



St Philip's Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104001
Local Authority Sandwell
Inspection number 286833
Inspection dates 9–10 October 2006
Reporting inspector Doris Bell

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Messenger Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Smethwick
Age range of pupils	3–11		B66 3DU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 5581643
Number on roll (school)	218	Fax number	0121 5589198
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	John O'Brien
		Headteacher	Stuart Brown
Date of previous school inspection	4 June 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This smaller than average primary school serves an area with very many social and economic disadvantages. Attainment on entry to the Nursery is very low and an above average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities. Movement in and out of the school is high, as is the number of languages spoken (27) and the proportion of pupils who are at the early stages of learning English. The school also has a significant minority of asylum seekers and refugees. There has been a high turnover of staff since the last inspection, including three headteachers in the last five years. The present headteacher took up his post only twenty days before the inspection, although he had been acting headteacher for two and a half terms. The school has received a Healthy Schools award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is an improving school which provides a satisfactory standard of education for its pupils. Although standards are below average in Year 6, they are better this year than they have been for some time. As a result, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. This improvement has happened because the headteacher has successfully focused the school on raising achievement. Although standards remain below average by the end of Reception, children make good progress in the Foundation Stage because they are taught well. Most pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 1 to 6, but girls do better than boys, and more able pupils do not always do as well as they could. These weaknesses are being tackled systematically.

Teachers in all age groups now have a good understanding of their collective responsibility for ensuring pupils' progress throughout the school. The quality of teaching is satisfactory and improving. However, there is still some way to go to ensure that all staff with leadership responsibilities fulfil their roles equally well in evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. However, the headteacher and the acting deputy are good role models, and they have made a good start on training other staff. There is an air of quiet confidence and expectancy throughout the school because staff know what is expected of them. Proud of their success so far, they are pulling together to raise standards even further. All of this gives the school good capacity for further improvement.

Behaviour is good and pupils in all age groups participate wholeheartedly in everything the school offers them. Their sheer enjoyment of, and enthusiasm for, learning is a joy to see and contributes to the warm, welcoming and purposeful learning atmosphere in the school. The good care, guidance and support pupils receive contribute greatly to their good personal development and well-being, and to their good understanding of how to keep safe and healthy. The recently revised curriculum has not yet had time to have a significant impact on pupils' achievement. However, the school is now building up the resources it needs to implement it fully and effectively.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate the achievement of more able pupils and close the gap between boys' and girls' achievement.
- Improve the skills of teachers with management responsibilities in evaluating teaching and its impact on the learning of all groups of pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Although achievement overall is satisfactory, it is good in the Foundation Stage. Standards are below the national expectation at the end of Reception but children make good progress from a very low start. Standards are close to average in Year 2 and below average in Year 6. They improved in both year groups this year because of

improved teaching. This was brought about by greater stability in staffing, more focused planning and good assessment. In addition, challenging targets were set for individual pupils.

The school is justifiably proud of its best results for some time. It exceeded the challenging targets it set for English and mathematics except for more able pupils. However, their performance also improved this year, although only very slightly in English. There is still much to do to ensure these pupils always reach the levels of which they are capable, and to narrow the gap between the achievement of boys and girls, which is greater than that found nationally. The school is tackling these issues and it has set even more challenging targets for next year for both teachers and pupils. Participation in a writing project has contributed to the improved progress in writing. However, pupils often have difficulty solving problems and understanding what they read, which slows their progress.

Whilst their overall progress is satisfactory, pupils at the early stages of learning English make good progress in acquiring and using the English language. Pupils with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress towards the targets in their individual education plans. The recent increase in the number of support staff is contributing to that progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The strong emphasis placed on personal, social and emotional development in Nursery and Reception leads to children reaching good standards in this aspect of learning. Throughout the school, the pupils' enthusiasm for learning and their good behaviour contribute to their progress. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is good. Attendance is satisfactory. It has improved considerably in the past year and the school is working hard to improve it further. Pupils really enjoy school. The only thing they wanted to change about the school was to extend the school day so that they could learn even more. Pupils feel safe from any form of harassment and they have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They know whom to go to for help, and the 'worry box' and newly introduced 'playground buddies' are highly valued. They understand what it means to follow a healthy lifestyle and readily explaining why they should exercise and eat healthily. Residential experiences, their participation in enterprise projects and their work as school councillors foster appropriate lifeskills, financial awareness and an understanding of citizenship. However, there is still room for improvement in some pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In Nursery and Reception, good teaching contributes in great measure to the children's good progress. From an early age, pupils are successfully encouraged to work independently and in small groups. Teachers give pupils time to think and discuss their responses with a partner or in a group before sharing them with the whole class, and rarely accept one-word answers. All of this increases pupils' confidence and helps them to improve their often underdeveloped speaking and listening skills. Teachers are also fully aware of the need to improve boys' achievement. Their use of a greater range of practical activities and well-chosen texts is helping to do this but the impact is not yet evident in the test results.

