



St Clare's Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103476
Local Authority Birmingham
Inspection number 286672
Inspection dates 20–21 February 2007
Reporting inspector David Driscoll

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Robert Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Handsworth
Age range of pupils	3–11		Birmingham B20 3RT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 5543289
Number on roll (school)	365	Fax number	0121 5235854
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Joseph Fallon
		Headteacher	Christine Fowler
Date of previous school inspection	11 November 2002		

Age group 3–11	Inspection dates 20–21 February 2007	Inspection number 286672
--------------------------	--	------------------------------------

© Crown copyright 2007

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

St Clare's is a large primary school serving a culturally diverse area. The great majority of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds, of either Pakistani, Indian or Caribbean heritage. Over half the pupils speak English as an additional language and a relatively high number are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is above average, but few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Some pupils have particularly complex needs, because they have learning difficulties while at the same time are learning English for the first time. When children enter the Nursery, their attainment is well below the level expected for their age.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Clare's provides a good education for its pupils. Pupils achieve well because the teaching is good. The good progress made by all pupils, regardless of their backgrounds or starting points, means that they leave school with standards a little below average. Pupils who are struggling to learn English, either because it is entirely new to them or because they have learning difficulties, make rapid progress to reach a stage where, with support, they can play a full part in lessons. Pupils throughout the school do particularly well in mathematics and science. Progress in writing in Year 1 is slower than in other years, because teachers are not able to plan to build on what pupils can already do as assessments made at the end of the Foundation Stage are inaccurate. Speaking and listening skills are also developed at a slower, but still satisfactory, pace because the satisfactory curriculum does not give pupils enough opportunities to speak aloud, or to be independent.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. The strong emphasis on developing good moral values, together with firm but fair discipline, ensures pupils behave well and have good attitudes to learning. They like coming to school because they like their teachers and the extra clubs and activities. Their enjoyment, however, is not reflected in their attendance, which fell significantly last year and currently remains below average. This is partly because of a relative weakness in the good leadership and management.

The school's managers are good at improving pupils' achievement, because they pay close attention to identifying who may be at risk of falling behind, and then take effective steps to do something about it. The same emphasis is not placed on some aspects of care, guidance and support, which is satisfactory rather than good. So, while achievement has been improving at a good rate, attendance has been falling. Managers have not got to grips with tackling the causes of absence in the same way they have with underachievement. Nevertheless, managers have a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' performance and clearly have the skills, at all levels, to make further improvements. They are a little conservative in their evaluation of the school's performance, which in turn demonstrates their lack of complacency and desire to make the school even better.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that assessments of pupils' writing made at the end of the Foundation Stage provide an accurate basis for teachers' planning in Year 1.
- Take swifter action to improve pupils' attendance.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to be independent and to develop their speaking and listening skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children join the school with standards that are well below average. By the time they leave Year 6, pupils make good progress and their standards are a little below average. Their achievement is good, regardless of their background or starting point. Children make steady progress in the Foundation Stage, but their attainment when they start Year 1 is still well below that expected for their age. From Year 1 onwards, pupils make good progress in reading, mathematics and science. Progress in writing in Year 1 is a bit slower, but still satisfactory. In all years pupils make satisfactory progress in speaking and listening. The progress made by pupils who are learning English for the first time is particularly good. They quickly gain sufficient understanding of the language to enable them to play a full part in lessons, provided they are given some support in class.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school and are very positive about all it has to offer. They particularly appreciate their teachers. As one boy said, 'The teachers are great and give up their own time to help us after school.' Pupils' general enthusiasm for learning is not reflected in their attendance, which remains below average mainly because of extended holidays and illness.

Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. Pupils are thoughtful and considerate and usually respect each other's viewpoints. Racist incidents are rare and pupils from different cultural backgrounds get on well with each other. The school's strong Catholic ethos underpins pupils' awareness of moral issues and behaviour is generally good. Occasional instances of bullying are dealt with effectively by the school. This school year, several pupils have been excluded for a day to help them to understand that bullying is not acceptable. Some pupils make a contribution to the school community by taking on responsibilities, such as membership of the recently formed school council. However, many pupils do not show initiative and find it hard to work independently.

