

St Ambrose Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	131400
Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	381337
Inspection dates	24–25 May 2012
Lead inspector	Graham Sims

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	193
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Hesketh
Headteacher	Marie Yates
Date of previous school inspection	9 December 2008
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Graham Sims

Additional Inspector

Tracey Kneale

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 18 lessons taken by eight different teachers and visited each class at least twice for varying lengths of time. Some lesson observations were undertaken jointly with the headteacher. Inspectors listened to pupils read and looked at their written work. They held discussions with the headteacher, groups of pupils, nearly all of the teaching staff and two members of the governing body. They had informal discussions with a few parents and carers. They observed the school's work and looked at the school's attendance data, behaviour logs, the school development plan, assessment data, planning, safeguarding procedures and other documentation. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection. They scrutinised questionnaires completed by 86 parents and carers, 98 pupils and 15 staff.

Information about the school

St Ambrose Catholic Primary School is an average-sized primary school. The large majority of pupils are White British. Around a quarter come from a variety of minority ethnic groups. The largest group, at just over 11% of the school's population, is from the Polish community. A fifth of the pupils speak English as an additional language. Many of these speak little or no English when they join the school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.

The school provides accommodation for a pre-school for three- and four-year-olds, and for a before- and after-school club for pupils. Both of these facilities are run by private providers and are inspected separately.

In 2011, the school met the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress for pupils at the end of Year 6.

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

- St Ambrose Catholic Primary School is a good school which has improved since its previous inspection. Inspectors found that pupils work hard and make good progress, reflecting the positive opinions which most parents, carers and pupils have of the school. It is not outstanding because there is still some variation in the school's assessment procedures and in the quality of teaching, and pupils are not always challenged sufficiently to improve their written work.
- Pupils achieve well. Attainment has been broadly average for a number of years, but standards are rising throughout the school. Improvements are most noticeable in mathematics at Key Stage 2. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make particularly good progress.
- The overall quality of the teaching is good. Good professional development and well-focused improvement initiatives have strengthened the teaching of phonics (the sounds which letters make), writing and mathematics. Teachers engage pupils' interest through an interesting and creative curriculum. Pupils' work is marked regularly, but pupils are not given enough time to respond to teachers' comments or make improvements.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They have positive attitudes to learning and enjoy school. Pupils say they feel safe in school because the staff care for them. The level of attendance has improved from below average to above average over the last year.
- Good leadership, good performance management and a shared sense of purpose and commitment from the staff have led to improvements in the quality of teaching and contributed to improvements in pupils' attainment. Pupils' progress is tracked carefully, but systems are over-complex and assessments are not moderated carefully enough. The varied curriculum contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Help pupils to derive the maximum benefit from their written work by:
 - building in adequate time for pupils to respond to the comments teachers make when marking their work
 - helping pupils to develop the skills to become self-critical readers and editors of their own work
 - being more rigorous in pointing out where pupils have made errors or where they could improve their work.
- By July 2013, improve the school's assessment and tracking systems by:
 - simplifying the way half-termly assessment information is collated and presented
 - moderating teachers' assessments so that the school's data provide a clear, coherent picture of the progress each pupil makes as he/she moves through the school.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

When they enter the Early Years Foundation Stage, children's skills, knowledge and abilities are generally in line with those expected for their age, although for the most recent intake they were much lower. Since the previous inspection, the school's national assessments and test results at the end of Years 2 and 6 have been broadly average. However, these raw results mask important improvements which have been taking place in pupils' achievement. Standards in mathematics have risen markedly. A concerted effort to improve the teaching of phonics has helped pupils to become much more confident readers, and the most recent emphasis on improving pupils' writing skills has raised the bar in this aspect of pupils' work. Throughout the school, therefore, pupils have been making good progress for at least the last two years. The school's own assessments and scrutiny of pupils' work during the inspection indicate that pupils are on track to produce the school's best-ever results in 2012. About half of the pupils currently in Year 6 and a third of the pupils in Year 2 are working above the level expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. Current attainment, therefore, is above average by the end of Year 6.

These improvements are fuelled by better teaching and the positive and diligent attitudes of pupils in the classroom. Pupils listen attentively, respond quickly to teachers' requests, work sensibly on their own and collaboratively in groups. In many classes, pupils complete an impressive amount of written work which has fuelled the development of their writing skills. The emphasis on teaching phonics has helped children in the Early Years Foundation Stage to make much better progress with their early reading and writing skills than has been the case in previous years. Attainment

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in reading is now average at the end of Year 2, where over a quarter of the cohort speak English as an additional language, and above average at the end of Year 6.

Support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, for those pupils who have been identified as falling behind and for the large proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is effective. Consequently, almost all pupils in the current Year 6 have reached the level expected for their age. In the Early Years Foundation Stage and Year 1, excellent bilingual support for pupils who start school with little or no knowledge of English enables them to make rapid progress. Older pupils who speak a language other than English at home are often indistinguishable from native English speakers, having made very good progress with their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. Support groups to help pupils make progress with their reading have been highly effective, and the number of pupils requiring additional support has fallen dramatically as a result.

Quality of teaching

A very large majority of parents and carers say that their children are well taught and, as a consequence, are making good progress. Almost all of the pupils say that the teaching is good, that they learn a lot in lessons and that the school helps them to do as well as they can. These views are borne out by the observations of the inspection team, who observed teaching that was nearly always good, occasionally outstanding, and sometimes satisfactory. Observations undertaken jointly with the headteacher during the inspection indicate that the school has a good insight into the quality of the teaching, and knows what is working well and what could be improved.

