



St Mary's Catholic Junior School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104816
Local Authority St. Helens
Inspection number 287041
Inspection dates 8–9 November 2006
Reporting inspector Frank Carruthers

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Barn Way
School category	Voluntary aided		Newton-le-Willows
Age range of pupils	7–11		Merseyside WA12 9QQ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01744 678603
Number on roll (school)	222	Fax number	01744 678605
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr John O'Connell
		Headteacher	Mrs Bernice Livesey
Date of previous school inspection	5 March 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average sized junior school serves three parishes in a predominantly residential area. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and none learn English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most of these have moderate or specific learning difficulties. The school has the Healthy School Award, the Eco School Award (silver) and Activemark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. The pupils behave exceptionally well and they have excellent attitudes to learning. Their awareness of personal safety and healthy lifestyles is excellent. It is the very positive Catholic ethos of the school and high quality care, guidance and support that account for these outcomes.

Pupils achieve well because of the good teaching and learning they receive so that standards in English, mathematics and science are generally above average by the end of Year 6, although there is some variation between the results of different year groups. In some years, standards are significantly above average.

The quality of teaching is good and its strengths, such as teachers' planning and subject knowledge as well as the contribution made by teaching assistants, lead to a good rate of learning for the pupils. At times, however, the pace of learning in lessons slows when pupils are not given enough time to work on tasks. The successful introduction of targets for pupils' learning has had a good impact on standards in writing and is at an early stage in mathematics. Nonetheless, there are missed opportunities to regularly refer to the targets in lessons and sometimes when work is marked. The curriculum is good and is enriched by specialist visitors and coaches, whose work broadens pupils' horizons well.

The school has continued to improve since the time of the last inspection and standards have risen. This is because leadership and management including governance are good. In particular the outstanding leadership by the headteacher is tremendously successful in developing the pupils' excellent personal qualities which stand them in good stead for their future. The school is highly thought of by parents, the community and the local authority. The development of information and communication technology (ICT), for example, has received high praise from visitors from the local authority and from other schools and St Mary's staff have shared their good practice with them. The process of school self-evaluation is thorough and effective in identifying points for improvement. The school gives good value for money and has a good capacity to improve and to raise standards further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure marking frequently refers to pupils' targets so that they are clear about how well they are doing and understand what they need to do to improve.
- Ensure that the pace of lessons is consistently challenging.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' attainment on entry is generally slightly above average, although this varies from year to year. Pupils make good progress and standards are above average by the

end of Year 6. This forms a very good foundation for their future schooling and economic well-being. Standards in English are often above those in mathematics and the school has had notable success in promoting pupils' writing because of the particular attention the school has given to it. Boys' performance was especially good in 2006. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher level in English and mathematics is frequently above average. The focus for the current year is mathematics and priority is rightly being given to improving the pupils' skills of problem-solving and to the introduction of targets for pupils' learning.

The school has dealt fully with a key issue in science from the last inspection report by promoting pupils' investigative skills well. Standards in ICT are good because of the high quality of the provision. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the good range of intervention strategies the school has introduced, careful grouping of pupils by their attainment for English and mathematics and the strong support of teaching assistants. As one appreciative parent commented, 'I was looking for special schooling but we decided to try the juniors and we have never looked back.'

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school, work extremely hard and are very enthusiastic about their learning. This was evident in a highly successful music lesson, where the pupils not only made very good progress but enjoyed activities of performance and composition very much. The pupils report that they feel very happy, confident and safe in school and this is echoed by their parents. Pupils have excellent relationships with staff and one another. They behave exceptionally well and are friendly, polite and caring. Levels of attendance are generally above average.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and is the outcome of the strong ethos and very clear values of the school. Pupils have an excellent awareness of safe practices and healthy lifestyles. They make a very positive contribution to life in school through the school and eco school councils, in the community, where they frequently take part in festivals and events, and further afield, for example in their contributions to various charities. The pupils develop excellent skills for life, for instance in attending regularly, being punctual to school and cooperating with one another.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good across all year groups and there are examples of outstanding lessons, where the pupils learn at a fast pace and make

excellent progress. Key strengths of the teaching include the depth of teachers' subject knowledge and planning which caters very well for the different needs of pupils, for example in the grouping arrangements for teaching English and mathematics. Another feature is the teamwork of staff, in which relationships are very strong. Teaching assistants and the ICT technician take a full part in lessons and make a significant contribution to the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In addition, pupils' learning is good because pupils work very effectively on their own and when they collaborate with one another.

