

Blackbrook St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104802
Local Authority	St Helens
Inspection number	287038
Inspection dates	4–5 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Gill Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	411
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Alcock
Headteacher	Mrs Kathryn Ashton
Date of previous school inspection	11 November 2002
School address	Chain Lane Blackbrook St Helens Merseyside WA11 9QY
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This larger than average primary school serves the Catholic community of Blackbrook in the borough of St Helens. It was a newly amalgamated school at the time of the last inspection. Families' economic and social circumstances are broadly average. The majority of children are of White British heritage. The proportion of children from minority ethnic groups is very low and a very small number of children are at an early stage of learning to speak English.

The proportion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities within the school is below average overall. A very small proportion of these children have a statement of special educational need.

The school has been awarded the Healthy Schools Standard and the Investors in People award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Blackbrook St Mary's provides a satisfactory quality of education. Children are happy at school and they are cared for well. The school has a good ethos. Strong Christian values permeate the life and work of the school. The headteacher has successfully managed the amalgamation of the previous infant and junior schools. Although comprised of two separate buildings it feels like one school. Parents appreciate the care and support that staff show to their children and families and feel that the school is at the heart of the local community.

Children's achievement is satisfactory and the standards they reach at the end of Year 6 are broadly average. Children of all abilities generally enjoy their work and most make satisfactory progress. Standards have fallen in recent years. The school has identified the reasons for the decline and has successfully tackled the issues. Better progress is now being made. Children's personal development is good. They behave well. They know how to stay safe and are keen to lead healthy life styles, enjoying the wide range of sporting opportunities the school provides.

The quality of teaching and learning and that of the curriculum are satisfactory. Lessons are generally well planned and teaching is lively, capturing the children's interest well. Relationships are good and children requiring help in lessons are effectively supported by classroom assistants. There has been a recent review of the way basic skills are taught which is helping teachers to focus on improving children's progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The curriculum is enriched well through a number of visits to places of local interest. The care for children is of high quality. Good relationships with other schools, local agencies and the diocese support children well, particularly as they move on from Blackbrook to their secondary school. The guidance children receive is satisfactory. However the school does not make full use of the information about the progress that children have made to help set them challenging targets.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. A new senior leadership team was completed in 2006 with the appointment of an assistant headteacher. The team is now dealing effectively with underachievement. More demanding school targets have been set for 2008 and 2009 and standards are starting to improve. However, the school does not yet base its improvement plans firmly enough on the outcomes of self-evaluation. The school is at an early stage in this work and the improvements made are not yet fully effective. The school provides satisfactory value for money and has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The quality of provision in the Foundation Stage (Reception) is good and is a strength of the school. Most children enter Reception having previously attended a local pre-school setting. The levels of development on entry are below those expected for children of this age. They make good progress in Reception in all areas of learning. The opportunities to learn through play are enhanced by good quality resources, imaginative activities and good teaching. The adults in Reception are skilled at building children's confidence and children tackle challenging activities readily. There is no secure outside play area, which severely limits independent learning outdoors. The school has good quality plans to resolve this issue. Relationships are good and the Foundation Stage is well led and managed. Children enjoy school. They are well cared for and their development is thoroughly assessed and recorded. The partnership with parents is good and parents are happy with the induction their children have into school. By the end of

their first year, most children have made good progress and are ready to start the Year 1 curriculum.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise expectations of children's achievement by providing them with more challenging targets.
- Improve the analysis of data in order to identify underachievement and to monitor subsequent progress.
- Base plans for school improvement firmly on the needs of children, identified through rigorous evaluation of the school's effectiveness.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children's achievement is satisfactory and standards are broadly average. Children enter Year 1 with levels of development that meet the levels expected for children of their age. They make satisfactory progress through Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, reaching broadly average standards by the time they leave at Year 6.

Since the last inspection, standards at Key Stage 1 have been average. Standards in Year 2 dipped in 2007. The staff identified the reasons for the fall in standards and put in place additional support for these children. They are now making better progress in Year 3. The children currently in Year 2 are making satisfactory progress and are on track to meet their targets at the end of the year.

Standards at Key Stage 2 are broadly average. Standards have fluctuated around the national average since the last inspection, although there has been a downward trend for the last two years. The targets for children have not been sufficiently challenging. This decline has been tackled and children currently in Key Stage 2 are on track to meet more challenging targets. The work seen in lessons and in the children's exercise books reflect their teacher's high expectations.

Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as other children.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Children's personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. They grow in self-esteem and confidence as they progress through the school and develop a strong sense of community. They are respectful to each other and polite and helpful towards visitors. Children know about healthy lifestyles and have a good understanding of how to keep fit. They are keen to take part in the sporting activities offered by the school. Behaviour is generally good and children say they feel safe and secure. They appreciate the friendship stops and the lunch-time activities. Children say there is very little bullying, but when it occurs, they are confident staff will help them to deal with it effectively.

