

St Nicholas's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104657
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	377108
Inspection dates	11–12 July 2012
Lead inspector	Clare Henderson

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	180
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anthony O'Brien
Headteacher	Anne Edmondson
Date of previous school inspection	18 March 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

Clare Henderson
Chris Maloney

Additional Inspector
Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed 15 lessons taught by nine teachers and two learning support assistants, listened to individual pupils reading in Years 1, 2, 4 and 6 and scrutinised pupils' work. They held meetings with pupils, staff, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. They observed the school's work and looked at documents relating to safeguarding, pupils' progress and attainment and the way in which the school evaluates its own performance. The inspectors scrutinised the questionnaires completed by staff and pupils and analysed the 59 received from parents and carers.

Information about the school

This is smaller than the average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. The percentage of disabled pupils and pupils supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average. A minority of pupils are from White British backgrounds; the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language are well above average. A higher than average proportion of pupils join or leave the school during the school year. The governing body manages a breakfast club which was observed during this inspection. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. The school has Healthy School status and Dyslexia Friendly school status. The position of headship is shared by the headteacher and the acting headteacher in preparation for the retirement of the headteacher this term.

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. It is not yet outstanding because pupils' achievement in reading and writing is not as high as in mathematics and aspects of leadership and management are not fully effective. It is highly inclusive and welcoming; 'come to our school because it respects every culture and belief', is typical of pupils' views. Furthermore, the school promotes outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and enrichment to pupils' learning within the curriculum.
- Children make good progress overall in the Early Years Foundation Stage. At least good progress is made through Key Stages 1 and 2 so that pupils' achievement by the end of Year 6 is good. When they leave school in Year 6, their attainment is above average in mathematics and broadly average, though rapidly improving, in reading and writing.
- The quality of teaching is good with outstanding practice evident. Teachers and support staff are extremely attentive to pupils' personal and academic needs. This enables all groups of pupils to make at least good progress. However, occasionally in lessons tasks are not consistently challenging or matched to pupils' needs to ensure they make enough progress. Pupils, especially the more able, do not always have enough opportunities to extend their writing skills across the curriculum.
- Pupils show very positive attitudes to learning although they are not always provided with enough guidance through target-setting and marking on how to improve their work. Most parents and carers report that their children are safe and happy in school and this is endorsed by inspection findings. Behaviour around the school and in lessons is good.
- Senior leaders and members of the governing body provide effective management of both teaching and the school's performance. Teaching has improved with only slight variations especially in the teaching of English. The school identifies the correct priorities although school improvement plans to accelerate pupil progress are not sharply focused on measureable outcomes.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' attainment and accelerate learning in reading and writing to outstanding in all year groups by:
 - ensuring tasks in lessons consistently match and fully challenge pupils to achieve their potential
 - ensuring pupils are given clear guidance through target-setting and marking on how to improve their work
 - providing more opportunities for pupils, especially the more able, to extend their writing skills across all the subjects of the curriculum.
- Raise the quality of leadership and management from good to outstanding by ensuring school development plans are sharply focused on measurable outcomes.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress from well-below expected starting points. They make outstanding progress in developing their independence and language skills. This is particularly impressive given a high proportion begin school with limited spoken English. The reasons for this success is evident in class when learning is good because of the attention given to talking and learning through play and practical activities.

Data and inspection evidence indicate that pupils make good progress overall in Key Stage 1 and attainment is average. This is helped by the focus given to regular reading sessions and daily phonics lessons (the links between sounds and letters). Pupils' attainment in reading is average overall by the end of Year 2. Progress is good in Key Stage 2 and attainment is average in reading and writing and above average in mathematics by the time pupils leave the school. Strong investigative mathematics and problem solving skills enable pupils to reach the higher levels in mathematics. Attainment is average rather than above average in reading and writing throughout the school. Most pupils make good progress to reach the level expected for their age but the more-able pupils do not always make enough progress and in particular do not have enough opportunities to extend their writing skills across all subjects of the curriculum.

Learning in Years 1 to 6 is good and in a small minority of lessons, outstanding. It is particularly strong when learning is based on pupil's interests. In a Year 6 English lesson, for instance, pupils prepared for their leavers assembly by reflecting and writing about what they hope to achieve by the time they return for a school reunion in the future. Some talked of being pharmacists or midwives. Such opportunities show pupils have high aspirations and this prepares them well for the future. In lessons, when tasks are not accurately matched to pupils' needs and fail to be fully challenging pupils' learning is slower and pupils do not make as much progress as possible.

Pupils for whom English is an additional language receive very effective support and make at least good and often outstanding progress. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs achieve well because a range of interventions and teaching groups meets

their needs effectively. Most parents and carers agree with the inspection findings that their children make good progress.

Quality of teaching

Most parents and carers consider teaching to be good and inspection evidence supports this view. Among the positive features of teaching are the very good relationships between adults and pupils. This is extremely beneficial for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Lessons include excellent support for children's personal and social development. The inside and outside environments provide a wide range of well-resourced, interesting activities although there are not enough labels, signs or opportunities for children to practise their reading and writing skills while playing outdoors. Links made with prior learning to the task in hand proved very effective as the children prepared cheese and cucumber sandwiches. They gleefully exclaimed 'this is a circle, a triangle and a rectangle'. Such learning accelerates children's social and independence skills and consolidates their mathematical knowledge very effectively.

