extend children's learning. However, the range of activities in the extensive outdoor area is limited. This does not take the opportunity to extend the learning of boys, many of whom prefer to learn outside when they have the choice.

Pupils enter Year 1 with skills that overall are below what is typical for their age. They make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 1 and attainment is broadly average overall at the end of Year 2, though attainment in writing is weaker than in other subjects. Attainment is broadly average at the end of Year 6. However, this varies considerably from year to year due, in part, to variations in class sizes, the number of pupils joining or leaving the school within each class and the number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Nevertheless, individual records show that pupils make satisfactory progress overall. The weakness in writing continues in Key Stage 2. In the most recent national tests the number of pupils attaining the expected level in mathematics was above average, though only about half of the pupils attained the expected level in writing, which was below average.

Senior leaders are, quite rightly, taking action to improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning, which are satisfactory. For example, the school is developing its systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress, though the information is not yet used effectively in all lessons to match work to the needs of different groups. The school's policy for marking pupils' work is being used well in some classes and is helping children to improve their work, though again, partly because of recent staff changes, this is not yet consistent through the school. Raising standards in writing is a priority for the whole school this year. Consequently, the curriculum has been adjusted to provide more opportunities for pupils to write in other subjects. Again, this is evident in some classes but not all.

The school's self-evaluation is accurate in most respects and provides a firm basis for taking the school forward. There have been satisfactory improvements in attainment in mathematics and in reading, as well as in attendance since the last inspection, indicating that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in writing by:
 - providing further opportunities for pupils to write in other subjects
 - sharing the good practice in marking across the school
 - using assessment information more consistently to challenge and support pupils of different abilities
 - ensuring all teachers fully implement the school's policies on teaching and learning.
- Improve the use of the outdoor area in the Early Years Foundation Stage to extend opportunities in all areas of learning, particularly for boys.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils say that they enjoy school because of the exciting trips and because they learn new things every day. Learning is most effective when lessons are interesting and pupils are fully involved. For example, older pupils concentrated well when playing the 'fizz-buzz' game to sharpen their recall of times tables. Learning is less effective when the pace of a lesson slows and work does not take sufficient account of what pupils already know. Pupils behave well and this makes a good contribution to their learning.

Pupils say they feel safe in school and are confident to approach an adult if they need help. They have a good understanding of aspects such as road safety. They have a good understanding of the need for a balanced diet and the value of regular exercise. They enjoy the 'walk to school' weeks and many come to school regularly on cycles or scooters. Pupils are proud of their school and willingly take on responsibilities such as school councillors and play buddies. They enjoy contributing to a variety of activities in the community such as joining other schools to sing carols and also raising money for charities. Average attendance and basic skills make a suitable contribution to pupils' future well-being. Pupils show respect for each other and are clear that discrimination is not to be tolerated. They have a clear sense of right and wrong and have a good awareness of the faiths and cultures of others.

Pupils enter the school with a range of skills that overall are below what could be expected for their age. They make satisfactory progress and attainment is close to average by the time they leave Year 6, though attainment in writing is below

average. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive well-targeted support and so they progress at a similar rate to others. Pupils who speak English as an additional language receive appropriately focused support to enable them to be fully included in lessons and they, too, make similar progress to others in the class.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is satisfactory overall, though several examples of good teaching were observed. Teachers value pupils' contributions and make good use of praise to encourage pupils to offer their ideas. In some lessons teachers take good account of information from assessments to plan work which will support and challenge different groups, though this is not consistent across the school. The skills of teaching assistants are well deployed and make a good contribution to pupils' learning. Pupils' work is marked regularly and in some cases teachers give very clear guidance on what pupils need to do to improve. This is helping to improve the quality of writing, particularly in the older classes.

The school's good learning environment and curriculum stimulate pupils' interest and enjoyment. There is a very good programme for personal, social and health education which makes a strong contribution to pupils' good personal development. Good emphasis is placed on developing basic literacy and numeracy skills and this is having a good impact on progress in numeracy and reading. There are increasing opportunities for pupils to develop these basic skills in other subjects, particularly writing. For example, pupils in Key Stage 2 were enthused to write about Boudicca in their history topic, having visited the theatre to see 'Rotten Romans!'

