



St Ambrose Barlow Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103465
LEA Birmingham
Inspection number 276928
Inspection dates 19 September 2005 to 20 September 2005
Reporting inspector Bogusia Matusiak-Varley RISP

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Shirley Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Hall Green
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Birmingham, West Midlands B28 9JJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01214 642791
Number on roll	279	Fax number	01214 642791
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	
Date of previous inspection	13 November 2000	Headteacher	Mr Gregory Jones

Age group 4 to 11	Inspection dates 19 September 2005 - 20 September 2005	Inspection number 276928
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

St Ambrose Barlow Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School is situated in Hall Green, Birmingham and serves a wide community, taking pupils from Hall Green, Solihull and surrounding areas. Socio-economic circumstances are average and the number of families claiming free school meals is below the national average. Nearly all of the pupils are from white British backgrounds, with very few from minority ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils who have special educational needs is below the national average and four pupils have statements of special educational needs. Nearly all pupils spend the whole of their primary education at the school. Attainment on entry to the school is average and has declined since the previous inspection in 2000, when it was above average. The school is very much a focal point for the Catholic community.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Ambrose Barlow Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School provides an outstanding education for its pupils and has maintained very high standards in English, mathematics and science since the previous inspection in November 2000. Standards improve year on year because of the very good teaching and use of assessment, target setting and curriculum planning. The parental support is very good and the leadership and management of the headteacher, senior management team and the governing body are excellent.

The headteacher and senior leaders have an accurate picture of what needs to be done in order to improve, such as raising overall standards in information and communication technology (ICT) so that these match the very high standards in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. Attainment on entry to the Foundation Stage is average. By the end of the Foundation Stage, children exceed the expected standards and their achievements are outstanding. Pupils continue to make excellent progress throughout the school because of the excellent teaching.

School self-evaluation is thorough but the school judges itself too modestly. The curriculum is well planned except for opportunities for pupils to develop and use ICT skills. These are at an early stage of development due to lack of resources. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities.

The strength of this school lies in its outstanding Catholic ethos. The pupils are encouraged to keep healthy, they feel safe, enjoy school and achieve well and they make a positive contribution to the community. There is still more work to be done in ensuring that the pupils develop skills that contribute to their future economic well-being and increase their knowledge and understanding of living in a multicultural society. These areas are currently satisfactory. The school has very good capacity to further improve, due to the rigour of its self-evaluation. It provides very good value for money and has made good improvement since the last inspection, especially in developing pupils' attainment in mathematics and developing the role of subject leaders.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve resources in ICT to increase opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in this subject
- Improve pupils' awareness of achieving economic well-being and living in a multicultural society.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The school evaluates learners' achievement and standards as good but the inspectors judge these as outstanding because of the continuous improvement in standards over the past five years. From an average starting point, pupils attain well above national

standards by the end of Year 2 and Year 6 in English, mathematics and science. All groups of pupils make excellent progress, including higher-attaining pupils and pupils who have special educational needs. Their achievements are excellent and nearly all pupils achieve the challenging targets that are set for them. This is because of excellent teaching throughout the school. The pupils use their literacy and numeracy skills very well in other subjects, especially when they write accounts, reports and explanations. By the end of the Foundation Stage, nearly all children exceed the expected standards in all areas of learning and enter Year 1 with a firm knowledge of basic reading, writing and speaking skills. They continue to make excellent progress as they move up through the school and are very well prepared for their next stage of education. However, standards in ICT are only average by the end of Year 2 and Year 6 and pupils' achievements are satisfactory. Whilst satisfactory progress in purchasing computers has been made since the last inspection, they are, nevertheless, outdated and this restricts pupils' further progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The school evaluates pupils' personal development and well-being as good but the inspectors judge them as outstanding. The school is a very happy harmonious community where each individual child is valued for his or her uniqueness. Pupils genuinely care for each other, have excellent attitudes to learning and are very keen to please their teachers, whom they adore. When asked by inspectors what they like most about the school they immediately responded in unison "our teachers because they make learning fun".

Children in the Foundation Stage get off to a very good start in that they know the difference between right and wrong and are very familiar with classroom routines. Behaviour in and around the school is excellent; pupils are very polite, support one another's differences and are very attentive in lessons. Relationships are outstanding and the Catholic ethos and school's mission statement of caring for one another underpins all aspects of school life. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good overall but pupils' cultural development could be improved upon with regard to their learning more about life in a multicultural society. Pupils love coming to school and attendance is well above the national average. Regular health and safety checks are carried out and pupils are taught how to take care of themselves through a very good programme of personal, social and health education. The school's participation in the Birmingham Healthy Standards Programme and the extra links with specialist services ensure that pupils are healthy and well cared for.

Links with industry are satisfactory but could be improved so that pupils are made more aware of how their skills in literacy and numeracy can contribute to their future economic well-being. The school has recognised, in its self-evaluation, that this is an area for further development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The school evaluates this aspect of its provision as good. Inspectors judge it as outstanding because the school has maintained standards that are well above the national average and the pupils achieve highly and learn very quickly.

The quality of teaching in relation to meeting the full range of learners' needs is exceptional. This quality is consistent in the Foundation Stage and in all other year groups and the pupils do very well as a result. Most of the staff have been at the school for a long time and they are passionate about teaching and enriching the lives of their pupils. All the staff are committed to raising standards and teachers have excellent subject knowledge. They question pupils to develop their thinking skills and independent learning and there is very good use of assessment to inform planning. Teachers give realistic praise and pupils feel safe, secure and valued. Teachers have very good knowledge of pupils' social and emotional needs and they set ambitious targets for them.

