



St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104809
LEA St. Helens
Inspection number 277225
Inspection dates 27 February 2006 to 28 February 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Mark Madeley CfBT Lead Inspector

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Rainford Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Windleshaw
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		St Helens, Merseyside WA10 6BX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01744 621380
Number on roll	268	Fax number	01744 621381
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr R Houlton
Date of previous inspection	12 September 2000	Headteacher	Mr R Orlandi

Age group 4 to 11	Inspection dates 27 February 2006 - 28 February 2006	Inspection number 277225
-----------------------------	---	------------------------------------

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is larger than average. It serves a diverse community in which the socio-economic characteristics are broadly average. There are few children from minority ethnic heritages. The percentage of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, although a higher than usual number of these pupils has a statement of special educational need. Children's attainment on entry is broadly average. The school has achieved a number of awards including, the Early Years Charter Mark, Investors in People, the Sports Activemark and the Healthy Schools Standard. The school is also a member of a Network Learning Community.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Overall, the school's self-evaluation is accurate; this is a good school. The only exception is that children's personal development is outstanding rather than good as judged by the school. This difference in view is because children are so confident, caring and knowledgeable about staying healthy and safe.

Children get off to an exceptionally good start in the Foundation Stage where they learn very effectively through purposeful play activities. Provision, including the quality of teaching, here is outstanding and enables most children to reach the standards for their age group and a high proportion to go beyond this level.

The quality of teaching is good. Staff build effectively on the very positive start children get in the Foundation Stage. Some classes have many more boys than girls and occasionally teachers in Years 1 to 6 do not consistently plan well enough for the more active way in which boys learn. Children make good progress through the school and standards in English, mathematics and science are above average. The school has identified children's writing as an area for further development and the team agrees that in particular, the writing of the most able children could be better.

The school is well led and managed and there has been good improvement since the last inspection, especially in the quality of marking which is now a strength of the school. The school knows itself well. Children's progress is rigorously monitored and the outcomes of new initiatives are carefully evaluated. These factors show that the school is very capable of improving further. The school makes exceptionally good use of its partnership with a local secondary school in using the subject expertise of teachers and that of other schools and outside agencies that support the most vulnerable children. The school gives good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Encourage all children, but particularly the most able, to improve and enliven their writing further.
- Improve further boys' learning by ensuring that teaching reflects the active way that they learn.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good. Children's standards on entry to the Foundation Stage are as expected. From this point, they achieve well because teaching is effective and their progress is carefully monitored and evaluated through the school.

Across all six areas of learning, children make at least good progress in the Foundation Stage. Staff skilfully promote children's independence and their ability to make informed choices so that in their personal, social and emotional development children

make outstanding progress. Children are very well prepared for learning in Year 1 because most reach the standards for their age with one third going beyond this.

Standards in English, mathematics and science are above average by the end of Years 2 and 6 and have been like this for the last three years. Teachers build effectively throughout the school on children's early reading, writing and mathematical skills. Children have confidence when writing and are keen to share their thoughts. The most able writers, though, are not consistently challenged to produce high quality work which demonstrates the high quality of their vocabularies and experiences. Changes to the way problem solving in mathematics and planning experiments in science are taught are having a positive impact on children's understanding. The difference in progress between boys and girls is quite marked. This has been identified correctly by the school and is partly explained by the high proportion of boys who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Another reason is that, on occasions, teaching does not fully engage boys and this limits their learning. The school sets and meets challenging targets based on rigorous evaluation of children's work. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress towards the targets set for them in their individual plans. The school uses support staff and outside agencies well to help these children learn.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children's personal development and well-being are outstanding. They enjoy school, feel safe, secure and happy. They show great consideration and care for each other. Children's attitudes and relationships are outstanding and their behaviour is excellent. The good levels of attendance reflect the pleasure children get from coming to school.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Children's sense of respect and feeling for others is very well developed. Their confidence and independence shows very good self-awareness which helps them to recognise their personal progress. At playtimes, children play together sensibly, older children frequently caring for the younger ones. Children know about the need for physical exercise, healthy eating and personal safety because the school places these issues as high priority. An outstanding example is the 'wake up and shake up' session at the start of the day led by Year 6 children. This active start to the day is enjoyable and fun for children and some parents join in too! Children have good opportunities to learn about other cultures and beliefs. They show exemplary concern for those less fortunate than themselves. Children contribute very well to school and have an effective school council. Celebration of belonging to the Parish through social and religious occasions is strong. They are diligent in their learning and achieve well which prepares them effectively for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children behave well and are attentive to their teachers and each other because there is mutual respect and there are very positive relationships in all classes. In the best lessons, all children are challenged through teacher's questioning and tasks which best suit their ability. The pace of learning is rapid and encouragement is used sensitively to engage everyone. Occasionally, lessons require boys to sit still for too long or the content does not interest them and this leads to ineffective learning and restlessness. One very positive feature of teaching is that children assess their own learning. In some writing lessons children, particularly the more able, are not challenged enough to use their rich vocabularies. Staff work very effectively with children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities using varied strategies, and a great deal of patience and understanding, to help them learn well.

