



St Margaret Mary's Catholic Infant School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104481
Local Authority Knowsley
Inspection number 286956
Inspection dates 8–9 November 2006
Reporting inspector Kevin Johnson

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

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|---|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Type of school | Primary | School address | Pilch Lane |
| School category | Voluntary aided | | Liverpool |
| Age range of pupils | 3–7 | | Merseyside L14 0JG |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 0151 2284024 |
| Number on roll (school) | 475 | Fax number | 0151 2280073 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair | Cllr Robert Maguire |
| | | Headteacher | Miss P Deegan |
| Date of previous school inspection | 2 July 2001 | | |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is situated on the boundary of two local authorities, Knowsley and Liverpool. It attracts pupils from both authorities in roughly equal proportions, most of whom are from White British backgrounds. The catchment area is typified by a mix of owner-occupied and local authority housing, much of which is in an area of high social need. An average number of pupils are identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities or are eligible to receive free school meals. The number of pupils for whom English is an additional language is below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school where pupils achieve well. They get off to a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes where personal development thrives and children become curious and willing learners. Their overall level of skills is below what is expected for their ages when they arrive but they achieve well because they reach the appropriate end of Foundation Stage levels. Good progress continues throughout Years 1 and 2 because of consistently good teaching, so that standards are above average by the end of Year 2. A dip in standards between 2003 and 2004 has been successfully reversed.

Achievement is good overall because teachers plan creatively to make sure all pupils are engaged in lively and interesting activities, so they enjoy learning and work hard. Some boys do not always achieve as well as girls, so the school is currently reviewing its approaches to reading, writing and topic work, to heighten boys' interest. Although there are promising signs in the Foundation Stage of the gap closing between boys' and girls' achievement, there is still some way to go before the success of the changes can be evaluated.

The school really lives its mission statement, 'We learn to love and love to learn.' Relationships are excellent and pupils love being in school. Every pupil is valued and pastoral care, especially for the most vulnerable, is managed very sensitively so that they can achieve as well as others. The school has also won the hearts of parents who are full of praise for the way their children are taught and cared for. This sense of 'togetherness' helps the school to improve standards and to prosper within the community. The stability of the effective teaching staff, including committed and skilled classroom assistants, makes a substantial contribution to the pupils' success in learning.

The headteacher leads the school well. She has built up a cohesive staff team who, with governors, share the vision for the school's future and give it a good capacity to improve. Her inclusive style and her openness to new ideas mean that all contribute to school development. Systems for monitoring the school's performance identify the right areas for development whilst outcomes from the monitoring of teaching help to ensure the consistent quality. The tracking of pupils' progress contributes to setting future long term targets, which help in raising standards. However the school does not set short term targets for achievement. All stakeholders contribute to the school improvement plan. Parents are consulted over budget priorities and governors are watchful to see that priorities and spending are linked. The school gives good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise boys' achievement in reading and writing.
- Involve all teachers more fully in analysing assessment information to identify short term targets and monitor progress towards them.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are above average though they have fluctuated since the previous inspection. There was a dip between 2003 and 2004 when attainment in all subjects fell to broadly average levels. Standards recovered in reading and writing in 2005 and rose to above average. In mathematics they remained average due to a lower than expected proportion attaining Level 3. Further recovery in 2006, due to decisive action taken, saw the number of children reaching Level 3 in mathematics double, whilst standards in reading and writing were broadly maintained. The successful strategy of grouping pupils by ability for literacy and numeracy is continuing as part of the school's determined drive to raise standards further. New ways of teaching boys' reading and writing have also been introduced. Children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well because of the good support they are given, as do the small number for whom English is an additional language. Given that many children start in Foundation Stage with below the expected level of skills for their age, achievement by the end of Year 2 is good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good with some outstanding features. Children are happy and confident. They say they love to come to school and would like to 'stay longer and come in at weekends'. Attendance is around the national average. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. It is underpinned by opportunities to strengthen moral messages by embracing the values of the Catholic faith and learning to respect differences of culture and tradition. Children always behave exceptionally well because of the excellent relationships they share with staff and each other, which leads to a calm learning environment. Pupils are proud of their Healthy School status and know the importance of a healthy diet and why some foods are unhealthy. Many enjoy 'walking Wednesday' when they are encouraged to walk to school as well as undertake other physical activities, including soccer training. Children have a growing awareness of the skills required to secure their future well-being. From the Foundation Stage onwards independence and cooperation are encouraged. Many learn the benefits of saving weekly with the credit union that operates in the school. Their views about developing the playground are taken into account. Nevertheless, there is still some scope for allowing pupils more choices and giving them an even more active voice. This is why the inspection judgement does not fully agree with the school's evaluation of excellence in this aspect.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The skill, commitment and hard work of teachers and assistants result in good teaching and learning. Teachers plan an interesting range of activities which keep pupils on their toes during lessons. Opportunities for pupils to work together often results in a buzz of excitement as learning gathers pace. For example, in a mathematics lesson, mental calculation gathered speed as pupils got on or off the 'subtraction bus'. Some teachers use questioning well to check pupils' understanding and develop their confidence in speaking and listening. The use of practical activities with real objects as well as pictures helps pupils understand new ideas and make good progress in lessons. In the Foundation Stage teachers plan a good range of activities to challenge children's curiosity and improve independent learning skills. Children delight in new discoveries such as finding out that mixing red and yellow produces orange. Teachers question pupils well to assess understanding and build new learning on what they already know. When pupils' work is marked, however, there is not always enough guidance about the next steps towards improving on what they have done.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum helps children to achieve well. A strong emphasis is placed on basic skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology, giving pupils a strong foundation for their future learning as well as raising aspirations. Typical of what the pupils say about what they learn is 'When I grow up I want to be a professional footballer so I need to work hard in geography for when I travel all over the world.'

