

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School Upton

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105068
Local Authority	Wirral
Inspection number	287111
Inspection dates	12–13 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Sarah Drake

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	324
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr Susan Brown
Headteacher	Miss Julie Kenny
Date of previous school inspection	30 September 2002
School address	Moreton Road Upton Wirral Merseyside CH49 6LL
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This larger than average school serves a socially mixed area close to Birkenhead. Its pupils come from a wider area than the immediate locality. Smaller proportions of pupils than average have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, belong to minority ethnic groups or are eligible to receive a free school meal. The school has designated resource provision for up to four pupils with physical impairment, but at the time of the inspection no such pupils were on roll. The current headteacher took up post in January 2006 after the school had been led by an acting headteacher for one term. The deputy headteacher took up post in January 2007. The school has twice gained Investors in People status and holds the local authority Safe Schools award.

The independently run St Joseph's before- and after-school care was inspected in December 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school where pupils enjoy learning and form good quality relationships. It has a good reputation in the community and works well in partnership with others to provide support for pupils and enhance the curriculum. The overwhelming majority of parents are very supportive of its provision. They express their appreciation through comments such as, 'the children learn in a warm, friendly, happy environment, feeling valued and supported by their teachers', and, 'the school has helped my child to develop as a caring individual who considers others when playing.'

Children join the Reception year with skills that are below the expectations for their age. Achievement is satisfactory, resulting in skills that are still below those expected by the time they enter Year 1. Here, they make rapid progress so that by the end of Year 2 standards are above average. However, the same rapid progress is not sustained in Key Stage 2, where pupils' achievement is satisfactory, resulting in standards that are above average. Provision in the Foundation Stage is undergoing great change and is currently satisfactory. Children now have greater freedom to extend their more formal learning through access to a range of resources designed to develop all of their skills. This way of teaching is relatively new to staff who as yet do not capitalise sufficiently well on children's enthusiasm and interests, particularly in learning through play.

Pupils' personal development is good. The very great majority are polite, supportive of others and behave well. They have a good awareness of how to stay safe and healthy, and they participate wholeheartedly in a variety of community activities ranging from charitable fundraising to local arts festivals and sporting competitions. Their good collaborative skills and a strong awareness of responsibility for themselves and others prepare them well for the next stage of their education. Staff provide good quality pastoral care so that pupils feel comfortable to share any problems with them, confident that action will ensue. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning, and the academic support for pupils, are satisfactory. Teachers provide helpful verbal guidance but their marking seldom provides comments designed to move pupils' learning forward. Staff are at an early stage of using the information gained from assessing and monitoring pupils' progress to best advantage when planning activities. This means that, although they give clear explanations and provide interesting things for pupils to do, they do not always cater sufficiently well for the different abilities of all pupils in the class. This is why despite above average standards, pupils' progress and achievement are judged to be satisfactory.

The satisfactory curriculum includes all the required elements to develop pupils' basic skills and it promotes their personal development well. Increasing use of visits and visitors brings learning to life for pupils but, as at the time of the previous inspection, information and communication technology (ICT) is not used sufficiently well across a range of subjects as a natural tool for learning.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. After an unsettled period, the school is beginning to move forward well. Under the skilful leadership of the headteacher, who is ably supported by the new deputy headteacher, there is a strong sense of teamwork and determination to make best use of staff's willingness and hard work to raise pupils' levels of achievement. The recent focus on raising standards in writing, particularly for older pupils, is having a positive impact as are changes to the Foundation Stage provision. The school provides satisfactory

value for money. It has accurately identified its key priorities for improvement and has the capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on the recent developments in the Foundation Stage to ensure that staff exploit fully the potential of children to learn through play.
- Strengthen pupils' achievement at Key Stage 2.
- Increase the use of ICT across the curriculum.