The work in pupils' books shows that teachers keep pupils working hard throughout the year, although the amount of work does vary from one class to the next. In a few classes some of the worksheets pupils are required to complete are not particularly challenging. Pupils practise their writing skills across the curriculum and this undoubtedly helps them to become more fluent writers. However, teachers do not leave enough time for pupils to respond to the comments which are made when their work is marked or to improve aspects of their written work. At times, mistakes are left unchallenged and comments are not always critical enough to help pupils make even better progress.

The teachers engage and motivate the pupils well because lessons are imaginatively planned from a creative curriculum. Much of the teaching is centred around topics, and pupils draw on and consolidate their learning in other subjects when developing their key skills in English and mathematics. For example, pupils in Year 5 drew on their knowledge of 19th century Britain when learning how to produce writing in which they compared and contrasted life in two different eras. Pupils in Year 6 enjoyed putting their mathematical skills to the test as they measured outdoor areas to see how many planters would fit into the area currently occupied by a chicken run, or how many benches and tables would fit under the covered area if it rained during their Jubilee celebrations.

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The teaching of disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language is well coordinated, unobtrusive and effective. Pupils' progress and the effectiveness of intervention work are reviewed regularly.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils and staff indicated that the good standards of behaviour, both within lessons and around the school, and the positive attitudes to work observed during the inspection were typical of behaviour and attitudes throughout the year.

The large majority of pupils' questionnaires and all of the pupils spoken to during the inspection indicated that they feel safe in school. Pupils said that some bullying occurred last year, but the perpetrators had now left and they were unaware of any bullying during the current year. They talked knowledgeably about different types of bullying, such as cyber-bullying, drawing attention to recent training that all pupils in the school had received. A small minority of parents and carers indicated that they thought the school did not deal well with bullying, but gave no examples to support their views. The only recently recorded incident had been dealt with effectively to the satisfaction of both parties. Pupils expressed their total confidence in the staff to sort out any problems.

In the years following the previous inspection, attendance was below average. Concerted efforts to improve attendance through the work of the family support worker have proved effective. Attendance for the current academic year has improved markedly and is now above average.

Leadership and management

The school's leadership team and governing body ensure that the school has good capacity for further improvement. They responded well to the issues raised in the previous inspection and have focused their attention on the most important issues for improvement. As a result, standards in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 rose significantly in the two years after the inspection. Subsequent self-evaluation has been perceptive and has identified further areas for development which have been tackled effectively and led to improvements in pupils' reading and writing skills. Staff have responded well to the training provided and have embraced new initiatives enthusiastically, resulting in improvements to the quality of teaching. The establishment of curriculum teams, which include members of the governing body, has strengthened and improved the leadership of different subject areas and ensured good succession planning.

Since the previous inspection, the school has developed much more rigorous systems for keeping track of pupils' progress through half-termly assessments. However, the

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different ways of recording the assessments are time consuming and overly complex, and do not always present the information clearly and simply. Assessments are not always moderated carefully enough, resulting in a picture of pupils' progress in one or two year groups which is at odds with the good progress evident in pupils' books.

The school has maintained its focus on providing an interesting and creative curriculum. The topic-based approach, visits to places of interest, such as the Titanic exhibitions in Liverpool and Birmingham, visitors to the school and other activities engage the pupils. The curriculum, varied teaching strategies and the strong links with the church contribute well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Assemblies and church services provide opportunities for pupils to reflect and consider spiritual and moral issues. The school's chicken run and gardening activities provide insight into the wonders of nature. In lessons, pupils are encouraged to work collaboratively and to support each other. Theatre visits, concerts and opportunities to play musical instruments contribute well to their cultural development.

The school is an inclusive community reflecting the school's efforts to ensure that every pupil has equality of opportunity. Discrimination is not tolerated. This is illustrated well through the support provided for pupils who speak English as an additional language which enables them to integrate well into all aspects of school life. For example, the grandparents of a pupil who had recently arrived with no knowledge of English were thrilled at the rapid progress the child had made. Support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is managed well. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements and give no cause for concern.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.



28 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Ambrose Catholic Primary, Kidderminster, DY10 1RP

My colleague and I enjoyed our recent visit to your school. We should like to thank you for making us feel welcome and for talking to us. You said that St Ambrose is a good school and that you learn a lot in lessons; we agree with you. The school has improved since it was last inspected. These are the main strengths.

- You are making good progress in all classes and the standard of your work is improving; many of you are working above the level expected for your age.
- You behave well in lessons and around the school, and you show by your positive attitudes to work that you enjoy school.
- Although it varies occasionally, the quality of the teaching throughout the school is good; the teaching of phonics, writing and mathematics has improved.
- Displays around the school show that you work hard and you are involved in many interesting and creative activities.
- The headteacher, staff and governors have worked hard to improve the school and they are determined to make it even better.

You are given plenty of opportunities to practise your writing. Those of you in Year 6 have produced a huge volume of work this year. However, you are not given enough time to respond to the comments your teachers make when they mark your work or to learn how to edit and improve your work. We have asked your teachers to give you slightly less work, but more time to improve the quality of your work. We have also asked the teachers to simplify and improve the way they keep track of how well you are doing so that they and the governors can see very clearly how much progress each of you is making as you move through the school.

You can improve your work even further by learning how to spot mistakes before your teachers do and by responding thoughtfully to your teachers' comments.

We hope you continue to enjoy your time at school and wish you the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Graham Sims
Lead inspector

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