



The Oratory Roman Catholic Primary and Nursery School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103427
LEA Birmingham
Inspection number 276918
Inspection dates 9 May 2006 to 10 May 2006
Reporting inspector David Rzeznik HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary	School address	Oliver Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Ladywood
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		Birmingham, West Midlands B16 9ER
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 4540600
Number on roll	237	Fax number	0121 4541978
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Peter Marchant
Date of previous inspection	27 June 2000	Headteacher	Mr Justin Gray

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Oratory is an average-sized, voluntary aided Roman Catholic primary school in Birmingham. The intake has changed since the last inspection in June 2000. This is because of changes in the school's admissions criteria. The majority of parents choose to send their child to the school because it has a Roman Catholic ethos. Just under half of the pupils are White; around a quarter are of Black background and a fifth are of mixed heritage. A very small number of pupils are of Asian heritage or are looked after by the local authority. The percentage claiming free school meals is well above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties, including those with statements, is average. Pupils enter the Nursery either on a part-time or full-time basis in the academic year in which they become four years old. Attainment on entry is below the level expected for pupils of this age.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school has a number of strengths and overall its effectiveness is satisfactory. The school judges its effectiveness to be better than this. While leadership and management are satisfactory, weaknesses in the leadership's self-evaluation have led to senior staff having a more generous view of some aspects of provision than the school outcomes warrant. Monitoring, development planning and the tracking of pupils' progress are not yet sharp enough. Nevertheless, the school has demonstrated that it has the capacity to improve further by increasing the rate of pupils' progress in science. Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection. It provides satisfactory value for money.

In 2005, overall standards at the end of Years 2 and 6 were at the national average. Pupils made satisfactory progress in English and mathematics and good progress in science as they moved through the school. Pupils' speaking and writing skills, particularly their spelling and punctuation, are not sufficiently well developed. Not enough opportunities are provided for pupils to write at length. Pupils make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes (Foundation Stage) to reach the expected levels for their age. The outdoor curriculum and the range of play resources in the Foundation Stage require improvement to further develop pupils' physical, creative and imaginative skills.

The school is welcoming, with a distinctive Catholic ethos, and pupils enjoy being there. Pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are happy, have positive attitudes to learning and behave well. They feel secure, valued and well cared for. Relationships between pupils and adults from different ethnic backgrounds are very good.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There are examples of good teaching but there is not enough consistency of practice across the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further develop self-evaluation procedures to improve teaching, monitoring and evaluation, strategic development planning and the tracking of pupils' progress, particularly in listening and speaking.
- Improve pupils' speaking and writing skills, particularly their spelling and punctuation, and create more opportunities for structured talk and writing at length.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching by spreading the good practice that exists across the school, turning more of the satisfactory lessons into good ones.
- Improve the quality of the outdoor curriculum and the range of play resources in the Foundation Stage.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

When pupils enter the Nursery their performance is below that expected of children of this age. At the end of Reception, after their first two years in school, pupils have made good progress in all areas of learning to reach expected levels for their age.

In 2005, standards at the end of Year 6 were average in mathematics, slightly below average in English and above average in science. Pupils' progress was good in science and satisfactory in English and mathematics. In Year 2, overall standards were average and pupils made satisfactory progress over time. In reading and mathematics the more able achieved well. Results should be treated with caution because of the relatively small numbers of pupils taking national assessments.

The pupils currently in Years 2 and 6 are making satisfactory progress given their original starting points. Pupils' speaking and writing skills are insufficiently developed and this is hindering their ability to communicate effectively and succeed in national assessments. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties is satisfactory. The very small number of looked after children are making good progress in their basic skills and personal development. This is because of the effective support and guidance they receive. Targets for the oldest pupils are realistic and provide an appropriate level of challenge.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils have a deep appreciation of the values of the Catholic faith and this pervades many aspects of school life. Regular opportunities are given for reflection and for pupils to apply their faith in everyday situations. This is helping them develop a sense of values, principles and beliefs that inform their perspective on life and behaviour. The school council has involved the whole school in a project in collaboration with a local health insurance company to create a quiet area for prayer and reflection, valuable to the whole-school community.

Pupils have a good understanding of their social responsibilities, both within school and in the community. They enjoy coming to school, behave well and are relaxed and open in the way they relate to adults and each other. They say that they feel safe and are free from problems such as bullying and discrimination. Racial harmony is very good. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory.

Pupils appreciate the need to keep fit and eat healthy food. This is reflected in changes to the food provided at break and lunchtime, which are valued by the pupils and have improved eating habits. The outside link with a local credit union has a number of benefits. It helps pupils gain an understanding about personal finance and a number save regularly as a result.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There are examples of good teaching but there is a lack of consistency. Too many lessons are only satisfactory. The very good relationships and positive attitudes of the pupils support learning well. In the most effective lessons, work is pitched at the right level and builds on what pupils have learned before. Teaching methods are well selected and time is used productively for whole-class and independent work. There are plenty of opportunities for pupils to talk about things to develop their ideas and clarify their thinking. Expectations are high and pupils have a clear understanding of what they are learning, how they are getting on, and how they can improve.