Children enjoy school and their attendance is good. They appreciate the visits the school organises and they particularly enjoy the residential visit in Year 6. The work of the school council is good and demonstrates that children are developing well as young citizens. They are

very active in raising funds for charity and have been successful in securing funding for the school garden.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Inspectors saw a range of satisfactory and good lessons during the inspection. Typically, teaching is lively and resources such as the interactive whiteboard are used well to capture the children's interest. Relationships are good. Teachers challenge children well through their questioning. They plan activities collaboratively, making good use of their knowledge of what the children have learned previously. Classroom assistants are delegated well within classrooms and make a good contribution to supporting the children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, teachers do not routinely check the progress of children who are withdrawn from lessons for special help. In the weaker lessons, teachers sometimes spend too long talking and children lose concentration. Too much is often already decided for children by the teachers: for example, how the children should record their work on worksheets. This means too little emphasis is given to children developing their independence, initiative and to practise their writing. Marking is regular and generally positive. There are pockets of good practice where marking indicates how children can improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. It covers all the subjects in the National Curriculum, as well as including a modern foreign language. A recent review of the curriculum for basic skills has led to improvements in the provision for reading and writing. These developments are having a positive impact in Reception and Year 1. At times the curriculum is not fully relevant to the children's needs. For example, in one lesson the Internet was to be used for research, but this was too challenging for the weaker readers. The curriculum is enriched by visits to places of interests, a residential visit and an impressive list of extra-curricular activities. There is provision for family learning and for gifted and talented children and some children have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The care, guidance and support for children are satisfactory overall. The general level of care and concern for all children is high, reflecting the Christian ethos in the school. This is acknowledged and appreciated by parents. Procedures for safeguarding children and keeping them healthy meet current guidelines. The school works well with a range of children's services to identify special needs and provide additional support. The school has put much effort into transition arrangements between Key Stages 1 and 2 since the last inspection, where it was identified as a key area for improvement. Transition arrangements are now good. The work of the learning mentor is highly effective and support for vulnerable children is strong.

The school is at the beginning stages of improving its academic guidance for children and the use of assessment to improve children's work. At present, although the school tracks children's progress, it does not make the link between whole school target setting and children's individual

targets, so it has been slow to identify underachievement. Currently it does not set individual targets for children sufficiently well.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. The senior leadership team have been successful in building a unified staff team with good morale since the amalgamation. They are now determined to raise standards and achievement. The headteacher sets a good ethos, with clear principles rooted in the school's Catholic foundation and faith.

The governing body is fully involved in the leadership and management of the school. It meets all its statutory duties. Governors and the local authority have given strong support to the headteacher since the amalgamation. The governing body holds the school to account for its actions, but its effectiveness is currently limited by the quality of data it receives from the school.

To date, the school's evaluation of its effectiveness has not been focused sharply enough to lead to improved standards. This is because links are not made between the children's progress, targets and school improvement planning. The school has now set challenging targets for 2008 and 2009. However, these are not yet linked to teachers' accountability or children's individual targets. Leadership roles for staff other than senior staff are at the developmental stage. Subject leaders have good subject knowledge but they do not yet make checks on children's progress or link their subject improvement plans to how well children are doing.

Effective partnerships have been built with local schools, the faith community and local agencies. The partnerships are used well to support children's well-being. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and appreciate the care it offers their children. Issues raised at the last inspection have been dealt with successfully.

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.

Annex A

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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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?	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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

You may remember that Miss Kenna, Mrs Auton and I visited your school recently to check how well you are learning. Thank you for talking to us and for sharing your views about your school, we listened carefully to what you said. We enjoyed our visit and this letter is to explain to you what we found.

We judged your school to be satisfactory. This means that is doing fine. It does some things well and it could do other things better. You are developing strong values and learning to be considerate to others. Your parents told us that you are happy and feel safe in school and that most of you enjoy learning. We agree. You behave well in lessons and around the school. We could see that you enjoy keeping fit and healthy and enjoy the wide range of sporting activities and extra-curricular activities the school provides. Your school council works hard to support others through its charity work and you show a good understanding of the need to help others.

Before we visited your school we looked at the standards you reach in Year 2 and Year 6 and we were concerned. We think you can do better and your headteacher agrees. She is going to set you more challenging targets. We can see that standards are already starting to improve from the work in your books. Your headteacher and the staff are planning to make closer links between the standards you reach and the school's plans for the future, and to analyse your progress more carefully. Everyone in school needs to know that improving your work is the most important thing. Your challenge is to do your best to reach your targets.

With my very best wishes for the future.