The school provides a warm and welcoming environment in which pupils feel safe and secure. There are well-established procedures for identifying pupils who need extra help and support at an early stage and this is having a good impact on pupils' attitudes and behaviour. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities

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

receive effective support in class, in small groups and sometimes individually so that they make similar progress to others in their class. The learning mentor has a valuable role in supporting pupils and families to access learning in school and strategies put in place have been effective in improving attendance and reducing persistent absenteeism. The breakfast club run by the school provides an inviting and settled start to the day.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior leaders promote an ethos of care and mutual respect which fosters pupils' good personal development and well-being. Actions to improve the identified weakness in writing have been introduced but it is too soon to measure their impact. A whole-school policy for marking has been introduced, with some success, but this is not yet fully embedded in all classes. Electronic systems for assessing pupils' progress have been set up fairly recently and are being used to identify the needs of different groups. However, the information is not yet collated in a way to provide managers with a readily available overview of the pace of progress across the school. Actions to improve attendance have been effective.

Members of the governing body are a regular presence in school and are active in supporting the headteacher in promoting good pastoral care. They are not as involved in holding managers to account for the academic aspects of school. Governors are well aware of their responsibilities in keeping pupils and staff safe, and all staff and several governors have received full training on child protection. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are good. All the expected systems for safeguarding pupils are in place, regularly reviewed and fully meet requirements. Provision for equal opportunities is good. Pupils are well aware that discrimination of any sort should not be tolerated and links with the Ethnic Diversity Service have helped to extend pupils' awareness. The school analyses the progress of different groups of pupils closely and this information is used to help close gaps in attainment, for example, in the recent past, between boys and girls in Key Stage 2.

Fortnightly newsletters and termly information about the curriculum keep parents and carers well informed about their children's learning. Parents and carers are welcomed to meetings to discuss the progress and provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Community cohesion is satisfactory. The school is a harmonious community where pupils learn to respect the faiths and cultures of others. Members of the local community are welcomed into school and there are good links with the parish. Links with communities further afield are limited.

There are good links with a wide range of other professionals to access help for those pupils who need additional support. The school works effectively in close

partnership with other local schools that are focusing on improving standards in writing this year. External specialists such as sports coaches supplement the curriculum.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make good progress in relation to their starting points and achieve well, although outcomes for boys are weaker than for girls. Letter sounds and counting skills are taught systematically and well, so children make good gains in their learning. All adults talk to the children, whatever the activity, to develop their language skills. Children respond well to the high expectations to put up their hands and take turns from the earliest age so they make good progress in developing personal and social skills; their behaviour is good. There is a good range of purposeful, practical activities indoors that show a good understanding of how young children learn. However, activities to promote learning outdoors do not have the same clear focus on developing children’s learning across all areas, particularly for boys.

Leadership and management are good. All adults cooperate well as a team to plan activities and assess children’s progress. Assessment information is used well to identify any underachievement at an early stage and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive good support and achieve well. There are good links with parents who are welcomed into school each morning. All systems for safeguarding children are in place and staff are fully trained.

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 in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Approximately 35% of parents and carers returned a completed questionnaire which is broadly average for primary schools. Parents and carers are very positive about all aspects of the school's provision but a small number expressed some concern about pupils' behaviour and the information provided about their children's progress. The inspection evidence shows pupils' behaviour is good. The school sends home information on a regular basis.

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 62 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 186 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	41	66	18	29	0	0	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	43	69	16	26	2	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	28	45	28	45	6	10	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	20	32	39	63	1	2	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	24	39	33	53	2	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	23	37	29	47	7	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	30	48	28	45	3	5	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)	17	27	35	56	1	2	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	24	39	31	50	4	6	2	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	24	39	28	45	6	10	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	18	29	31	50	5	8	2	3
The school is led and managed effectively	27	44	27	44	4	6	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	35	56	23	37	1	2	1	2

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 is for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 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.



4 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Ambrose Catholic Primary School, Stockport, SK3 8LQ

Thank you for making my inspection team and me so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you in lessons and in groups and we found it very useful to hear your views. You are polite, friendly and well behaved. Well done!

Your school is satisfactory, which means there are a number of good things about it and some things which could be improved. We agree with you and your parents and carers that the school takes good care of you all and there is always an adult around to give you extra help when you need it. You told us that you enjoy school and I could tell that those in Key Stage 2 really enjoyed their theatre visit to see 'Rotten Romans!' It was pleasing to see that what they had seen in the theatre helped to improve their writing about Boudicca the next day. Your good curriculum gives you plenty of interesting experiences and develops your strong personal qualities. Teaching in your school is satisfactory and helps you to make expected progress in most subjects. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make a good start in school. They enjoy choosing from all the interesting activities indoors that help them to learn so well.

We have suggested some ways to make your school even better.

- Raise standards in writing by providing more opportunities for you to write in other subjects and by making sure you know what you need to do to improve.
- Improve the use of the outdoor area in the Early Years Foundation Stage to extend opportunities in all areas of learning, particularly for boys.

I hope you continue to enjoy school and get on so well together.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Herring
Lead inspector

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