Many of the best lessons throughout the school include the strong features seen in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The pace is brisk and lessons managed effectively. These lessons have a clear match of activities to meet and extend pupils' learning. However, this effective practice is not a consistent feature in all lessons in all year groups leading to a slower pace in learning. Marking of work helps pupils to see how they could improve. However, in some classes, pupils do not receive enough guidance in how to improve, especially in their writing. Pupils are set targets, but these are not always linked closely enough to the work in books and to teachers' comments.

The teaching of pupils who join the school during the school year, often with limited understanding of English, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is at least good because these pupils receive interventions specific to their needs. These are put in place by a range of skilled learning support assistants.

Teachers make a strong contribution to the excellent provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Through the high quality teaching of drama, music, sports and Spanish, an enjoyment of learning is promoted.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Inspectors' observations and school records show that behaviour is typically good in classes and around the school. Most parents and carers agree. Pupils enjoy school and say that bad behaviour rarely spoils lessons. Behaviour observed by inspectors in lessons was good and sometimes exemplary. This has a positive effect on pupils' good achievement. This was noted in a Year 6 lesson in which pupils were attentive, responded with enthusiasm, shared their thoughts about the future and showed exemplary behaviour. In discussion, pupils were certain that bullying is rare and when it occurs is dealt with swiftly by the teachers. They clearly understood the various forms bullying might take but were equally sure it was not part of life at their school. Few parents and carers disagree with this. Support from parents and carers and the unstinting work of the pastoral care mentor are having a positive effect on attendance. As a result, attendance, while below average, has improved year-on-year and is improving rapidly.

Pupils say how safe they feel in school and their parents and carers agree. Pupils are very aware of how to keep safe when using the internet. Pupils understand the high expectations of their teachers and, in the large majority of lessons they respond very well and have very positive attitudes to learning. Pupils feel valued and undertake responsibilities with pride, whether as helping the younger ones or as members of the school council. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, care and welfare are excellent and this contributes to children's very positive attitudes to school. They share equipment well, take turns and are happy to talk about their learning. A daily breakfast club, attended by a high proportion of pupils, demonstrates the high regard and strength of relationships and support parents and carers have for the school staff.

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher is well prepared to take up the full time role in September. Leaders at all levels are effectively involved in monitoring pupils' achievement. Information is used suitably to resolve any underachievement and also set school priorities. School development plans include actions to tackle these priorities and to accelerate pupils' learning to outstanding. However, they are not sharply focused on measurable outcomes. Performance management is used effectively to maintain a strong focus on continuous improvement in teaching and learning. Although a few areas in teaching are still to be improved, feedback from monitoring of teaching is used well to identify professional development needs. Good effect can be seen in the rise in achievement throughout the school and particularly in mathematics. Self-evaluation is accurate and with the relentless drive for improvement the school has good capacity to improve.

The school promotes equal opportunity well by checking the performance of different groups. It is increasing opportunities for more-able pupils to achieve, although more remains to be done in reading and writing. The progress of disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and those at an early stage of learning English is rigorously tracked and the impact of different strategies to support individual needs is well evaluated. Equal opportunities are also well promoted through the school's robust response to any discriminatory behaviour.

The governing body executes its responsibility well and ensures that safeguarding meets requirements. It receives good quality information from the school which enables it to ask probing questions and to hold the school to account for the outcomes it achieves.

Effective management of the curriculum ensures it engages pupils' interests. They enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Visits and visitors enhance the understanding of topics studied. However, the curriculum is good rather than outstanding because pupils' needs are not consistently met in all lessons and they do not consistently have enough opportunities to apply their writing skills across all subjects of the curriculum. The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development exceptionally well. Numerous opportunities for pupils to reflect on their work, relationships and behaviour are built effectively into learning. Strong partnerships with local schools ensure smooth transition at all stages of the pupils' education. Parents and carers say that they are well informed about the work of the school and are particularly praiseworthy of the help given when they first join the school, often from countries with different cultures and beliefs.

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.



13 July 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Nicholas's Catholic Primary School, Liverpool L3 5XF

We really enjoyed our time in your school. Some of the highlights for us were talking to so many of you about your experiences at school and in hearing about how much you enjoy performing plays and learning in lessons.

You will be pleased to know that we agree with you that yours is a good school. These are some of the things we liked best. You make at least good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Teaching is good and helps you to be interested in what you are doing. Behaviour is good and your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted extremely well within the curriculum you study. You have an exciting range of activities, which help you excel in art, music, Spanish and sports. We read the comments made by your parents and carers. Almost all were very pleased with all that your teachers do to help you to learn and enjoy school. Please thank them for taking the time to write to us.

Your headteachers, other staff and the governing body are determined to make your school even better. To do this, I have asked them to ensure that:

- lessons consistently match and fully challenge you to achieve your potential
- you are given clear guidance, through targets set and marking on how to improve your work
- you have more opportunities to extend your writing skills across all the subjects you study
- school plans make it easy to measure your success.

I hope you will play your part by continuing to work hard and to do your best to make your school even better.

Yours sincerely

Clare Henderson
Lead inspector

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