



St Gregory's RC Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104002
Local Authority Sandwell
Inspection number 286834
Inspection date 2 November 2006
Reporting inspector Ian Knight

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Park Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Smethwick
Age range of pupils	4-11		B67 5HX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 4294609
Number on roll (school)	210	Fax number	0121 4297394
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mary O'Brien
		Headteacher	Finula Foley
Date of previous school inspection	15 October 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This average sized, voluntary aided school primarily serves the local parish, although significant numbers of pupils travel from further afield to attend. Almost all pupils are White British, with a small number from Asian, Black or mixed heritage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. The school has received a number of awards since the last inspection, including Investor in People, Healthy Schools Platinum, Active Mark Gold and Arts Mark Gold.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The school's motto, 'Loving and Learning', sums up the whole ethos of this outstanding school. 'The pupils are encouraged not only in their studies but also to become valuable members of their school, family, community and church,' wrote one parent; this statement aptly sums up the findings of this inspection. Parents appreciate the care that their children receive as they start out on their journey in the Nursery and Reception classes. Excellent provision sets pupils securely on the path to high achievement. Pupils leave the school with standards that are well above average overall and exceptionally high in English. What is particularly notable is that almost all pupils gain at least the expected levels in National Curriculum tests at the end of Years 2 and 6. This is because the school's excellent tracking of pupils' progress, coupled with high expectations of what they should achieve, enables sensitive and focused support to be given to those pupils who need a little more help. The most capable are also well catered for as is shown in the high proportions gaining the higher levels in the National Curriculum tests, especially in English. The achievement of pupils is outstanding. This is because of outstanding teaching, founded on a clear understanding of the needs of individuals. This outstanding achievement in the core skills and the outstanding provision for personal, social and health education ensures that pupils are extremely well prepared for life in the world of work.

Not only do pupils do so well academically, but their personal development and well-being are outstanding too. They really enjoy school, are highly attentive in lessons, keen to take part and behave particularly well. Attendance is above average. Pupils show a clear understanding of healthy living and keeping safe because the school promotes them particularly well through, for example, regular physical activity, swimming and healthy eating. Pupils eagerly take responsibility, for example acting as peer mediators, and Year 6 especially enjoy their sessions when they act as 'buddies' to children in Reception.

The curriculum is good and supports literacy particularly well as teachers ensure that the skills learned in English are reinforced and extended in other lessons. The school has identified that the next step in developing the whole curriculum is to focus on developing the skills of problem solving and research to complement pupils' very good knowledge and understanding. The school cares for pupils supremely well, which they appreciate.

The glue that holds the school together is the clarity of vision that is shared by all in the school under the excellent leadership of the headteacher and her deputy, supported by a good governing body. There is an uncompromising drive towards continuous, sustainable improvement, which is reflected in the school's development planning. The school's work is rigorously checked to identify areas to work on. All the parents who returned questionnaires agreed that the school is led and managed well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement the plans to provide more opportunities within the curriculum for pupils to develop the skills relevant to each subject, for example in problem solving and research.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Children enter the Nursery with standards as expected for their age, and enter Year 1 with standards above expectations in all areas of learning. There are variations in standards from year to year. For example, the Reception class last year were not as strong as this year's class in aspects of communication, language and literacy, and this has been noted and support provided. Standards are above average at the end of Year 2, well above average at the end of Year 6, and exceptionally high in English. This follows from the high expectations of staff and pupils informed by the school's challenging year-on-year targets for progress that are generally met. Almost all pupils achieve at least the expected levels and a high proportion gains the higher levels in both Years 2 and 6. The school is proactive in identifying pupils who seem to be progressing more slowly than they should and providing them with well managed, sensitive and focused support. As a result, they make the same excellent progress as their peers. The standards pupils attain represent outstanding achievement when considered in the light of their previous attainment and backgrounds.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils really thrive in the supportive atmosphere in the school and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Although a few pupils find it difficult to behave well, the positive ethos of the school and the excellent provision for personal development help all pupils to behave exceptionally well and to show extremely positive attitudes. Pupils' cultural understanding is enhanced by links with schools abroad and particularly good provision for pupils to understand western culture. Pupils really enjoy coming to school, saying that lessons are fun. Excellent personal, social and health education provision ensures that pupils understand the importance of keeping safe and of healthy living. Pupils spoke of how well used the salad bar is at lunchtimes, for example, and in lessons they naturally adopted safe practices as they moved around rooms. They say there is very little bullying but understand the procedures they would need to follow and are confident that any incidents are dealt with quickly and effectively. The school has the 'National Healthy School' award; a Year 6 pupil said the school is 'a very active school'. The high standards in the core subjects and in personal, social and health education ensure that pupils are very well prepared for the world of work. They have plenty of opportunities to take responsibility in school and the wider community. Older pupils are trained as peer mediators and the school council has a real and effective voice with its suggestions regularly discussed by the governing body.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