Planning is thorough. It identifies clearly the work for different ability groups and, for most pupils, builds on what has gone before. However, the work given to more able pupils is not always challenging enough and this hinders their progress. Teachers assess pupils' learning well in lessons. They use whole-class sessions effectively to make additional teaching points and to help pupils evaluate their own learning and learn from each other. All of this is helping pupils to make faster progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The new curriculum is satisfactory. It is planned around promoting key skills such as communication, thinking and problem-solving in all subjects, through well-focused practical activities. This and the links between subjects ensure that it has the potential to meet the needs of all pupils and promotes literacy and numeracy skills at every opportunity. The school is now building up its resources to support the curriculum fully, especially in relation to raising the achievement of boys and more able pupils. These initiatives have not yet had time to make a significant impact on pupils' progress. There is a good range of well attended activities in and beyond the normal school day.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good levels of care, guidance and support contribute greatly to pupils' personal and academic progress. Teachers, support staff and the learning mentor work closely together to help pupils in all age groups. This and the school's good links with external agencies contribute to the good support provided for pupils for whom English is an additional language, including asylum seekers and refugees. One pupil proudly commented, 'When I came here I couldn't speak any English. The teachers worked hard with me and now I can'.

Pupils are well looked after and their parents are very satisfied with what the school does. Good quality marking helps pupils understand the targets they have for English

and mathematics, and the steps they need to take to reach them. However, the targets for more able pupils are sometimes not sufficiently challenging.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Within what is overall satisfactory leadership and management, the headteacher's leadership is good. The systems he put in place as acting headteacher successfully improved teaching and learning and raised achievement and standards last year. He has given the school very clear educational direction, based solely on giving the pupils the best possible chance to achieve well. His vision is shared by staff, governors and parents.

Systems for recording and analysing pupils' progress and for checking teaching and learning are rigorous. The allocation of teachers to classes and the organisation of year groups into 'phases' have successfully enabled teachers to work closely together, supporting each other and sharing expertise. The headteacher and the acting deputy fulfil their roles well. All staff have been suitably involved in school improvement planning and examining pupils' work, and some have joined the senior managers in lesson observations to develop their skills. More remains to be done to enable them to become fully effective in these roles. The governors' role in relation to monitoring the school's performance is developing satisfactorily and now includes visits to classrooms to check on aspects of the school's work. Overall, there has been satisfactory improvement in the key issues identified at the last inspection. The consistency with which agreed procedures are being implemented throughout the school demonstrates the strong teamwork now evident among the staff and the confidence they have in the school leadership.

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

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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
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?	3
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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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 making us so welcome and for talking to us about your school and your work there. You are clearly very proud of your school and you very much enjoy your learning. We were very pleased to hear that you could not think of anything to improve other than to lengthen the school day so that you could learn even more. Your school is satisfactory overall and it is improving. That means it does some things well but there are things it needs to do better. The teachers know what these are and are trying hard to do them. Here is what we found:
- most of you are making satisfactory progress because the teachers give you suitable work to do
- you behave well because the school takes good care of you and you are taught to respect everyone and everything
- you know how to keep yourselves safe and why it is important to keep fit and healthy, and you are always ready to take responsibility and to help others
- the different people who lead and manage your school do so satisfactorily. However, your new headteacher is helping them to do this even better.

We have asked your school to help you make faster progress in these ways:

- make sure that those of you who can cope with it are given harder work to do, and help some of the boys to make faster progress
- help teachers to get even better at checking how well you are being taught and how much progress you are making.

We hope that you will continue to work hard and enjoy learning .