The staff's sense of humour is apparent in most lessons. For example, in one mathematics lesson in the juniors, the class teacher told her pupils that smiling makes learning easy and far more enjoyable. Pupils immediately smiled while practising their four-times tables. Owing to the excellent teaching, pupils make excellent progress and are very happy, confident and eager learners who are constantly eager to please their teachers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is very good and plenty of opportunities are provided for children to learn through using their senses. A very good balance is provided through formal learning and learning through structured play. This has a very positive effect on children's acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills. The curriculum is vibrant and exciting, offering very good opportunity for pupils to use their skills of literacy and numeracy especially in writing across the curriculum and for a range of different purposes. This was seen in pupils' history, geography and religious education books where pupils used a wide range of different styles of writing. However, the use of ICT is only satisfactory and needs improving. Too few opportunities for using ICT across the curriculum are provided and this is not reflected in teachers' planning. The curriculum is enriched with an excellent range of activities, including very well attended after-school art and design, music, dance, ICT and sports clubs. The quality of art displays around the school and in the art and design portfolio is breathtaking.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school evaluates its provision for care, guidance and support as good but inspectors judge this aspect as outstanding. The welfare of the learners is at the heart of the school's work and is a significant strength of the school. Children in the Foundation Stage are given plenty of very good opportunities to express their emotions. Every opportunity is taken to enable them to feel safe and secure through high insistence on classroom rules. Throughout the school, pupils feel their views are listened to, respected and acted upon. Pupils are very clear about what aspects of the school provision needs improving, such as the development of the large playground and the further development of the provision of ICT in the school so that all pupils have equal access to the most recent technology. Adults in the school provide very good role models and foster excellent relationships. Very close attention is given to providing pupils with a healthy and safe working environment. Potential risks are assessed rigorously and any issues are dealt with speedily. Very close links exist with different agencies aimed at supporting pupils' well-being. Child protection procedures are very good. All pupils are very well supported; pupils who have special educational needs have their individual education plans reviewed regularly and know what they need to do in order to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher evaluates leadership and management as good; inspectors judge it to be outstanding. The headteacher is a reflective, purposeful and rigorous leader who provides a very clear direction for the work of the school through his very good monitoring of teaching and learning and good school self-evaluation. He is well supported by his deputy headteacher, senior management team and the governing body, all of whom carry out their roles very effectively. The school improvement plan is a very well-focused document with very detailed criteria to judge its success, of which all staff and governors have ownership, and it is effective in moving the school forward.

Keeping track of the effectiveness of the teaching is very well established throughout the school. Senior managers and subject leaders regularly undertake book trawls and consult pupils as to what they like about teaching and learning. This is then discussed with staff, and information is used to alter curriculum planning and teaching strategies so that the needs of pupils are fully met. Staff attend a full range of courses, such as developing guided reading. This is having a very positive effect on improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising standards. Staff foster a extremely caring environment, ensuring that all children have equal opportunities to help them achieve as well as they can. The school has very good systems to combat all forms of discrimination and disadvantages; pupils are given excellent support and are encouraged to respect each other regardless of their background. For example, the issue of sexism is tackled very effectively through the history curriculum where pupils, while learning

about the Crimean war and Florence Nightingale, explore male attitudes to female nursing. The leadership and management of the Foundation Stage are excellent. Activities for children run like clockwork and all staff are clear about what is expected of them.

The school has adequate staffing levels and uses its budget wisely; financial planning is very good. However, resources are only satisfactory overall; in particular there are too few computers, interactive whiteboards and laptops to support pupils' learning. The school gives very good value for money and governors discharge their duties exceptionally well. They are fully involved in all aspects of self-evaluation and subsequent planning for school improvement. They are fully aware of their responsibilities and these are taken seriously for the benefit of the pupils.

Partnership with parents is excellent. Parents are consulted on all aspects of school life and are seen as true partners in their children's learning and well-being. They are exceptionally supportive of everything that the school offers and are very appreciative of the headteacher and his staff.

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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?	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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?	1	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	1	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	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?	1	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	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

Thank you so much for making us feel so welcome when we inspected your school. A thank-you to those of you who brought us toast on Tuesday morning. Both the inspectors and the Local Education Authority advisor thoroughly enjoyed it!

We think that you are very lucky to attend such a wonderful school. We are particularly impressed by:

Your excellent attitudes, behaviour and the way you care about one another

Your very good attendance

The very high standards you reach in English, mathematics and science throughout the school

Your contributions to the Catholic community of your parish

Your knowledge of what you need to do to improve further

The excellent way in which you learn, which is due to your teachers' excellent teaching

The governors' contribution to ensuring that you get an excellent education

The way your headteacher and the other senior teachers lead and manage the school

The way your parents support you in your schoolwork.

We thoroughly agree with your views that your teachers are ace! We do, however, feel that in order to make your school even better, your teachers need to:

Help you more in developing your skills in ICT

Teach you more about the world of work and life in a multi-cultural society.

Your headteacher has already got plans to help you get better in these areas.

It was a pleasure for us to inspect your school and we wish you the very best for the future.