At times, however, the pace of learning slows when teachers' talking at the start of lessons does not leave enough time for pupils' own activities. Teachers mark pupils' work conscientiously although reference is not always made to the pupils' targets for development. This means that pupils are not always clear about the next steps they are to make. In addition, there are missed opportunities in some lessons to refer to their targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum matches the needs of the pupils well. A key strength in the curriculum is ICT. Not only is the computer suite in a focal position at the centre of the school but the subject is central to work across several subjects, and new technology is a successful feature of almost all lessons. The arrangements for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly strong. Several intervention strategies, often led by teaching assistants, are very effective.

Work is enriched by good opportunities to take part in educational visits, celebration assemblies and musical performances. Visiting specialists, for example for drama, dance, music and modern foreign languages, make a good contribution to the breadth of the curriculum.

The curriculum supports the pupils' understanding of personal safety, citizenship and healthy lifestyles well and there are good opportunities for pupils to explore aspects of personal, social and health education. The school is active in introducing programmes of work that help the social and emotional development of pupils. There are some opportunities to raise the pupils' awareness of the multicultural nature of society and the school is aware of the need to develop these further.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

These elements of the provision are outstanding and lead to the pupils' excellent personal development. Arrangements for child protection and safe staff recruitment are in place and all health and safety procedures are very effective and ensure that pupils are safe. Staff support the needs of individual pupils exceptionally well in order to raise their self-confidence and self-esteem. The school works very well with parents in order to promote their children's well-being through meetings and specific courses. One parent wrote, 'The children are made to feel valued and loved. The school is a

true extension of the home and church - one big family.' There are very good links with other schools, such as the associated infant school and high school, as well as agencies to promote the pupils' learning and personal development. The school has developed comprehensive systems to chart the progress that pupils make in academic and personal development and these are used exceptionally well to pinpoint where individuals' achievement might be insufficient and to take steps to remedy it.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The outstanding leadership by the headteacher has been instrumental in promoting the well-being of the pupils, the good improvement since the last inspection and the rise in standards. She is very well supported by the deputy headteacher. The senior management team, which includes two other postholders, has made a good start in its role of widening staff representation in the leadership group. Subject coordinators have a good grasp of their areas of responsibility and contribute well to school development planning. Improvements they have introduced to target-setting for pupils' learning have been very effective in raising standards in writing.

The school self-evaluation is good and the views of the school match the judgements of the inspection quite closely, though its views on both personal development and well-being and care, guidance and support are a little modest. All staff have contributed to the process of self-evaluation and this means that they have a good understanding of the strengths of the school and areas to improve. The governing body is well led and meets all necessary requirements. Governors are kept well informed by senior staff and gain a good grasp of the school's performance. They challenge the senior staff and a few governors are able to make a good contribution to governors' understanding of how the school works by their frequent visits and reports to the full governing body.

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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	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?	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?	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?	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?	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 your help when we inspected your school. Please pass on our thanks to the other children we met and spoke to while we were with you, especially the members of the eco school council. We enjoyed our visit very much. Now we want to share with you what we think about your school.

Your school is giving you a good standard of education. This means that you are doing well in school subjects and there are many things that the staff do well for you.

These are some of the things that are good.

- The staff take exceptionally good care of you all, helping you all to be fit, safe and healthy.
- You are achieving well in subjects such as English, mathematics, science and ICT.
- A real strength of the school is ICT and it is at the centre of so much that you do.
- Your behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent and you are growing into very sensible students who want to learn.
- The staff provide you with good opportunities to take part in activities in the community, such as the musical performances you do, and to help people who are not as fortunate as yourselves through your charity work.

Congratulations. You and the staff have much to be proud of!

To help you to do even better in school subjects, we have asked the staff to make sure that teachers:

- do not take too much time talking to you at the start of lessons but give you enough time to complete the activities they plan for you to do
- refer to your targets for learning as much as possible in lessons and when they mark your work. This will help you all to know what your targets are and what the next steps are for you to learn.

You can see that your part in this is to make sure you know your targets and work as hard as you can to achieve them and then move on to the next.

With best wishes to you all for the future.