



St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104927
Local Authority Sefton
Inspection number 287066
Inspection dates 25–26 September 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	Back Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Crosby, Liverpool
Age range of pupils	4–11		Merseyside L23 4UA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0151 924 4447
Number on roll (school)	97	Fax number	0151 932 0844
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr F Cowell
		Headteacher	Mr P Hennessy
Date of previous school inspection	4 June 2001		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 25–26 September 2006	Inspection number 287066
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small rural school in the village of Little Crosby serves families in the village itself and children who come from Hightown and Ince Blundell and from further a field in Thornton and Crosby. Very few children are from minority ethnic backgrounds and none is learning English as an additional language. The proportion of children eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All children, other than those in the single age Reception class, are taught in mixed aged classes.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school in which children achieve exceptionally well in relation to both their personal and their academic development. They reach high standards by the time they leave school at the end of Year 6. This is the result of the high quality of learning the school offers, its exceptional leadership and excellent teamwork. Parents hold the school in the highest regard. 'A lovely little school' is a frequent observation.

From the outset children are made to feel very welcome in the friendly, supportive environment of the school where they flourish and are challenged to do their best. Children comment how much they enjoy school, feel safe and know what they need to do to succeed. Standards in English, mathematics and science are consistently high in tests in Year 6. Most often all children achieve the expected Level 4 in these subjects and the majority reach the higher Level 5. The children flourish because the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good with strength in depth across all classes, for example in the excellent relationships and the quality of questioning. These factors make teaching and learning outstanding overall. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve excellently too. Children in the Foundation Stage, that is the Reception year, achieve well because of the good provision, which has improved since the last inspection. This is thanks to good leadership by the class teacher, improvements to the accommodation and good professional development for staff. Although much of the Foundation Stage provision is successfully planned the outdoor curriculum is less well developed. Occasions for children in Year 1 to access the Foundation Stage curriculum are too few.

The staff work exceptionally well as a team under the excellent leadership provided by the headteacher. They make very good use of all the benefits offered by a small, rural school, such as its family atmosphere, its community links with the church and village and the opportunities afforded by its location among woods and fields and being close to an outdoor pursuits centre. These assets enrich the curriculum excellently. Staff and governors work very well together because many governors have close links with the school. They all have an excellent awareness of how well the children are doing, though their views on the how well the school is doing overall are somewhat modest. They have made excellent progress since the time of the last inspection, addressing all key issues fully and making significant additional improvements. This indicates the excellent success of the school's own evaluation and monitoring of its work. The cost of educating a child at the school is below that found in most small primary schools and, given its high quality, provides therefore excellent value for money. It has excellent capacity to maintain its high quality.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make more use of the outdoor area for the Foundation Stage curriculum to enrich activities indoors and strengthen curricular links between the Reception class and children in Year 1.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Children start in the Reception class with levels of attainment that are above the average in the local authority, though this varies slightly from year to year. They make good progress in the Foundation Stage. By the time they enter Year 1, almost all reach the national expectations for children of this age, and some exceed them. A few are still working towards them, for example in communication, language and literacy. This good achievement is because of the good teaching and learning, which helps the children to blossom particularly in their personal, social and emotional development.

Achievement is excellent in both Key Stages 1 and 2 and, by the time they leave the school, pupils consistently reach high standards. The school's tracking of children's progress shows that they are making very good progress in all year groups. Standards in Year 2 are in most years significantly above average. The school is successful in helping children to achieve the challenging targets they are predicted to achieve when they are in Year 6, and they frequently exceed them. The school met its overall targets in the 2006 tests in Year 6.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The children enjoy school very much and this is reflected in their good attendance and excellent attitudes to school. One child who had attended different primary schools in the past, commented, 'Everyone's so friendly here and it's such a lovely place to come to school.' The children behave exceptionally well, work hard and are keen to make the most of the many things the school offers.

