

St Bartholomew's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104815
Local Authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	287040
Inspection date	14 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Margot D'Arcy

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	338
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr John O'Donnell
Headteacher	Mr Michael Edwards
Date of previous school inspection	26 March 2001
School address	School Lane Rainhill Prescot Merseyside L35 6NN
Telephone number	01744 678550
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Age group	5–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This large primary school is situated in the Rainhill metropolitan borough of St Helens, Merseyside. The majority of pupils are White British. There are small numbers from minority ethnic backgrounds, but none is at an early stage of learning English. The social and economic circumstances of most pupils are favourable. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. When children start school in the Reception classes, their attainment in all areas of learning is as expected for their age.

The school has been awarded a quality mark for information and communication technology (ICT) and an ActiveMark for sports quality.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St. Bartholomew's is a good school which provides good value for money. Pupils develop well personally and academically because the school takes good care of them and teaches them well. Standards are generally well above average by the time pupils leave Year 6, reflecting pupils' good achievement during their time at the school. However, in 2006 there was a significant fall in Year 6 test results mainly due to staffing disruptions. However, this was also part of a more subtle decline, which began the previous year and was linked to some shortcomings in aspects of the provision for English and mathematics. The fall in standards prompted the school to take a more critical look at its provision, and this showed that not enough emphasis was being given to problem solving in mathematics. The range of writing being taught to junior pupils was also too narrow. The school was proactive in seeking support from the local authority and has achieved a good level of success in rectifying the situation. However, opportunities for promoting these skills across the curriculum are still not fully embedded, especially at Key Stage 2. Nevertheless, the school's data show that pupils in all junior year groups are making up lost ground and progressing well. Standards in most year groups are well above age-related expectations. The current Year 6 group has also made good gains in the last year and is on course to meet its challenging targets. The standards for this group are slightly above average but reflect good achievement overall in relation to attainment at the end of Key Stage 1.

Children get a super start in the Foundation Stage where good teaching and learning experiences allow them to achieve well in all areas of their work. Outdoor provision for these children has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now a strength, opening up many new learning opportunities.

Teaching is good throughout the school, although approaches differ. Expectations are high in all year groups and all teachers have good subject knowledge and manage pupils well. At Key Stage 1 teachers adapt the curriculum more creatively than at Key Stage 2 to provide pupils with better opportunities to develop independent learning skills. At Key Stage 2, teachers are beginning to reduce the amount of control that they have maintained over pupils' learning to enable them to more effectively develop these key skills. Pupils in both key stages enjoy learning and speak enthusiastically about school, with many subjects put forward as favourites. Pupils at Key Stage 2 are appreciating the increasing opportunities for problem solving and organising aspects of their work. Year 5 and 6 pupils, for example, relished creating challenging number puzzles for their friends to solve. The curriculum is satisfactory. While there are strengths, the school is not as far on as it could be in adapting the curriculum to promote pupils' independent learning and helping them develop key skills within the full range of subjects.

Pupils' personal development is good. Their behaviour is outstanding and they are very keen to learn. Pupils are mature and responsible and, when given the opportunity, rise to the challenge of working independently. Pupils have gained a very good understanding of how to stay healthy and keep safe. They contribute well to their school and community, taking on jobs and fundraising for good causes. Pupils' admirable personal standards result from the good level of care, guidance and support provided by the school, with pastoral support being especially strong. Academic guidance is satisfactory with some good improvements being made to setting individual targets. However, marking at Key Stage 2 remains inconsistent in guiding pupils on how they might do better.

Leadership and management are good. The desire to provide the best for pupils is strong and after the fall in Year 6 test results last year the quality of self-evaluation stepped up a notch. Self-evaluation is honest and mainly accurate, if a little cautious, being influenced by last year's Key Stage 2 test results. Differences between inspection judgements and the school's evaluations stem from the former being based on pupils' current good progress and the good improvements that have been made to provision in the last year. Overall, the school has addressed well the recommendations made by the last inspection and is well placed to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the curriculum so that it provides pupils, particularly at Key Stage 2, with more opportunities to develop key skills across a range of subjects rather than discretely, and better involves them in organising and managing aspects of their own learning.
- Achieve consistency in the quality of marking at Key Stage 2 so that it guides all pupils effectively on how they can improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Overall achievement is good. Pupils in most year groups are attaining standards that are well above those expected for their age in English, mathematics and science. The school's strategy of building from the early years upwards is proving successful. Reception children make rapid progress in all areas and most exceed the learning goals expected by the end of their first year in school. Astute deployment of staff has ensured that the pace of progress continues in Key Stage 1 where standards by the end of Year 2 have risen significantly in the last two years. These are now well above average in reading, writing and mathematics. The school is keen to maintain the momentum of learning in Key Stage 2 and is examining different approaches to enhancing its provision here. The school's response to the fall in Year 6 results last year has been effective and as a result most pupils at Key Stage 2 are making good progress. This is because of the increased emphasis on problem solving in mathematics and a wider range of writing. The standards of pupils in Year 6 are not as high as in other years but pupils have achieved well in relation to their earlier attainment at the end of Year 2. Throughout the school, a good standard of work was seen in ICT, reflecting good improvement since the last inspection. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good quality additional support which builds their confidence and enables them to make good progress. The school has accurately identified some underachievement of boys and has taken successful action to improve this. Data show that the school has significantly narrowed the gap between boys and girls in all subjects during the last year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and has improved since the last inspection. Assemblies and circle time sessions provide good opportunities for pupils to reflect on important issues, develop empathy with others and give thanks for good things in their lives. Lessons often excite and inspire pupils, such as when Reception children observed mini-beasts under a magnifier and Year 1 pupils watched a time-lapse film of a plant blossoming. Pupils enjoy learning about cultures different to their own and can recount a good deal of detail, for example about different religious beliefs and art and music from around the world. Their excellent behaviour contributes very well to the good standard of learning. Attendance