Assessment systems are very good. Staff make effective use of information from tests to inform their lesson planning and to identify those who need additional support. Their marking of children's work is very high quality and this, coupled with a very effective target setting system, helps children understand how to improve their work further.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good with some very strong features and meets statutory requirements. It is creatively designed and meets the needs of all children thus enabling them to make good progress. The Foundation Stage curriculum is of high quality. It uses the national guidelines very effectively to help children learn through purposeful play. Reception classrooms are very inviting for young learners and activities are exceptionally well organised. Good provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology provides children with the basic skills for life. An enriching feature is the wealth of opportunities for physical education and music. There is outstanding provision for children's personal development which promotes healthy lifestyles and a keen sense of community. The programme for gifted and talented children is well planned. However, it has only recently started and has, therefore, not yet had sufficient time to have an impact.

The extensive educational visits and visitors broaden the children's understanding of the world. An example of this is the very good provision of Spanish language teaching, which is supported by staff from the secondary school. Dedicated staff offer many after school clubs for all ages and these are well attended and enjoyed by the children.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support for the children are good. The school ethos of Catholic commitment and care permeates its life and work. Consequently, the children feel secure and valued. Children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well cared for and talented staff ensure they are continually challenged to improve. All children have targets to work towards and they have a good understanding of how to improve their work. Older children especially recognise how they learn best and the teachers are generally mindful of this information as they plan their lessons, though boys' needs could sometimes receive greater consideration. Health and safety issues are well addressed in the school. The arrangements for child protection are appropriate and links with support agencies and with the secondary school are very strong. The parents' views are overwhelmingly supportive. They value the healthy initiatives promoted and also reflect that the school has not lost sight of the children's needs in the drive for improved standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher provides a clear vision for the school. Parents recognise that he has a very strong commitment to all the children in his care and hold him in high regard. The school flourishes because of strong teamwork between adults which has the common goal of improving standards. School self-evaluation is accurate and priorities for development are suitably focused on raising achievement. The key coordinators have a clear understanding of their subjects through effective monitoring procedures. Recently implemented strategies to improve the performance of boys are resulting in teachers becoming more aware of their specific needs but this remains inconsistent across the school. The school makes effective use of expertise by providing specialist teaching in some subjects and is monitoring the impact of this strategy closely. The views of the children are sought and frequently acted upon. Parents recognise the good care and commitment demonstrated by the school. The school has made good improvements since the last inspection and has maintained its above average standards. Because the school's self-evaluation is accurate, it demonstrates a good capacity to improve further.

The governing body is effective. Governors have a wide range of skills and are well informed about the work of the school. The committed chair of the governing body is a regular visitor to the school and consequently knows it well.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
--	-----------------------	--------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	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?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	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	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	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?	2	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?	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?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	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	2	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 very much for making our recent visit to your school such an enjoyable one. We think you attend a good school. One of the really great features of your school is YOU! We were really impressed with how well behaved, keen to learn, sensible and thoughtful you were all the time. Those who led the 'wake up and shake up' were fantastic. We were really thrilled with the Foundation Stage and how well the children responded to the exciting room and great activities. They are becoming so confident and really enjoy playing together. You told us that you enjoyed your lessons and the extra activities and we agree they are very good. We liked the way you are taught by specialist teachers sometimes, like for Spanish and physical education.

We think your hardworking teachers help you make good progress and reach high standards in English, mathematics and science. Your reading skills are particularly strong but we would like to see greater challenge in writing for some of you. We also feel that in some lessons not enough thought is given to how boys learn best and we have asked the school to make this more consistent. Your school is well led by your headteacher and the staff work together very well as a team for your benefit.

Your parents and the children we spoke to are delighted with your school and we are not surprised. It is a very caring community in which every single child is valued. Parents talked about a 'lovely atmosphere', 'a happy and secure learning environment' and 'a very welcoming community' and we agree with all these comments. Above all, we thought you were very special and we thank you for your contribution to the inspection.