



St Francis' Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103437
Local Authority Birmingham
Inspection number 286660
Inspection dates 11–12 January 2007
Reporting inspector Bogusia Matusiak-Varley

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Nursery Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Handsworth
Age range of pupils	4–11		Birmingham B19 1PH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 4645072
Number on roll (school)	399	Fax number	0121 4643728
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Helen Ryan
		Headteacher	Johanne Hennigan
Date of previous school inspection	11 November 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
4–11	11–12 January 2007	286660

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large primary school; situated on the outskirts of Lozells and Handsworth, areas of high social and economic deprivation. Racial hotspots in the community have seen some very serious incidents. The school has a high percentage of pupils from different ethnic groups, 21 different languages are spoken, nearly 45% have support for learning English as an additional language, one third of the children attending the Foundation Stage are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language and the school has recently admitted a number of Polish children. Forty-five per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals. The number of pupils entering and leaving the school during different times of the academic year is high at 23% and this affects end of Year 2 and Year 6 academic standards. Whilst staffing is stable, the school experiences difficulty in attracting staff to come and teach in the area.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school which is rightly prized in the community for enabling pupils to make informed choices and become good citizens. It rises above the challenges presented in the local area. The school offers a good education and its mission statement of striving to ensure that everyone is valued and achieves their full potential regardless of colour, culture or creed underpins all aspects of school life.

Achievement and standards are good. Pupils attain broadly average standards by the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT) and their achievement is good with outstanding examples of achievement seen in ICT. By the end of Year 2, standards are below national average in English, mathematics and science; they are average in ICT. Overall, achievement is better in Years 3 to 6 than in Years 1 and 2 because teaching is consistently good. In Years 1 and 2 teaching is satisfactory but variable. Pupils are not always doing as well as they could because tasks set do not consistently meet their needs. This is mainly due to weaknesses in the use of assessment information when tasks are being planned and particularly restricts the more capable pupils' rates of progress. Overall, teaching and learning are good.

Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage. They acquire basic skills at a rapid rate but they do not attain the expected standards in communication, language and literacy, and mathematical development because of their very low starting points. The school offers a good curriculum suited to the needs and interest levels of pupils coupled with good teaching, care, guidance and support. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and pupils' personal development and well-being are strong. Nevertheless, there are too few opportunities for pupils to develop their skills of independent learning throughout the school and, in Years 1 and 2, pupils are not writing enough due to the overuse of worksheets which sometimes limit what they might otherwise achieve. Pupils have good attitudes to learning, behave well and attendance is satisfactory. Learning mentors provide good levels of support resulting in pupils being able to manage their feelings well and so subsequently learn better.

Leadership and management and governance are good. The headteacher is an outstanding leader who is passionate about the pupils contributing fully and making a difference to the community. She is well supported by her senior teachers but middle management, being new to their posts, have not yet had sufficient time to impact on standards.

School self-evaluation is accurate and, since the last inspection, standards of writing have risen in Years 3 to 6 but not in Years 1 and 2. Due to the many good outcomes the school is well placed to continue to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in Years 1 and 2, especially for more capable pupils, in writing.
- Improve the quality of teaching in Years 1 and 2 so that all teachers use data from assessment to plan tasks that meet pupils' needs.

- Develop middle management so it has a more prominent role in raising standards throughout the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children enter the Reception class with very low levels of attainment for their age. They make good progress because of the good emphasis on teaching basic skills. Nevertheless, the majority are still working towards the standards for communication, language and literacy and mathematical development by the time they start Year 1.

Progress in Years 1 and 2 is satisfactory overall but inconsistent across year groups. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory but standards in reading, writing and mathematics are below average. Standards in ICT are average and all groups of pupils make good progress. More capable pupils make inconsistent progress because they are not sufficiently challenged especially in writing, as on occasions, too many worksheets are used which restrict their writing, especially in science.

Pupils make better progress in Years 3 to 6 and standards are broadly in line with the national average in English, mathematics and science. The 2006 test results show a significant increase in the percentage of pupils attaining the higher levels, especially in writing and mathematics. This is because performance management has focused on raising standards, and very rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning, undertaken by the headteacher and senior management team, has been effective.

Pupils learning English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and disabilities do well and almost all reach or exceed their targets. The six week focus for pupils learning English as an additional language to equip themselves with basic vocabulary is paying dividends.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

By the time pupils leave school they are confident, outgoing, able to articulate their opinions and have a good sense of right and wrong. They have a good understanding of cultural diversity and social awareness because of the high emphasis placed upon the teachings of Jesus and the Christian faith. Pupils are very aware of good role models in the various cultures the school represents such as Martin Luther King and Ghandi.

Pupils take their responsibilities very seriously and the school council and peer mediators contribute to the smooth running of the school. 'You can always sort things out by being respectful', said one Year 6 pupil. Learning mentors help pupils to manage their anger. Although the school has had a high number of exclusions, these have all followed the correct procedure and pupils have been fully integrated back into education. Pupils are proud of their school and show this by keeping it neat and tidy. A group of Polish pupils interviewed said that when they arrived they were made to feel most welcome in the school and help is always available when they need it.