Subjects are well-planned and adapted to the varying needs of most pupils, although at times the curriculum is not broad enough to best meet the learning needs of all boys. The school recognises this and has begun steps to remedy it. A wealth of stimulating activities enriches the curriculum and ensures that pupils enjoy coming to school. A good example is when the war veterans shared their experiences with the pupils and helped them to reflect on the meaning of Remembrance Day. A good range of clubs complements an already stimulating curriculum, providing pupils with many opportunities to develop their sporting and creative interests outside of normal lesson time.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The outstanding level of pastoral care and support that the school provides for all its pupils contributes significantly to their good achievement. A typical parents' view is that, 'staff care about developing the children . they grow into happy and confident individuals'. Support for the most vulnerable pupils, such as working with a mentor,

is unobtrusive yet highly effective in helping them learn as well as others. Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported very well through carefully planned learning programmes and the skilful intervention of teachers and learning assistants.

Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of children in school are in place.

Good attention is given to teaching pupils how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Pastoral guidance is stronger than academic. Although teachers know the pupils' capabilities, the pupils themselves are not always sufficiently clear about what they need to do next in order to improve. Teachers are not fully enough involved in setting targets for pupils based on assessment information. This leads to pupils not always being stretched to the extent they could be.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Through good leadership and management the headteacher and governors have tackled the dip in standards successfully, maintained the high profile the school has in the community and made a good start on the planned programme for refurbishment of the building. Issues from the previous report have been dealt with. Consequently, the school demonstrates good capacity for improvement. The exceptionally warm, caring ethos means that pupils feel safe and confident and this helps to promote their good achievement. Staff, governors and parents share in the school's vision and all contribute to setting out the priorities for improvement. The outcomes of good monitoring of teaching contribute towards the drive to maintain and improve quality. Whilst procedures for tracking pupils' progress and setting targets have served the school well and guided the upturn in standards, new systems are nevertheless being trialled to bring about more consistent and regular use of assessment information by all teachers. Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well and give challenge and support in equal measure. The headteacher and governors have accurately evaluated standards and achievement, teaching quality, the quality of the curriculum and leadership. However, they do not always judge the effectiveness of improvement planning by the impact it has on pupils' learning so evaluations are not always as sharp as they could be.

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Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| 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

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|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 2 |
| 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

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|---|---|
| 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 | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 3 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 1 |
| 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

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| 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 very much for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed our visit all the more because you are so helpful and polite. It was great fun talking to you and easy to see why you are so happy in school.

We found a lot of good things about your school during our inspection. Here are a few that we think are important and will help you to learn well:

- you behave exceptionally well all of the time and you work hard for your teachers
- your teachers work hard to make your lessons fun so you make good progress
- all of the adults in school take very good care of you
- your headteacher has some good ideas about how to make your school even better.

We think your school will be even better when:

- all of the boys do the best they possibly can in their reading and writing
- your headteacher and teachers keep a closer check on how well you are doing and try to make your progress even faster.

You can help by continuing to enjoy school and trying as hard as you can to make your work a little better each day.