



Inspection report

St Patrick's Catholic Primary School

Better
education
and care

Unique Reference Number 122045
LEA Northamptonshire

Inspection number 274615
Inspection dates 20 and 21 June 2005
Reporting inspector Mrs P C Cox, Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Type of School	Primary	School address	Patrick Road
School category	Voluntary Aided <i>Diocese of Northampton</i>		Corby Northamptonshire NN18 9NT
Age range of pupils	3 to 11 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01536 744447
Number on roll	201 full-time 25 part-time	Fax number	01536 744447
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr G Mallaghan
Date of previous inspection	October 2003	Headteacher	Mr C Donnachie

Age group 3 to 11 years	Published 5 September 2005	Reference no. 274615
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Introduction

When St Patrick's Primary School was inspected in October 2003, the school was judged to be underachieving. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) and Additional Inspectors subsequently visited the school on one occasion to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in June 2005.

Description of the school

St Patrick's Catholic Primary School is situated in Corby, Northamptonshire. It is an average-sized school, with 201 full-time pupils and 25 part-time in the nursery. Most are of white British heritage, although there are a few pupils who do not have English as their first language. Twenty six per cent of the pupils have been identified as having special educational needs, a proportion that is above the national average. Nineteen per cent of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, broadly in line with the national average. The pupils have a wide range of attainment on entry, but overall it is similar to what is normal for their age.

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Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school is not sufficiently effective because leadership and management are weak at all levels. There is insecure understanding within the school of its shortcomings or of what must be done to tackle them. Senior staff and subject co-ordinators have not developed their roles adequately. Governance is unsatisfactory; governors do not have the information necessary to be aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The pupils make insufficient progress in the Foundation Stage, so that standards are lower than they should be by the time they enter Year 1. The pupils' progress accelerates in Years 1 and 2, where they achieve well. This good start is not maintained in Years 3 to 5 and, while the progress is better in Year 6, the pupils are unable to make up the ground they have lost in previous years. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour in class and around the school were at least satisfactory in almost all of the lessons observed. In a few of the lessons, when the teaching was unstimulating, the pupils were passive and less inclined to engage with the task. Attendance is below the national average and the school does too little to tackle the unsatisfactory punctuality.

The quality of education is unsatisfactory. Teaching was satisfactory in just over half of the lessons and was good in only a few. While it was satisfactory and sometimes good in Years 1, 2 and 6, it was unsatisfactory and sometimes poor in the Foundation Stage and Years 3 to 5. The better teaching was based on a secure understanding of the pupils' attainment and the steps they should take to reach the next stage. However, where the teaching was unsatisfactory, the tasks failed to ensure that the pupils achieved the aims of the lesson. In too many lessons, the teaching was dull and unchallenging, particularly for the more able. Assessment is unsatisfactory; although teachers are developing their knowledge of their pupils' attainment, assessment is not used sufficiently to plan further work for them. Provision for the pupils who have special educational needs is unsatisfactory and the procedures for identifying these pupils are not rigorous. The curriculum is unsatisfactory: the timetables do not allow time for each subject to be covered in enough depth, and the teaching time at Key Stage 2 is short of that which is recommended.

Improvement since the last inspection

The previous inspection was critical of a number of aspects of the school, particularly the pupils' achievement, aspects of leadership and management, the use

of assessment, and rates of attendance. There has been poor progress since then. Although there has been considerable support from the local education authority (LEA) and the consultant headteacher to improve teaching and raise standards, there is too little understanding within the school of the need for urgency in bringing about improvements, or how this should be done. Consequently, although standards in Year 6 have risen this year, the pupils have not made enough progress since they were in Year 2 and the quality of teaching has declined significantly. Although some changes have been made to the senior management team, its members do not have a clear enough view of whole-school issues and standards to be able to operate effectively.

Capacity to improve

The school has limited capacity to bring about the urgent and necessary improvements. Although teaching is at least satisfactory in some year groups it is unsatisfactory in too many, so that the pupils do not make sufficient progress overall. Although test results are strong at the end of Year 2, the pupils do not achieve the standards that would be expected of them at the end of Year 6. Planning for school improvement is weak because there is too little awareness of the school's shortcomings and the main issues have not been given adequate priority.

What the school should do to improve further

The key priorities for improvement are to:

- raise standards in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 2;
- improve leadership, management and governance so that there is a clear understanding of the areas where improvement is necessary and that there is appropriate action to bring about the required urgent changes;
- improve teaching in the Foundation Stage and at Key Stage 2 and the way in which teachers use assessment to plan their teaching;
- improve the curriculum so that each subject receives enough time to give pupils a worthwhile experience, and that the school meets the recommended teaching time at Key Stage 2.

