



St Catherine's RC Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105524
LEA Manchester
Inspection number 277368
Inspection dates 14 September 2005 to 15 September 2005
Reporting inspector Mr Frank Carruthers CfBT Lead Inspector

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	School Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Didsbury
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		Manchester, Lancashire M20 6HS
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0161 445 6359
Number on roll	433	Fax number	0161 445 0648
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Father Wilson
Date of previous inspection	27 November 2000	Headteacher	Mr P Hennessey

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This large Catholic aided primary school is located in a relatively prosperous suburb to the south of Manchester city centre. The school shares the same site as the church and space is at a premium, both inside the buildings and in the grounds where there are two temporary classrooms, a hard play area and no grassed area for sports. Most pupils are White-British with a small proportion from Asian or Black African families. There are no pupils at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The attainment of most children on entry to the nursery is better than expected for their age. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is just below the average for a school of this type and there are four pupils with a statement of special educational need. Their needs include physical disability, and language and learning delay. At the time of the inspection, a new headteacher had just started at the school after the retirement of the previous post holder.

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 a highly effective school, promoting exceptionally high standards of pupils' achievement and personal development through high quality teaching. The school provides excellent value for money when the pupils' results and the relatively low costs of provision are taken into account. The school has significant strengths in all aspects of its work, particularly in the achievement of pupils and the standards they reach in English, mathematics and science, which are very high. The quality of teaching, learning and the curriculum are excellent, as are the care, guidance and support that the school provides for pupils. The quality of provision in the Foundation Stage is excellent and children achieve very well, so that standards at the end of the reception year are well above expected levels. The school works productively with other schools and agencies to promote pupils' learning and well-being. The school is highly successful in catering for the needs of all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Parents and pupils hold the school in very high regard.

Leadership and management of the school are good, helping to maintain the high standards since the time of the last inspection. The school has effective procedures to evaluate how well it is doing but sometimes underestimates its own quality, for example in judging teaching and learning as only good. Some aspects of monitoring and evaluating how well the school is doing, including involving parents' and pupils' views, could be improved. The school buildings have significant weaknesses and plans have been drawn up for the building of a new school on the same site. Improvements made since the last inspection have proved effective and the school is well placed to improve even further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the existing procedures for checking the quality of teaching and learning in order to give all teachers the opportunity to monitor provision and share good practice.
- Involve governors more effectively in these procedures so that they are well informed about the quality of teaching and learning.
- Include parents' and pupils' views in planning the development of the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve very well in this school and standards in Year 6 are exceptionally high compared to most primary schools. Not only do children make very good progress in the nursery and reception classes, they continue to make rapid gains in essential aspects of literacy and numeracy in Years 1 and 2. Pupils achieve very well in relation to their capabilities and standards are well above average in Year 2. A high proportion of pupils regularly reach standards that are above expected levels. In Years 3 to 6, this very good progress is maintained as a result of the high quality of teaching. The standards that pupils reach in Year 6 when compared to their performance in year 2

show that the school is doing significantly better than expected in helping pupils to achieve their potential. The school is successful in meeting the challenging targets it sets for pupils in English and mathematics. Pupils achieve very well in information and communication technology (ICT), despite some limitations to provision in Year 3 caused by the shortcomings of temporary classrooms.

Teachers have high expectations of all pupils, including higher attainers and those with learning difficulties and disabilities; as a result, they make very good progress. For example, a high proportion of pupils reach standards in English, mathematics and science that are above the levels expected of pupils in Year 6. Those with learning difficulties regularly reach the targets in their individual education plans and this success means that many are removed from the school's list of pupils requiring extra support. Boys are doing particularly well in comparison with boys nationally and girls are performing very well. The small numbers of pupils from minority ethnic groups achieve as well as their classmates and those children 'looked after' in public care are very well supported to achieve their potential.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Pupils are happy, safe and confident in school and attendance is good. The pupils themselves and their parents say that they enjoy school very much. They are very enthusiastic in their learning and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. This is the result of the school's positive ethos, which arises naturally from its religious character.

Positive written rules and reminders of appropriate behaviour help pupils to behave exceptionally well in lessons and at break times. Pupils see the excellent example set by staff and are at all times polite and helpful. Relationships that pupils have with staff and with each other are excellent. Children are encouraged to help others from the moment they enter the school and older pupils help and welcome children who are new to the school, acting as their buddies. Pupils work very well together in groups and show initiative in lessons, using resources and equipment confidently.

The school council is proud of the school and its sporting and academic achievements. They are confident that staff listen to them and say that everyone is friendly. The school recognises that further consultation with pupils and parents could be developed and inspectors agree that taking better note of their views would help the school's planning for the future. Healthy lifestyles are promoted through the school's successful work with the Healthy Schools programme. The school's Catholic ethos encourages the pupils to consider and to contribute positively to the well-being of others, through fund raising and charity work. This work also helps the pupils to use their initiative and understand money in the fund-raising stalls that they operate. Pupils' basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT are promoted well enabling them to be given an excellent start to their secondary school career.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are very good throughout the school with many outstanding features. As a result, all pupils achieve very well. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve the targets in their individual education plans because work is matched to the right level for them. They receive very good guidance from the learning support assistants and the support teachers who work with them.

