



St Martin's Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111380
LEA Halton
Inspection number 278675
Inspection dates 15 June 2006 to 15 June 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Michael Cladingbowl HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to inspect any school in England. The inspection is to be treated as a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Type of school | Primary | School address | St Martin's Lane |
| School category | Voluntary aided | | Murdishaw |
| Age range of pupils | 4 to 11 | | Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 6HZ |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01928 711207 |
| Number on roll | 197 | Fax number | 01928 710673 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair of governors | Mr D Littlewood |
| Date of previous inspection | 2 October 2000 | Headteacher | Mr P Hallman BA |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools. Lessons were visited, a range of documents was scrutinised, and meetings were held with pupils, parents, staff, governors and representatives of the local authority.

Description of the school

This popular and friendly Catholic primary school serves a socially and economically disadvantaged area of Halton. There are 197 boys and girls on roll and around a third of the pupils are entitled to a free school meal. Twenty six pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) but none has a statement of special educational need. Nearly all pupils speak English as a first language and are from a White British background. The proportion of pupils who join or leave the school part-way through the year is high. The school puts on a range of activities for adults and other members of the local community before, during and after the school day. The school won a Healthy Schools Award in 2004 and gained re-accreditation in 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This outstanding school serves its pupils and the surrounding community exceptionally well. At its heart lies a strong Catholic ethos: this is underpinned by a desire to serve the pupils and wider community and the conviction that learning should be fun. All this is reflected in the dedicated way that the pupils, teachers and other staff do all that they can to care for and support one another. Visitors to the school comment frequently on the friendliness of the pupils and the teachers and other staff know their pupils very well.

The pupils achieve outstanding results and have done so for the last few years. Although many struggle to do what is expected for their age when they start school, they are taught very well and the good progress they make in the Reception class continues as they move through the school. By the time they leave Year 6, pupils achieve much better results than similar pupils in other schools. No groups of pupils underachieve and pupils who have LDD do very well compared to similar pupils.

The two main reasons for this outstanding achievement are the pupils' very positive attitudes to learning and the consistently good teaching they encounter. Behaviour in and out of lessons is usually good, and often exemplary, as pupils listen, work and play together harmoniously. Many spoke, breathless with enthusiasm, about how much they enjoyed school and a Year 6 pupil commented, 'I feel I belong here.' All of the pupils spoken to during the inspection knew who to turn to if they needed help and sang the school's praises about the way teachers and other staff helped them to learn.

At play and break time, friendly pupils sit and talk in shaded areas in the attractive playground or organise themselves into teams to play games. A few of the older pupils weed and care for a memorial garden, while explaining to younger pupils what they are doing and why. Elder pupils act as mediators if squabbles occur. All this helps encourage the openness, confidence and independence that are evident in pupils as they move around school and learn in lessons. Attendance has improved markedly in recent years and is now average.

Pupils make a valued and important contribution to the running of the school too. School Council members meet regularly: their job, in their own words, is to 'make a difference so that the school is a better place', an example being the way they helped to change the way lunchtime is organised. Charitable organisations are supported frequently through fund-raising activities and pupils talk freely about their concern for those less fortunate than themselves.

Teaching is consistently good or better and lessons are lively. Careful thought is given to establishing what the pupils know, and do not know, and lessons are planned to make sure that any gaps in learning are filled. Pupils know what is expected of them and know what they need to do so that they can achieve their best.

In the very well managed Reception class, a skilful blend of teaching and play encourages a love of learning. After introductory whole-class teaching, pupils usually explore and learn through fun-filled activities. As pirates, for example, they share,

name and count objects. Others use lap top computers to compose sentences or practise writing numbers on a large white boards. Small groups work with teaching assistants on activities such as forming words from letters.

In the other classes, teaching is planned equally carefully. A notable strength of the school is the teachers' recognition that the pupils are their most valuable asset in the classroom: they routinely draw on the pupils' ideas and experiences to introduce new skills, knowledge and information. This trust in the pupils is rewarded by the pupils' willingness to accept responsibility for their own learning. Across the school, pupils work busily and happily, often pausing to consider what to do next, turn to a neighbour to ask a question, or even simply to drink water, and then return refreshed to the task they are working on. The pace of learning is quick because pupils want to learn.