Achievement and standards

The pupils enter the school with a range of attainment that is broadly normal for their age. However, they make insufficient progress in the Foundation Stage, so that standards are lower than they should be by the time they enter Year 1. The pupils' progress accelerates in Years 1 and 2, where they achieve well. By the end of Year 2, the pupils' attainment is above the national average in English, mathematics and science. The school's results in national tests at the end of Year 2 have been, for most years, similar to, or above the average. The results of the most recent tests are above the national average in writing, well above in reading and very high in mathematics. This good start is not maintained in Years 3 to 5, and the pupils' skills and knowledge are not built on adequately. While their progress is better in Year 6, they are not able to make up the ground they have lost in previous years. Consequently, the pupils do not reach the standards of which they are capable and significant underachievement remains in all subjects. Since 2002, the school's results in the national tests for Year 6 have been well below average and they have fallen significantly since 2000. The test results in recent years demonstrate that the pupils' progress has not been rapid enough through Key Stage 2. The standards of the pupils presently in Year 6 are higher than in 2004 but the predicted test results demonstrate that progress has been unsatisfactory overall since they took the end-of-year tests in Year 2.

The attainment of the pupils in the nursery is similar to others of their age; most have average skills and knowledge in the six areas of learning. However, they do not make enough progress through the Foundation Stage because the teaching is unsatisfactory in the reception class. While many develop their abilities at a reasonable rate, these are not built on consistently and thoroughly enough.

The development of the pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in the rest of the school is unduly erratic. Standards in English are satisfactory at Key Stage 1, where they are above the national average in both reading and writing. Most write at length, interestingly and with secure spelling and punctuation. However, there remains much underachievement at the end of Key Stage 2, where many of the pupils write slowly. Handwriting, grammar, punctuation and spelling are weak and some pupils copy words inaccurately from the board or books. Although some pupils take care with their work, presentation in many pupils' books throughout the school is untidy. The older pupils are making inconsistent progress due to the variable quality of the teaching within the key stage. Moreover, the senior leaders have an incomplete understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of literacy teaching across the school. Teachers do not always set a good example to the pupils in their own writing and speech.

In mathematics, standards are high in Year 2, where all pupils have reached the expected level and more than half are working at the higher level. The work is set at appropriate levels according to the pupils' different abilities. However, much of the recording has been on worksheets, which hampers the pupils' ability to set out their own work. Progress has been at least satisfactory in Year 6, where the pupils have been given differentiated work that motivates them and builds on their skills and knowledge in a structured way. However, there is still a substantial proportion whose computational skills are weak and who have difficulty applying their knowledge to mathematical problems. Inconsistent progress through Years 3 to 5 has led to considerable underachievement.

Personal development

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were at least satisfactory in almost all of the lessons. In most cases the pupils listened well to the teacher. They were well motivated and showed an active interest in their work. The pupils were polite to the staff. They co-operated with each other and worked well in groups or in pairs. In some of the lessons they sat quietly for long periods of time but they were well behaved even when they appeared bored. In a few of the lessons, however, the pupils were less inclined to engage with the task. This was closely related to teaching which required little of the pupils. Occasional disputes between a few of the pupils in Key Stage 2 distracted them from their learning. Where the lesson demanded it, many of the pupils showed a reasonable level of independence. However, this was required in too few of the lessons. The pupils' behaviour was good around the school. At break and lunchtime they made good use of the play areas and behaved well in the dining room. The pupils moved sensibly around the school and were responsive to the needs of others. The school has not excluded any pupils during this academic year.

The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. The school gives the pupils frequent opportunities throughout the week to explore aspects of the Catholic faith and to participate in collective worship. Displays in some parts of the school give appropriate attention to raising the pupils' awareness of other countries, although less attention is paid to the different cultures within Britain. The pupils have the opportunity to participate in fund-raising events and a range of educational visits. However, the school's ability to develop the pupils' spiritual, moral and particularly cultural understanding is hampered by the lack of balance in the curriculum. There is insufficient opportunity to explore relevant themes through art, music, and the humanities.

Attendance from September 2004 to the end of May 2005 was 93.6 per cent. Rates continue to be below the national average for primary schools. The rate of

unauthorised absence was 0.2 per cent which was broadly in line with the national average. Although the school has improved its procedures for encouraging the parents to ensure that their children attend regularly, not enough has been done to improve punctuality.

Quality of provision

Teaching is unsatisfactory overall: it was satisfactory in just over half of the lessons observed and good in only a few. The inconsistency in pupils' progress is due to variable quality of teaching; while it was satisfactory and sometimes good in Years 1, 2 and 6, it was unsatisfactory and sometimes poor in the Foundation Stage and Years 3 to 5. Teaching in the reception class is not based on a clear understanding of the needs of these young pupils and the requirements of the Foundation Stage curriculum. The adults missed many opportunities to develop the pupils' language. Many activities failed to reinforce and extend their understanding of previous learning.