is also good, reflecting pupils' enjoyment of school. Pupils give good examples of how to stay healthy, quoting exercise, sleep and hygiene. Responsibilities such as being class monitors, playground buddies and school councillors have given pupils a good insight of how they can contribute to their world. They show delight in the photographs of children from a link school in Malawi wearing donated school uniform items that have become too small for them. Overall, pupils are adequately prepared for the future, but they are capable of taking on more responsibility for their learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers' high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour result in good learning. The atmosphere in classrooms is industrious with pupils attending very well to teachers' clear explanations and demonstrations. In the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, teaching is lively and exciting, with very good thought given to providing activities that motivate pupils and for which they can see a purpose. For instance, Year 2 pupils' 'press conference' with characters from the Little Red Riding Hood story provided an excellent basis for them to write a newspaper report on the subject. Strengths in teaching in these two key stages have underpinned good improvements to standards. While teaching is good at Key Stage 2, teachers are beginning to recognise that they can relinquish some of the control they have maintained in the past over pupils' work without jeopardising the quality of learning. This was seen in some lively mathematics lessons focusing on problem solving. Here pupils were clearly fired up and rose to the challenge of assuming responsibility for how they tackled their work. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution, working with small groups or individuals.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has some notable strengths but the school is at an early stage of adapting it in line with national recommendations. Some useful links are beginning to be made between subjects to make learning more interesting and meaningful. The school recognises that key skills such as enquiry, problem solving and involving pupils in managing aspects of their learning do not have a high enough profile, particularly at Key Stage 2. Provision in the Foundation Stage is good. Children have lots of opportunities to learn through exploration and well structured play activities. Strengths throughout the school include the provision of Spanish for all pupils, with the planned addition of French at Key Stage 2. Provision for ICT is good and enhanced by regular visits for all pupils to nearby city learning centres. Opportunities for pupils to learn about their own and other cultures are now good. Additional support programmes and activities are provided to boost the learning of specific groups, such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or those with particular gifts or talents. A good range of additional activities, for instance in sport, music, dance and ICT, enriches the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school takes good care of pupils. Staff know them well and relationships are supportive and friendly. This contributes to pupils' enjoyment of school, confidence and sense of security. Vulnerable pupils are supported very well, including through counselling, and their progress is

monitored rigorously. Some good support has been provided to increase boys' motivation to learn, involving workshops with parents and the identification of 'Boyzone' areas in classrooms. Visitors and links with outside agencies and businesses add to the good guidance about keeping healthy and staying safe, including understanding the dangers of drugs and safe use of the Internet. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are in place. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Pupils' progress is tracked and they have individual targets. Pupils say that they like having targets because 'You get to find out how just many things you can do.' They also appreciate the time teachers give to help them; as one explained, 'The teachers are dead supportive - if you're stuck they sit with you until you understand.'

Some pupils are being given opportunities to become involved in assessing their own learning, but the practice is not consistent. Marking at Key Stage 2 is also inconsistent in informing pupils how they might improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher plays a central role in promoting the school's true family ethos of which pupils and parents are so appreciative. Parents also commend the school for how well it helps their children develop personally and academically. In this, the high expectations set by the headteacher and governors underpin the school's successes. The headteacher receives good support from the deputy headteacher and senior management team. Subject and other coordinators also carry out their responsibilities effectively, with coordinators for English and mathematics playing a key role in the drive to raise standards here. There is a clear, shared, view among all staff and governors of the school's strengths and where improvements are needed. Most of the recommendations made by the last inspection have been tackled successfully, resulting in improvements to provision and standards in a number of areas. However, response to the issue to increase opportunities for pupils to play a greater part in their learning has been somewhat slow. While some good improvements have occurred to the curriculum, shortcomings in some aspects of mathematics and writing were only picked up relatively recently. Upon doing so, however, the school has worked hard, and with a good degree of success, to improve things. Governors fulfil their responsibilities well. They are fully involved in the school's work, providing support and challenge as appropriate.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	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

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

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	2
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?	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?	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.

Annex A

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	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

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

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when I came to inspect your school recently. I enjoyed talking to you and visiting your classrooms to watch you at work. I would like to share my findings with you.

I think that St Bart's is a good school. Good teaching enables you to enjoy your learning and achieve well. I was very impressed with the press conference in Year 2 and wish I could have stayed longer to see how things turned out. I could also see that many of you were having a great time working on the mathematics problems, trying to make them as challenging as possible for your friends.

You should be proud of your excellent behaviour and the work that you do to help others, both in school with your various responsibilities, and for people in your community and across the world. Your school takes good care of you and has worked hard to improve the opportunities you have for ICT and to understand and appreciate people's different beliefs and customs.

Your headteacher, other managers and governors are continually trying to make things better for you and I have suggested a couple of things to help them with this. First, I think that you are so responsible that you could play a greater part in organising and managing aspects of your learning. Developing these skills will help you a lot as you grow up. I have also suggested that your school pushes forward the plans it has to improve the curriculum so that you have the chance to practise important skills in different subjects and understand more about how different subjects are linked. You told me that you liked having targets to aim for so I've asked your school to ensure that when teachers mark your work they remind you more often of what you do well and how you can improve. You can play your part by trying your best at all times and keeping positive about learning.

With all best wishes for the future