



St Nicholas Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103475
LEA Birmingham
Inspection number 276931
Inspection dates 13 March 2006 to 14 March 2006
Reporting inspector Jacqueline Marshall AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Jockey Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Sutton Coldfield
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		West Midlands B73 5US
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 3552649
Number on roll	210	Fax number	0121 3556303
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Patricia Pratt
Date of previous inspection	19 June 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Margaret McConnell

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Nicholas is an average-sized primary school. The school is popular and currently oversubscribed. The proportion leaving or joining the school after the reception year is low. Few pupils are eligible for free school meals. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is higher than that usually seen for their age. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below the national average. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school where pupils are extremely well cared for and achieve very highly. Pupils really enjoy coming to school, their behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary and these aspects of personal development contribute significantly to their achievements.

Provision in the reception class is good and means children get off to a solid start in their learning from above-average starting points. By the time they reach Year 1 they are exceeding the expected levels for their age, and when they leave school at eleven they consistently reach exceptionally high standards. All groups of pupils make outstanding progress because teaching is consistently at least good, and often exemplary. Work is very well matched to pupils' individual needs and teachers ensure the support and guidance they give helps pupils to know exactly what to do next to improve. Whilst the curriculum is good and supports learning well, pupils' problem-solving skills in mathematics have been rightly identified as an area to develop further by the school.

Leadership and management of the school are excellent. The headteacher, all senior managers and governors in the school contribute to the school's success in the way they have promoted high standards and achievement. Although cautious in their own judgement of themselves as good, they have an extremely good understanding of their own strengths and what they need to do next to improve. As a result the school has made good progress since the last inspection and can go on to improve further. The school gives excellent value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement in mathematics further by developing pupils' problem-solving skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve very well at St Nicholas. Children's skills and knowledge as they enter school are above the levels expected for their age. They make good progress in the reception class so that most exceed these by the start of Year 1. Pupils go on to make consistently good progress throughout the school so that by the time they leave school, at the end of Year 6, pupils reach exceptionally high standards in English, mathematics and science.

Standards reached by pupils in the 2005 tests at the end of Year 2 were above the national average in writing and mathematics and well above average in reading. This has been a consistent picture for writing and reading. After a dip in 2004, results in mathematics rose again to above the national average.

Results are extremely and consistently high in the tests at the end of Year 6, with the majority of pupils reaching the higher levels in English, mathematics and science. In 2005 the school exceeded its own challenging targets. The school's efforts ensured that progress in English improved further in 2005 and, with science, is now significantly higher than the national average. Pupils' progress in mathematics, whilst consistently good, is not yet at this high level.

Standards seen in lessons and pupils' work during the inspection in Year 2 are above average and well above average in writing. In Year 6 the extremely high standards are being maintained and pupils are on track to meet the school's own challenging targets. Overall progress of all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, is outstanding.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding and their exceptionally good behaviour and attitudes reflect this. Attendance is consistently well above average.

Pupils look forward to coming to school because they really enjoy learning and feel valued and respected. Pupils told inspectors, 'it's a friendly place and teachers really help you to learn!' They feel safe from bullying and know that if they have a problem there is always an adult or older pupil to share it with. Pupils respond well to a good range of opportunities to contribute to how the school is run. Through the well-established school council they have recently changed the seating for pupils at lunchtime, a system seen working very successfully during the inspection. Initiatives such as this, and the strong emphasis placed on developing pupils' basic skills, prepare pupils extremely well for the world of work.

Pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is outstanding overall because of the extremely high priority the school gives to this. Especially close links with the parish, alongside quality opportunities in school, enable pupils to build on their experiences – for example through the highly successful peer mediation scheme and Year 6 pupils teaching younger pupils chess prior to them joining the lunchtime club. Whilst pupils' understanding of their own culture is more highly developed than of other cultures, regular fundraising for a variety of good causes means pupils are gaining a growing understanding of the wider world and an appreciation of the lifestyles of people who are less fortunate than themselves. The school promotes pupils' well-being and safe lifestyle effectively through initiatives such as healthy snacks, access to water and a wide range of out-of-hours sporting activities. As a result, pupils have a very clear understanding of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching is outstanding overall and in the best lessons is inspirational. Lessons are consistently well planned and this ensures that work is always exceptionally well matched to pupils' individual needs. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects and make particularly good use of a wide range of different teaching methods in order to ensure that pupils are fully engaged in learning. They explain tasks with extreme care and make sure that pupils fully understand what they are going to learn. They are very well supported in lessons by effective teaching assistants who provide valuable help to pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. As a result, all pupils make outstanding progress in their learning.

Teachers make lessons really interesting and, as a result, pupils are attentive, extremely well behaved and keen to learn. They work very hard because they enjoy the challenging activities they are provided with. As one pupil quite simply stated, 'Lessons are fun!' Pupils know what is expected of them because teachers share with them what they need to do next to improve. The quality of marking of pupils' work is particularly good in this respect.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's good curriculum and wide range of additional activities, whilst reflecting the religious nature of the school, ensure that all pupils, including those of reception age, are provided with learning opportunities that are very well matched to their needs and capabilities. However, while pupils attain exceptionally high standards, Year 6 pupils told inspectors that if they got even better at problem solving in mathematics it would improve their attainment even more. The wide range of clubs and activities, such as chess, choir, French and different sports, is popular with all ages of pupils and contributes to their positive attitudes. Pupils also look forward to meeting interesting visitors to the school whilst visits to places of interest bring their learning alive.

The school is continually developing and improving the curriculum. For example, provision for information and communication technology has improved since the last inspection and is now taught well and used successfully to support learning in a wide range of subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

This is an extremely caring school which welcomes all children, whatever their needs. Pupils and parents recognise this and it is a key factor in pupils' very positive attitudes to school. Child protection and health and safety procedures are well understood and any pupils who are at risk are quickly identified and supported very well. Pupils say

that they feel safe and know who to turn to if necessary. Support for pupils with learning difficulties is very good and outside agencies and parents are involved effectively.

Procedures for checking pupils' progress are extremely effective and the information gained is used consistently by teachers when planning further work in order to provide pupils with challenging targets. Very effective marking then ensures that pupils are given a very good idea of how to further improve their work. As a result, they make outstanding progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher has created a school where all pupils do well and a culture of success and achievement runs throughout. All leaders, staff, pupils and parents share her strong vision of a school that is constantly striving to improve but where every child is important.

The work of the senior managers is a significant strength of the school. They form a strong and extremely successful management team. They know precisely what is working well and what still needs to be done in the school. They monitor the teaching rigorously to see where it is best and support newly appointed staff particularly effectively, sometimes through joint observations, and they know just how well pupils are doing. They all have an excellent understanding of what is needed to take the school forward and have the capacity to help the school improve.

The governing body is also contributing effectively to this success. Governors are caring, supportive and active in school. They are fully involved in all major decisions and fulfil their responsibilities well. The school regularly seeks and takes into account the views of parents and other stakeholders, resulting in the large majority of parents responding extremely positively when asked about the effectiveness of their school.

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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?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	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	1	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	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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 for talking to us and showing us your work when we visited your school.

Here are the things we like best:

We are impressed by the really good progress you make in your subjects – especially English, mathematics and science.

We are pleased to hear that you really like school and that the grown-ups are very kind and look after you well.

We think that they help you to know just what you have to do to keep safe and healthy.

We were happy to hear that there are plenty of things for you to take part in, such as the chess, French and sports clubs.

We think you are extremely polite to adults and behave really well.

In order to make your learning even better, we have asked the adults in charge of your school to:

Make sure that teachers are helping you to get even better at solving problems in mathematics.

Thank you again for helping us with our work.