The better teaching throughout the school was based on a secure understanding of the pupils' attainment and the steps they should take to reach the next stage. Lessons were interesting, with pace and enthusiasm, involving and motivating the pupils. The teachers had high expectations of the pupils' learning and built well on their skills and knowledge. The teachers used questioning well to challenge the pupils, making them think and clarify their understanding.

The lesson planning was satisfactory overall, with mostly clear aims for the lessons. On most occasions, the teachers encouraged the pupils to speak, sometimes at length and, when the teaching was most effective, the pupils were asked to explain how they were going to approach their work, or the strategies they had used. In other lessons, however, much of the questioning required only a single word or a phrase in response and only those who volunteered were asked to answer. Paired discussion was a successful feature of some lessons, enabling the pupils to explore their ideas at some length. However, where the teaching was unsatisfactory, the tasks failed to ensure that the pupils achieved the aims of the lesson. In too many lessons, the teaching was dull and unchallenging, particularly for the more able. Many activities failed to build sufficiently on the teaching that had been done at the start of the lesson. Assessment is unsatisfactory; although teachers are developing their knowledge of their pupils' attainment, assessment is not used sufficiently to plan further work for them.

The provision for the pupils who have special educational needs is unsatisfactory. Little effective planning for the pupils who have special educational needs was observed. The pupils' individual education plans were not used to inform planning and insufficient attention was paid to the pupils' individual needs. In some of the

lessons the pupils were working in a small group with a teaching assistant; many of the teaching assistants interacted well with the pupils and helped them appropriately with their work. However, too often the pupils were discouraged by activities which they found too difficult or by instructions given by the teacher which were unclear or confusing. The approach to planning and support for the pupils who have special educational needs lacks sufficient rigour. Moreover, the school has limited understanding of the progress which the pupils are making.

Although the school has improved its systems for tracking the pupils' progress against National Curriculum levels, its grasp of the finer details is unsatisfactory. The targets which are set as part of the school's system for assessment, recording and reporting are too general. The teachers do not use assessment well enough to plan further work. The pupils who have special educational needs lack clearly written individual education plans with carefully defined targets. Some useful work has been carried out with the LEA's literacy consultant to moderate teachers' marking of the national optional tests. The quality of the marking varies significantly from class to class. In a few cases it shows the pupils how well they have done and what they need to do to improve, but this is rarely the case. Some work remains unmarked.

The curriculum is unsatisfactory. There have been recent initiatives to improve the planning of subjects other than English and mathematics, but this is still at an early stage. The timetables were not balanced sufficiently to allow time for each subject to be covered in enough depth. The teaching time at Key Stage 2 is short of that which is recommended time and there was some slippage, so that many lessons were shorter than planned.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are weak at all levels. There is not a clear educational direction for the school or view of where it should be in the future. Some improvements have been brought about, particularly through the support of the LEA and the consultant headteacher. However, while pastoral provision is satisfactory, monitoring has not led to a secure understanding within the school of its shortcomings. While much monitoring of teaching, planning and the pupils' work has been carried out, this process has not been sufficiently rigorous. It does not focus clearly enough on the impact of the teaching on the pupils' learning, or the standards attained and whether they are high enough. Consequently, there has been too little urgency in addressing weaknesses and, although some appropriate measures have been taken, these have been at too superficial a level to have had the impact needed.

Senior staff and subject co-ordinators have not had the guidance to develop their roles adequately and consequently do not take sufficient responsibility for raising standards in their subjects. Some members of the senior management team are enthusiastic and eager to improve but the team as a whole does not provide energetic leadership for the school. Key subject co-ordinators have only a vague knowledge of standards in the key stage in which they do not teach. Co-ordinators have made a sound start by writing action plans for their subjects but this process is at a very early stage. The plans vary in quality; some are focused on raising standards and improving teaching while others are more concerned with policies and resources.

Governance is unsatisfactory. Governors are supportive of the school, and the chair of the governing body is committed to the school's improvement. He has a sound understanding of the ways in which the governing body can provide the school with appropriate challenge. Other governors make regular visits to the school but they do not have sufficient information to be aware of its strengths and weaknesses.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

St Patrick's Catholic Primary School was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in October 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was judged to be underachieving because standards were too low in many subjects.

The school was visited by an Additional Inspector in December 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of October 2003.

In June 2005, an HMI and an Additional Inspector returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Sixteen lessons or part lessons and two assemblies were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, chair of governors, senior staff, a representative from the LEA, the consultant headteacher and informally with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and areas for improvement in the inspection report of October 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

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