In the less effective lessons there are some common weaknesses. In some lessons teachers talk too much and over-direct activities, limiting opportunities for pupils to participate and think and learn for themselves. There is little modelling of language to develop correct sentence formation. Tasks lack sufficient challenge; teachers' expectations are not high enough so pupils do not make as much progress as they should. On occasions, writing skills are taught in isolation and in unimaginative ways. Too often, pupils spend their time talking about the writing task rather than doing it.

Assessment systems are satisfactory overall. This said, pupils' listening and speaking skills are not effectively assessed. It is difficult therefore to measure pupils' progress in these key skills and to identify strengths and weaknesses in their performance. There are examples of detailed marking, particularly in writing, but this does not happen consistently across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. The school uses specialist expertise to provide a good range of activities in music and information and communication technology. The strong emphasis on developing numeracy, reading and listening skills enables pupils to make at least satisfactory progress in these areas. There are few planned opportunities for structured speaking in the curriculum and teachers are not modelling language often enough. As a result, pupils' vocabulary and grammatical skills are not developing at a fast enough rate. Progress in writing is also hindered because planning does not include enough opportunities for pupils to write for an extended period of time.

Provision in the Nursery and Reception classes is good and this means pupils achieve well in all areas of learning. However, the quality of the environment and the range of play resources on offer outdoors are limited. This means pupils' progress, particularly with regard to their imaginative, investigative and creative skills, is not being fully enabled. The school has recognised this and targeted the issue for action. The curriculum is enriched by a good range of worthwhile additional activities, such as the

teaching of sign language for the deaf. Pupils say, 'the clubs are one of the best bits of school life.'

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. There is a high level of commitment from staff in promoting health and safety. Robust risk assessments are in place and staff have been effectively trained in child protection matters so pupils are properly safeguarded. Pupils at risk are identified early and effective arrangements put in place to guide and support them. For example, the looked-after pupils receive a package of measures, including one-to-one work, which ensures that their academic and personal needs are effectively met. Pupils who are not progressing as they should are tracked by a learning mentor, who intervenes effectively to help pupils engage in learning or modify their behaviour, so they do as well as they can.

The individual targets that are set in literacy and numeracy are helping pupils gain a good understanding of what they have to do to improve. Apart from the oldest pupils, many are unaware of the national curriculum level they are working at and what needs to be done to reach the next level.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has been successful in creating a positive and open ethos based on Catholic principles. Staff share a common purpose and morale is good. Effective links have been made with parents and they hold the school in high regard. The Nursery Reading Project is a good example of parents being involved in their child's learning, with positive results. Governors are supportive and fulfil their statutory responsibilities. They were fully involved in shaping the new mission statement and rightly included the need to focus on academic achievement alongside developing pupils' personal and spiritual development.

A number of useful initiatives have been put in place to improve writing and assessment practices. The signs are that they are having a positive impact but inconsistencies in practice are slowing down progress. It is important that leaders embed initiatives, ensuring they are fully effective before they move on to new things.

The school's self-evaluation procedures are sound and this means leaders have a secure understanding of the main strengths and weaknesses of the school. The tools used for review require strengthening and better links need to be made between the different approaches to ensure work is coherent and effective.

The school collects a lot of information about pupils' performance, which it uses effectively to set targets and inform intervention. For example, data showed the slowing of pupils' progress in a particular year group and the headteacher intervened appropriately to bring about improvement. Leaders do not yet make full use of the information to evaluate the progress made by different groups of pupils or to improve

the quality of teaching and learning. General monitoring of teaching takes place and staff have been told about the strengths and weaknesses in their work. However, leaders have not been systematic enough in checking up on improvement. The evaluation of provision is not aligned closely enough to the priorities identified in the strategic plan.

The improvement plan is satisfactory and it clearly identifies the key priorities for the school. However, it is not made clear in the plan how initiatives will be monitored; also, the actions to bring about further improvement are not always made sufficiently explicit.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Pupils, Hello, I am one of the inspectors that visited your school. We enjoyed our visit and everyone was welcoming and friendly. We liked talking to you about your work, speaking to your teachers and coming into classrooms to see how well you were progressing. I am writing you this letter to tell you what we found out.

These are the things we thought were good

- You enjoy coming to school and are happy there.
- People of different backgrounds get on really well.
- We were pleased to see that your faith plays such an important part in your own lives and that of the school.
- You said that one of the best bits about school was the activities you do after school.
- You behave well in and outside of the classroom.

We have asked the teachers to do some things to make your school even better

- We think you could be doing better in speaking and writing. We want you to improve your spelling and punctuation and write for longer periods of time.
- We want all of your lessons to be as good as the best.
- We want those of you in the Nursery and Reception classes to have even more interesting and exciting things to do outside.
- We want the headteacher, staff and governors to keep an even better check on how the school is doing and where it is going in the future.

Best wishes,

David Rzeznik Lead Inspector