Pupils respond very well to teachers' high expectations of work and behaviour. They listen attentively and concentrate very well, striving to do their best at all times. The excellent relationships that are evident in school, between all the adults and pupils, mean that pupils enjoy school very much and are willing learners. Teachers know the pupils well. The very effective measures to track how well pupils are progressing and to assess standards result in work being well matched to the individual needs of all pupils.

Teachers manage the pupils very well and lessons are conducted at a cracking pace with not a moment wasted. Classroom assistants are carefully directed to support the learning. In the best lessons, teachers clearly explain what is to be taught in the lessons and skilfully ask challenging questions that extend the pupils' thinking and understanding. This was observed in a literacy lesson in Year 4, when the pupils were writing and reflecting on their stories about a lighthouse keeper.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

All statutory requirements are met and the curriculum is very well matched to the needs of all the pupils in the school. Clear individual education plans that are closely linked to the work completed in class lessons ensure that those pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are fully included in all the activities.

The curriculum is very well organised and enables the pupils to build on what they have already achieved. A good balance is given to ensure that pupils learn new skills as well as gain factual knowledge. A very good programme of personal, social and health education and citizenship gives the pupils a secure grounding in issues of personal safety and healthy living. Pupils also have the opportunity to learn French and Spanish as well as receive individual tuition in a wide range of musical instruments. Even at the beginning of the autumn term, bright and lively displays enhance the school resulting in a very attractive environment for learning. The effective way in which work is displayed promotes pupils' interest.

Work in the classroom is complemented by many opportunities for the pupils to take part in a wide range of other activities and external visits. The numerous clubs on offer, including chess, choir and sports, help the pupils to extend and develop their skills and add to their enjoyment of learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support given to all children are very good. Children are encouraged to care for each other. Systems to ensure the health and safety of pupils are well developed. Care is outstanding for children who need extra support and parents are very closely involved in all processes. There are very thorough systems to track pupils' academic progress and set them challenging targets, which pupils know well. Children are confident to share and express their concerns to staff, who are skilled to help them manage their own problems. They trust staff and a strong ethos of care and support for others permeates all aspects of school life and the wider community. Arrangements for settling new children into school, including one-to-one support by a member of staff who is a learning mentor, are excellent and result in happy and confident learners from the beginning of their school life.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Inspectors confirmed the school's own assessment that leadership and management are good. The school is well led and managed and, under the leadership of the previous headteacher, maintained the high standards evident at the last inspection. Improvements have taken place in the few areas identified as weaknesses in the last report, such as provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Senior staff have successfully led school development very well and have promoted the ethos of the school to support pupils' personal and academic development. There is a clear vision and commitment to doing the best for all pupils and the school is keen to include vulnerable children and those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

The school's self-evaluation is based on placing appropriate emphasis on how well pupils achieve in lessons and checking the work of teachers through lesson observations and the standards of pupils' work. However, much of this work has been carried out by members of the senior management team and there have been very few opportunities for other staff, such as subject leaders, to become involved. A further aspect of development is to make more of the existing good links with parents and the views of pupils, through the school council, to provide both parents and pupils with the opportunity to contribute to forward planning and school evaluation. The current school development plan is aimed appropriately at improving provision; however, targets are not sufficiently prioritised or detailed. This is partly because the previous headteacher wanted it to be flexible to help the incoming headteacher.

Governors are highly committed to the school and bring a very good range of experiences and expertise to their roles. They are well led by the chairperson and are appropriately informed about how the school is performing through regular reports from the headteacher and the analysis of performance data about the school. However, they are not taking a sufficiently active part in monitoring the quality of provision by, for example, creating links with individual subject leaders and post holders. On the other hand, they have been very active in pushing ahead the plans for a new building.

The current buildings are hampered by a lack of space, with an assembly hall that cannot accommodate all the pupils, temporary classrooms that restrict provision for ICT, space inside and outside classrooms at a premium and little opportunity for expansion for a designated library or parents' room. It is to the great credit of all staff that these shortcomings have not had a more pronounced adverse impact on pupils' achievement and personal development. The capacity of the school to maintain and improve its provision and performance is good, given the quality of the governors and senior staff as well as the enthusiasm and wide experience of the incoming headteacher.

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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	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	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	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?	1	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?	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	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 your help when we inspected your school and please pass on our thanks to all the other children we met and spoke to while we were at school. We enjoyed our visit very much. Now we want to share with you what we thought about your school.

There are very many things in your school that are excellent. For instance:

- your teachers are doing an excellent job taking care of you and helping you all to learn;
- you work very hard and we were very impressed with how well you are doing in subjects such as English, mathematics, science and ICT;
- your behaviour is excellent and you are all growing into very sensible students who want to learn and find out;
- your teachers provide you with very good opportunities to learn about living in a healthy, safe way as well as the chance to enjoy activities and clubs after school - so do make the most of them!

There is nothing of significance wrong in your school. It's an exciting time for you all with a new headteacher just starting, so we are suggesting just a few things for him and the school's governors to do.

- We want him to include your own views and those of your parents in planning how to improve the school. This is something you and your parents think is important.
- We hope your school's governors will be able to get more involved in seeing how the school works and what lessons are like.
- We want your teachers to become good at doing the kind of things we inspectors do when we watch lessons, so that they benefit and lessons are even better.
- We want the headteacher and governors to do all they can to get you a new building. You're doing so well that we think you all deserve it!