Stunning displays around the school also catch the eye, challenging the pupils to solve problems and to find out more about other cultures, as well as simply inviting them to enjoy the sensory pleasure of listening to music or looking at attractive things. These stimulating surroundings tell pupils that it is right to aspire and to be inquisitive.

A pastoral support team complements the work of teachers and other staff exceptionally well. Individual support plans for pupils focus the work of the mentors for learning and behaviour, as well as a counsellor and health professional, so that needs can be identified quickly and met by suitably robust care, support and guidance. Policies on risk assessment and child protection are in place and adhered to.

Links with parents and the local community are strong. A drop-in centre and caf, acts as a focal point for parents before and after the school day and provides a place for parents to meet. During the day, many attend a range of classes, for example in well-being, numeracy, and calligraphy, and help to raise funds. Parents' views confirm that pupils enjoy and do very well at school and are mostly delighted with the support provided by the school.

None of this is accidental. Innovative and strong leadership has been restless and unrelenting in its determination to keep looking for ways to improve the school. Careful reviews of the school's performance lead to the identification of what needs to be done next to make things better still. All staff know what is, or is not, a priority, and time is not wasted doing things that do not lead to better teaching and learning. Recent actions taken to improve boys' writing, for example, have worked. Senior leaders and managers foster a strong team spirit, for example by encouraging others to take the lead, and teachers and other staff genuinely love working at the school. Subject coordinators mostly work in teams too, together with the support staff, and this strengthens the way lessons are taught and organised. Curriculum planning is thorough but inventive, allowing pupils to enjoy and excel at a variety of sports, explore issues about social and personal development, as well as learn French, German, and Chinese. This broad curriculum is matched by an array of visits and other curriculum enrichment activities.

Governors are experienced and are determined to maintain the current high standards as well as to improve the school even more. They work well with the leadership and management of the school in focusing where improvement is needed most: for example, they agreed that attendance ought to be a priority and this has improved markedly.

Financial management is tidy, and the high quality of teaching and outstanding achievement means that the school provides outstanding value for money.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils reach very high standards given their generally low starting points and achievement is outstanding overall.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The school's positive ethos and strong commitment to personal development ensure that pupils flourish. Personal development and well-being are outstanding.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Very hardworking teachers and the pupils' enjoyment of, and rapid progress in, lessons mean that teaching and learning are outstanding overall.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The opportunities provided by the curriculum and enrichment activities are wide ranging and meet the pupils' needs very well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Outstanding care, guidance and support are at the heart of this school. The pupils do well because they are happy and this is one of the fruits of the excellent relationships that exist throughout the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership and management of the headteacher and his deputy are exemplary. The other staff in the school share their vision of a happy and hardworking community. They also make a considerable contribution to leading initiatives, and their commitment and hard work help to ensure that the school's day-to-day running is smooth.

Inspection judgements

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| <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

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|--|-----|----|
| 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 | 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 | 3 | 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 | 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? | 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

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|--|-----|----|
| 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 | 1 | NA |
| The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected | Yes | NA |

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|---|-----|
| 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 being so friendly and speaking to me when I visited your school. I promised I would write to tell you what I thought of your school. I know you will share the contents of this letter with the other children and that your teachers will help you with this if needed.

Your school is one of the best I have visited and because of this I have given it top marks. There are two main reasons for this:

- You are taught very well by very caring teachers. They like you very much and work very hard to make sure that you are happy and do your best in and out of lessons.
- Your own kindness to each other, good behaviour, and positive attitudes to learning help you to learn quickly and grow up into sensible, responsible and caring individuals.

All of the people concerned with your school have worked tremendously hard to make sure that your lessons are fun and to create a safe, happy and welcoming school. I know you will continue to work hard and enjoy all that the school can offer. In return, the school will make sure that you carry on achieving the very best that you can.