



St Paul's Catholic Primary School, Kings Norton

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103457
Local Authority Birmingham
Inspection number 286665
Inspection dates 17–18 January 2007
Reporting inspector Ian Hodgkinson

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Sisefield Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Kings Norton
Age range of pupils	3–11		Birmingham B38 9JB
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 4641546
Number on roll (school)	198	Fax number	0121 4642650
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Stefan Laszczyk
		Headteacher	Mary Daniels
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2002		

Age group 3–11	Inspection dates 17–18 January 2007	Inspection number 286665
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves a large housing estate on the south-west edge of Birmingham. It is an area of significant social and economic disadvantage. Nearly two thirds of pupils are entitled to a free school meal, although in the current Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception classes) the proportion is much higher. Many pupils join the school with knowledge and skill levels well below those expected for their age, and a high proportion, around a third, have learning difficulties. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is a little higher than average, but nearly all speak English as their first language. A Catholic ethos permeates the life and work of the school, although the proportion of pupils from Catholic families has been falling over several years and is now around a third.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Paul's is a good school which makes a real difference to the lives of the pupils it serves. It helps many to overcome significant barriers to their learning and achieve well. Although children's knowledge and skills on joining the school are generally very low, they make good progress and their standards, while below average overall, are much closer to the national average by the time they leave. Pupils know what is expected of them because the school's ethos establishes clear and appropriate expectations for pupils' conduct. These are consistently and sensitively applied by staff. As a result, while some pupils find it difficult to concentrate for long, they generally behave well and show very positive enthusiasm for school and for their learning. Their personal development is good, and their social development is particularly strong. Pupils eagerly take on responsibilities to help improve the school or to help each other out, for example, by becoming school councillors or mediators. Such good development of both academic and social skills ensures that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher effectively shapes the direction of the school through extensive consultation and collaboration with the school's users and partners. Effective monitoring and self-evaluation by leaders at all levels have identified key areas for action and have brought about significant improvements in standards over the last two years. Central to this improvement has been better use of assessment data to identify individual pupils who are underachieving. These pupils are put back on track by the high quality of support they receive from additional staff and resources in class, or through extra help out of class. Care, guidance and support provided for pupils are good. They are strengthened by some exceptionally strong work in partnership with parents and other agencies in the community, which has helped to produce a considerable improvement in pupils' attendance since the last inspection. Pupils learn well because they are well taught. Children get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage, where they make good progress because activities are very well planned and structured to meet their needs. Through the school as a whole, lessons are made interesting and engaging for pupils by the use of a wide variety of activities, resources and approaches. However, sometimes teachers set work that is not well enough matched to pupils' capabilities, and is too hard for the least able, or not challenging enough for the more able. The curriculum is satisfactory overall. It is particularly effective in developing pupils' literacy, numeracy and social skills. However, in subjects other than English and mathematics, pupils are not always given enough time to allow pupils to investigate topics in sufficient depth.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teachers plan work in lessons which is well matched to the capability of each pupil.
- Balance the curriculum more effectively to ensure that pupils have enough time to develop their skills and understanding in all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children make good progress through the Foundation Stage, and by the end of their Reception year many reach levels expected for their age in creative and physical aspects of their work. Standards by the end of the Reception year remain, however, well below average overall. Communication, language and literacy skills are generally well below average on entry into Year 1, with a high proportion of pupils having made small but constructive steps in their reading and writing. Across Years 1 to 6, pupils make good progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills, because of regular monitoring of their progress by teachers and carefully targeted support from teachers and other staff. Indeed, in national assessments and tests in both Years 2 and Year 6 in 2006, the proportion of pupils reaching the level expected for their age was broadly average. Overall standards are below average because relatively few pupils reach the highest levels, but pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, achieve well given their starting points.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Their social development has some outstanding features, and pupils make a very positive contribution to the work of the school. They enjoy being members of the school council and feel they can make a difference in decision making through, for example, their involvement in developing the new anti-bullying policy and the 'Friendship Stop' in the playground. Regular group work in class enhances pupils' social skills through team building and working together. Pupils respect each other and work safely and harmoniously together. Pupils' cultural awareness is satisfactory but opportunities for them to explore the diversity of cultures in modern Britain are relatively limited. A range of charities is supported so pupils become aware of those less fortunate than themselves, and links with the church and community groups all help to develop a community spirit. Pupils are well aware of how to eat healthily and participate enthusiastically in physical activities. They enjoy school and behave well because, as one pupil said, 'Teachers go out of their way to make lessons interesting.' Pupils' attendance has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now in line with the national average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers manage their classes well, ensuring that they are well ordered so that all pupils can concentrate on their learning. An engaging range of activities is used to capture pupils' attention and imagination, and to develop their understanding. Teachers