When a group of pupils from Year 6 were asked to sum the school up in one sentence, one said, 'You can depend on really good learning.' That is the reason, in a nutshell, why achievement is so good in the school: teaching is focused on learning and is consistently of high quality. It is focused and planned very carefully to meet the needs of all in the class. Teachers make sure that everything they do matches pupils' needs closely; for example, when questioning pupils, they nominate pupils to answer questions that are designed to challenge individuals at their own level. Regular assessment is used to identify pupils who are in danger of falling behind and they attend highly effective groups to build self-esteem and confidence. This is a big factor in the rapid and sustained progress of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. All of these excellent features are also evident in the Foundation Stage, within the mix of activities between those that are led by adults and those that children choose for themselves. As a result, children here achieve at the same high level.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Through its highly effective self-evaluation, the school identified some areas where the curriculum could be improved. As a result, it was restructured so as to teach many subjects through cross-curricular themes, enhanced by visitors and visits. Pupils say how much they appreciate this and enjoy residential trips, for example. This approach is now well embedded in the school's practice and has a particular impact on writing as teachers carefully plan activities in other subjects that link with the foci in English. English results in National Curriculum tests have been higher than those in mathematics. The school analysed reasons for this and is phasing in the use of a published scheme that aims to enhance understanding of mathematics as well as covering the content. However, this has not had time to have a significant impact on outcomes. The school maintains close and productive links with other local schools in a primary partnership. This allows the sharing of particularly good practice. In addition, the school rightly sees itself as a focal point for the Catholic community through its close working links with the church. The school is aware that the curriculum at the moment does not always focus clearly enough on the skills pupils need to gain, for example, in problem solving, alongside the content they need to learn and is currently working to modify the curriculum further to redress this balance.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school has a powerful ethos of caring, based on its foundation as a faith school. Pupils understand that staff really care for them in a safe and healthy environment, and they respond supremely well. All child protection procedures are in place and have

a high priority. Rigorous tracking of pupils' progress ensures that all have work closely tailored to their needs. The school's use of booklets of 'Stepping Stones' enables pupils to have a very clear idea of how they are doing and what they need to do next. Pupils say they appreciate the discussions they have with staff about their targets and the helpful marking of their work. Parents speak highly of the support they and their children are given if they have difficulties in class.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Excellent leadership and management from the headteacher and her deputy have ensured that the high standards in the school have been maintained over time, and improved in English in Key Stage 2. A clear focus on the individual is a major thread in the school's thinking and results in pupils making excellent progress based on their individual needs. Strategic planning is based on widespread consultation with interested parties and the outcomes of the school's exceptional self-evaluation and includes wholly appropriate priorities in this high-performing school. However, the criteria by which its success might be measured could be sharper. Nevertheless, the school's past performance and its knowledge of itself and its needs give it an outstanding capacity for further improvement. The governing body is supportive, very knowledgeable and challenges the school well. Individual governors are linked with different areas of the school, but they do not formally visit the school to see it at work or to discuss issues in depth, such as targets in the school development plan that fall within their area of interest.

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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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
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?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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 being so friendly and polite when I visited your school. I enjoyed seeing you work and chatting with some of you during the day. One of the Year 6 pupils told me that in the school, 'You can depend on really good learning.' I agree. I found that your school is excellent and you all do really well. Your headteacher and the other teachers know exactly how they want the school to work, and they all work together to make sure your school is like that. I saw you working well on tasks that the teachers made sure were hard, but not too hard! That helped make sure your learning was excellent and is one reason why so many of you do so well in your tests at the end of Year 6, especially in English. I also saw lots of really good behaviour and that also helps you to learn particularly well. The school council works very hard for you all and I know that the governors read the minutes of meetings to see if they can do the things you have asked for.

The school has done many things to make sure it keeps getting better. You will have noticed the themes in your work that mean you can make really good links between different subjects and that help you to remember things better. The school is working on helping you to gain more of the important skills that you will need in the future. I have asked the headteacher and the other teachers to carry on with this so that you can learn even better. You can help by always trying really hard in lessons, even if some are a bit different to how they have been before.

I wish you all the very best for the future.