Pupils know about healthy eating, as reflected in the choices they make of the delicious food in the canteen. Pupils love sport; they are competitive and know about staying safe. They achieve economic well-being by being good team players and achieving well in English, mathematics, science and ICT. However, opportunities for independent learning are too few and this prevents pupils' personal development from being outstanding.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good in Reception and in the upper juniors; in Years 1 and 2 it is satisfactory with some year groups demonstrating examples of good teaching. Teachers, support staff and learning mentors work well together and, as a result, vulnerable pupils, those with learning difficulties and disabilities and with English as an additional language, make good progress. However, in Years 1 and 2, teachers do not use data from assessment to challenge the most capable pupils and this, coupled with an over-reliance on worksheets, restricts pupils' progress in writing.

Throughout the school, teachers use interactive whiteboards well and this engages pupils in their learning. Teachers have higher expectations of their pupils in Years 3 to 6 and the quality of marking in Years 5 and 6 is outstanding. In Years 5 and 6, for example, teachers point out to pupils how they can improve their work. Consequently in the next task set, pupils remember what they need to do in order to improve, resulting in them achieving their targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum which is effectively tailored to meet the needs of pupils. For instance, Foundation Stage provision has been extended into Year 1, and greater use is being made of speaking and listening activities, and of drama, as preparation for writing. The success of this is reflected in the improved percentage of pupils attaining the higher levels in Year 6 in the 2006 test results.

Work in physical education and in personal, social and health education effectively promotes awareness of matters relating to pupils' safety and health. The curriculum is supported by a good range of visits and visitors. Special events such as Black History Month and Health Week enrich pupils' experience well, as do opportunities to learn musical instruments, and also French and Spanish, which have recently been introduced. This contributes positively to the enjoyment and achievement in learning of all groups of pupils. Opportunities to acquire workplace skills are well fostered through regular opportunities to work with partners and in teams, encouraging the emergence of workplace skills. The school offers a broad range of extra-curricular activities, including sports, arts and other clubs. Pupils' levels of participation in these activities are good.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support provided for pupils are good. The school has a strong Christian ethos, which is reflected in the good relationships between pupils and their teachers and other adults. Parents agree that their children feel safe and are well cared for at school. Pupils are encouraged to be mutually supportive. The learning mentors and other support staff make a good contribution to pupils' pastoral and academic care. Child protection procedures are effective, including the arrangements to refer pupils to the local authority's social care department, and to ensure the safe recruitment of staff. Risk assessments relating to the premises and for organised excursions are secure. Arrangements to set targets for individual pupils, in order to help them improve their work, are well developed, and involve parents on a termly basis. However, the use made of information from assessment is not consistent across the school and is a weakness especially in Years 1 and 2. The school has good systems for tracking pupils' academic attainment and additional support is provided for any who have not made expected progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher is determined to provide the very best for every pupil and her staff and she relentlessly leads them to attain success at a fast pace offering support at all levels. The school has a very positive 'can do' ethos in which teamwork is strong. Through effective school self-evaluation and monitoring of teaching and learning all staff strive hard to make the school better. The senior management team support the headteacher well but middle managers, being new to their posts, are not yet fully engaged in sharing best practice in their subjects with staff and do not yet monitor teaching and learning.

The school is outward looking and has outstanding relationships with other schools and the community. For example, the school has worked in conjunction with the local catholic secondary school to produce an anti-bullying newspaper. The school is the heart of the parish and the community welcomes the children's input towards the liturgy.

The school takes full account of the views of pupils, parents and governors. Governors support the school well and they have been instrumental in developing improvements to the building. They are fully involved in school self-evaluation and know the school's strengths and areas for development well.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making us feel so welcome in your school; we thoroughly enjoyed our two days with you. You attend a good school, your teachers are very caring, they teach you well and, in spite of the many difficulties you face in the community you are good citizens. You learn well and know right from wrong. We are delighted that you have high expectations of being famous sports people, actresses and singers. Keep reaching for the stars and you will get there! You behave well around the school and you are very caring. Your hard efforts at fund raising are supporting many charities; well done!

Your headteacher is doing an outstanding job at leading your teachers in ensuring that you get the best possible chances in life. Your learning mentors really help you learn and you are all so fond of the staff.

We have asked your headteacher and teachers to help you learn even better. You can help by making sure that in Years 1 and 2 you reach higher standards. Those of you who find learning easy need to write more. We have asked your teachers to share information about how well you are doing with you so that you all know what to do in order to improve. We have also asked those teachers with responsibilities for subjects to help you get even higher standards. You can help by asking them about what other children of your age are doing in different schools to achieve high standards.

We wish you all the very best in the future, and to the Polish group of pupils we interviewed, a little message for you and your friends, *Uczcie sie dobrze i szczesc Boze* (work well and God Bless).