work very effectively with their teaching assistants to nurture pupils' basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Pupils are given clear guidelines to help them to measure their success in activities, and have clear longer-term targets to aim at for improving their work. These factors all help pupils to learn effectively and contribute to their good achievement. Sometimes, however, the work set for the class by the teacher is not sufficiently well matched to the capabilities of all of the pupils. Teachers are sometimes over-reliant on the high quality of additional support given by classroom assistants and mentors to ensure that less able pupils keep on track. Marking of pupils' work is regular and comments are supportive, although comments do not always offer specific guidance on how standards could be improved.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The Foundation Stage curriculum is very well structured to develop children's skills in all areas. A current lack of facilities for outdoor learning imposes some constraints on the way pupils learn, but will soon be addressed when new building works (already underway) are completed. Significant improvements have been made to the structure of the teaching of writing in all years and to the grouping of pupils in mathematics by ability rather than age in mathematics classes for Years 3 to 6. Both initiatives have boosted pupils' progress by giving them clear and realistic targets at which to aim. Subjects other than English and mathematics are covered on the timetable, but the school recognises that they are not always given enough time to allow pupils to apply skills with rigour and develop real depth in their understanding. The use of information and communication technology for teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. A good range of extra-curricular enrichment and activities broadens pupils' learning. The programme of personal, social and moral education is successful in raising pupils' awareness of how to stay healthy and safe.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils' care, support and guidance are good. Staff know their pupils well and are committed to their well-being, by providing a secure, attractive, welcoming environment where the pupils feel safe. Child protection is securely in place and all staff properly trained. The school works exceptionally well with partners and other agencies in the local community to support pupils' welfare. Learning mentors play a vital role in supporting pupils' behaviour and their emotional well-being. Consequently pupils have high self-esteem and respond well to all that the school offers. Pupils with learning difficulties receive very good support from well-trained teaching assistants. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the work of the school, and particularly of the guidance they are given in helping them with their children's learning.

There are good systems in place for tracking individual pupils' progress against targets which are well understood by pupils. These systems help in the identification of pupils for additional support either in or out of class, or before school. However, the information from such tracking is not yet used sharply enough by teachers to

consistently pitch work at an appropriately challenging level in lessons. Nor is it sharply used by managers to evaluate the success of the school's provision for particular classes or groups of pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has been particularly effective in ensuring that the school is receptive to the views of its community and its users, and that responsibilities for improving the school are distributed widely among the staff. The school is involved in many local partnerships and networks which are aimed at surmounting the barriers to learning faced by children in the area. This involvement has brought additional staff, resources and ideas into school. Such strong collaboration has given the school a clear view of its strengths and weaknesses and a unity of purpose about how to improve. Information on pupils' progress by class and by pupil characteristics is not all processed clearly enough to give managers a ready view on how particular groups of pupils are doing. However, the school's improvement priorities are well founded on otherwise thorough monitoring and self-evaluation. Governors play an effective role in support of the school and in scrutinising its performance. The school has been very successful in addressing weaknesses in performance in English and among lower attainers in the last two years and is well placed to improve further.

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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?	1
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	2
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?	3
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

Many thanks for the welcome you gave to my colleague and me when we visited the school for its recent inspection. We enjoyed hearing your views and looking at your work.

Like you, we think St Paul's is a good school, which is well led by the headteacher and her colleagues. You and your parents made it very clear to us how much you enjoy going to school, and that you think the teaching is good. We agree. It is because, in the words of one pupil, 'Teachers go out of their way to make lessons interesting.' The big improvement in pupils' attendance since the school's last inspection is a clear sign of your enjoyment of school and your good attitudes. It also shows how well the school is working with your parents and other organisations to help you to succeed. The school takes good care of you, and you respond by behaving well and helping each other out. You are very willing to work with others and to take on responsibilities. By doing this you become well prepared for life in your next school and beyond.

Although quite a few of you have some difficulties with reading and writing when you join the school, you make good progress. The large majority of you reach the standards expected for your age when you leave, although relatively few reach the higher levels. Teachers keep a close eye on your progress and work very well with teaching assistants and learning mentors to ensure that extra help is given to those who need it.

We have made two main suggestions about how the school can improve further. Firstly, we have asked teachers to check that the work they set you in class is always well matched to what you can do, and is not too hard or too easy for some. Secondly, we agree with the school that it could improve the way subjects other than English and mathematics are taught, to give you more time to develop your understanding of the topics you are studying.

Of course, you can help the school to continue to improve by continuing to work hard, behave well and do your best. We wish you every success for the future.