The children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, fostered by the school's Christian ethos and epitomised in the school's code of conduct, which encourages the children to treat others as they would like to be treated themselves. The school's emphasis on promoting pupils' well-being gives them a good awareness of a healthy lifestyle and they have an excellent awareness of safety matters. The children say that incidents of bad behaviour are extremely rare and the older ones love playing with younger ones at breaktimes. The new school council is helping the children to have a voice and a valued role in decision making and they are already planning improvements. Taken altogether then, the children are given an excellent foundation for their future learning and life beyond school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Excellent classroom relationships are a key factor in the high quality of children's learning in this school. Children are attentive and listen very well in lessons, which

have great pace so that children learn quickly. They feel that their contribution is important and teachers plan work exceptionally well to cater for the range of abilities in the mixed-age classes. Question and answer sessions extend children's learning very well and challenge the children to deepen their understanding. Children with learning difficulties benefit greatly from the support of teaching assistants and volunteer helpers make an excellent all-round contribution to children's learning. There are excellent procedures to track children's progress. Marking and oral feedback to children help them to have a clear understanding of what are the next steps in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is planned exceptionally well so that all National Curriculum subjects are covered on a two-year rolling programme to cater for the mixed age classes. French is taught and a visiting specialist teaches violin. Links between subjects, so that the children see connections between ideas, are very well developed. The curriculum is enriched exceptionally well through a wide range of visits, outdoor events, residential experiences and visiting specialists, including drama and dance teachers and sports coaches. The locality is used to excellent effect and there are frequent trips to museums and other places of interest in the wider region. In the Foundation Stage, themes and topics are very well planned, addressing all the areas of learning. The outdoor curriculum, however, is not yet fully planned to enhance the indoor curriculum. A few children in Year 1 would benefit from the opportunities available in the Reception class. A very good range of extra-curricular activities enrich the curriculum very well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support for children are outstanding. The family atmosphere of the school is a major factor in the quality of these aspects and staff know the children and their families extremely well. Procedures and practices for all aspects of child protection, health, safety and safe recruitment of adults are robust. Provision for the few children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very well planned and links with other agencies, for example an occupational therapist, are good. Lessons in religious education, circle time and subjects across the curriculum give the children very good opportunities to reflect on their emotions. Arrangements for children starting in the Reception class are very good and a strong relationship is forged with parents. As a result, children settle quickly into school routines. Any vulnerable children are very well looked after and a breakfast club has been established in recent times to get the day off to a good start. Staff have developed excellent procedures that monitor and track children's achievements. They help the staff to identify the learning needs of children and set clear targets for their future development.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

A comment from one parent provides an apt summary: 'Perhaps the leadership and management of this school should be used as a benchmark to set the standards for the rest. Nothing short of excellent.' Since his appointment four years ago, the headteacher has led the school forward at an excellent pace and taken everyone along with him. The outstanding improvement since the last inspection reflects his commitment to establishing a first class school for the local community. Exceptional teamwork is a key feature of the school, involving not only staff, but governors and volunteers who frequently cover a number of roles in school. All aspects of governance match the high quality of the leadership. There is excellent leadership by the chairperson and a very good range of expertise among governors promoting the school's vision of itself. In their self-evaluation, governors and staff are perhaps too modest. Nevertheless, in underestimating the quality of the provision, they are striving to improve and are not content to stand still.

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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?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
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	1
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	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	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?	1
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	1
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 I inspected your school and please pass on my thanks to the other children I met and spoke to while at your school. I enjoyed my visit very much. Now I want to share with you my findings about your school.

Yours is an outstanding school! There are very many things in your school that are excellent. For instance:

- your teachers are doing an excellent job taking care of you and helping you all to learn
- you work very hard and we were very impressed with how well you are doing in subjects such as English, mathematics and science
- your behaviour is excellent and you are all growing into very sensible students who want to learn and find out new things
- your teachers provide you with very good opportunities to learn about living in a healthy, safe way as well as the chance to enjoy activities in your local area and clubs after school - so do make the most of them!

There is nothing of significance wrong in your school that needs to be put right but I would like the staff to do even more for the younger children, those in the Reception class and as they move into Year 1, so that they can make the most of play activities outdoors as well as indoors.