Pupils know how to stay healthy, but they do not always put this knowledge into practice. Too many eat sweets and crisps for breaktime snacks, for example. Pupils are well aware of what they need to do to stay safe and are particularly careful on the many steps and stairs in school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is successful because a great deal of emphasis is placed upon planning suitably challenging activities for the wide range of groups represented in each class. This is the most important factor in ensuring that all pupils make good progress in developing the skills they will need in later life. Teaching assistants' support is very carefully targeted to those pupils who are most in need of extra help, either because they have learning difficulties or because they only have a limited grasp of English. Teaching assistants are very effective when they help pupils to learn for themselves, but on occasions they spend too long keeping pupils quiet, rather than encouraging them to show initiative in their work. Strong discipline is a common feature of lessons, but this is always done in a polite and fair manner. Teachers are very skilful at positioning pupils in places where they will be least tempted to disturb others. This leads to pupils behaving well, despite a relatively high proportion who have the potential to be disruptive.

Assessments are accurate in Years 1 to 6, but the assessment of pupils' writing skills at the end of the Foundation Stage is inaccurate. This means teachers in Year 1 are not getting a clear picture of pupils' capabilities in writing, so they cannot plan as effectively as they do in mathematics, for example, pupils' progress is slower in writing as a consequence.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

One of the reasons pupils like the school is because of the wide range of extra clubs, trips and visits that are on offer. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is hampered by the lack of an outside area, and an uninspiring classroom, which slows children's social and creative development. Good provision is made for pupils who are struggling with basic English. They receive excellent, and highly intensive, teaching in small groups, which allows them to make rapid gains in the basics of speaking, reading and writing. They are then quickly integrated into classes, with additional support, where they make the same good progress as others. Teachers' strong discipline means that pupils receive few opportunities to speak aloud at any length or to listen to others. They also are not given enough independence in lessons, or responsibilities around the school, so restricting their contribution to the school community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The strong, caring, Catholic ethos of the school underpins pupils' good personal development. Every child is valued and appreciated and this is evident in the good relationships that exist between all members of the school community. These good relationships are established from the moment that children start in the Nursery.

Child protection arrangements are satisfactory. Reasonable steps are taken to ensure that pupils are kept safe, but too little attention is given to improving attendance.

Academic guidance is satisfactory. Pupils' work is carefully marked, but there is still some inconsistency in the way that teachers share with pupils, through the marking, what it is that pupils need to do to improve their performance. The school is working towards providing individual pupils with short-term goals for English, mathematics and science so that pupils and their parents are clear about the next steps in learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The most significant aspect of leadership and management that pervades the whole school is the way that the Catholic ethos of trying to do the best for all pupils, regardless of their background, is put into practice. The headteacher and other senior managers, including governors, are particularly good at identifying weaknesses in academic performance and taking effective action to bring about improvements. The initiatives used are firmly based on tackling the difficulties that individuals experience, and that may lead to underachievement. Pupils' achievement has been improving at a good rate in recent years, because the school's managers, at all levels, have the skills necessary to keep the school moving forward. They gain a very clear picture of the strengths in teaching, and teachers benefit from accurate guidance as to how they can improve. The same level of guidance is not provided for teaching assistants, however, so their effectiveness is more varied. Whilst there is a good emphasis placed on improving academic performance, too little attention is paid to checking and improving attendance.

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

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	-----------------------

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?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
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	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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?	3

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	3
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 very much for helping us when we came to visit your school recently. We really enjoyed talking with you and listening to what you had to say about your school. You think it is a good school, and we agree. You particularly like the teachers, and we can see why. They make sure you work hard and try your best, so you learn quickly and do well in most of your work. You are particularly good at maths and science. Some of the younger ones are a bit slower at learning to write, because the writing they are asked to do can be a bit too easy or too hard for them. So, we have asked the people who run the school to make sure that teachers know how good you are at writing when you start Year 1. Some of you find learning English very difficult. The teachers know this and are very good at making sure you learn enough to join in lessons as quickly as possible.

We were impressed by your good behaviour and how you make sure others are safe as they move around school. All the grown-ups make sure you are happy in school, and that you have friends. One thing some of you could do better is to come to school more often. We have asked the headteacher to do something about this, but you could help too by asking your mums and dads to make sure you come to school whenever possible.

You really like all the extra clubs and visits, but we have asked the people who run the school to give you more jobs around the school, and a bit more freedom in lessons. We have also asked the teachers to let you speak for longer in lessons, so you learn more quickly how to listen to others. The people who run the school are doing a good job in making sure it is getting better and better.

With all best wishes for your future.