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

Throughout their Reception year, children's skills remain below expectations for their age. They are strongest in mathematical and physical development and weakest in communication and their knowledge and understanding of the world. Very few children exceed the age-related expectations by the end of the Foundation Stage. In response to good quality teaching, pupils make rapid progress through Key Stage 1 to achieve consistently above average standards by the end of Year 2. Recently, writing has become a particular area of strength at this key stage. The above average standards are maintained but not improved on through Key Stage 2. Too few pupils have built successfully on their achievements when in Year 2 to gain the higher levels expected by the end of Year 6. In 2006, the school failed to reach its Level 5 targets in either mathematics or English, in the latter case because no pupils achieved the higher level in writing. Overall, boys and girls and pupils of different ability and ethnicity are all making satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' good quality spiritual, moral and social development underpins the happy, positive atmosphere that permeates the school. Pupils are very friendly, helpful and well mannered and they work together well in small groups. For example, pupils in a tri-golf lesson showed a very good balance between enthusiasm, competitiveness and appreciation for others' success. Pupils say they enjoy school because 'it is fun' and 'the teachers are really helpful'. They generally behave well, although some need regular reminders to help them do this. Pupils show respect for adults, each other and themselves. They know the difference between right and wrong and are conscious of their responsibilities in school and the wider community. Older pupils encourage younger ones to engage in safe playtime activities and school council members ably speak and act on others' behalf. Their requests have led to an increase in after-school activities and they recently organised a Fair Trade coffee morning to raise funds for the school's linked parish in Kenya. Through such activities and, in particular, art and geography they develop an awareness and appreciation of other cultures but their understanding of Britain as a diverse society is less strong.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers are hard working, plan interesting activities, organise them well and explain clearly what they expect pupils to do. As a result, pupils settle to work with enthusiasm and generally sustain their concentration well. In the few lessons where interactive whiteboards are available, pupils' learning really comes to life. Good quality relationships throughout the school mean that pupils try hard with their work and respond well to reminders about behaviour expectations. Teachers provide good visual reminders and regular opportunities to refocus. They question pupils well to confirm their knowledge and understanding but are sometimes too willing to accept volunteers rather than directing questions to specific pupils. In the Foundation Stage, staff lead focused activities satisfactorily, children are clear about routines and they grow in confidence. However, staff do not yet make the most of the curiosity and interest prompted in children by the resources that they freely choose to play with.

Assessment, monitoring and evaluation procedures are at an early stage of development so that the information generated in this way is not yet put to best use, particularly in Key Stage 2. Teachers' evaluation of their lessons is inconsistent and their planning is often too generalised so that it does not always meet the needs of individual pupils well enough. In lessons, teachers and teaching assistants provide helpful support that ensures pupils of all abilities work purposefully and improve the quality of their work. In their marking, teachers give too few guiding comments to help move pupils' learning forward.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum places satisfactory emphasis on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, and the success of the recent focus on writing is evident in pupils' work. Pupils' ICT skills are promoted adequately through the effective use of the two computer areas but many machines are old and slow, there are few facilities for using computers in classrooms and, therefore, ICT is not used sufficiently well across the range of subjects. The Foundation Stage curriculum promotes learning in all areas but the lack of focus and structure to activities means that, too often, children become distracted and wander, especially during activities outside of the classroom. The curriculum is particularly successful in fostering pupils' personal development and positive attitudes to learning. Good quality links with local schools enhance the sports provision, supporting the all-round good attention paid to developing pupils' understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. Increasing use of visits and visitors, along with a good range of extra activities further enrich the provision.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Parents comment very positively about the good quality of 'the pastoral care, and friendly staff' that mean that, 'children are encouraged to care about those around them'. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that if problems do occur, they know who to turn to for help, confident of immediate support. One volunteered how well a potential problem with bullying had been dealt with. Staff are sensitive to pupils' feelings and anxieties and the good relationships that follow from this help pupils to grow in confidence and self-esteem. The

necessary procedures are in place for safeguarding pupils and for protecting their health and safety. A well coordinated combination of outside agency support, internal monitoring and the work of class teachers and teaching assistants ensures that vulnerable pupils and those who find learning more difficult can make similar progress to their peers. Such pupils are particularly well helped to prepare for their move to secondary school. However, and most importantly, the academic guidance provided for pupils does not make sufficiently clear to them what they should be aiming for next in order to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

All staff share the same vision of wanting the best for the pupils and, since the arrival of the new senior staff, they are developing a clearer understanding of how to achieve this. Staff greatly appreciate the recently increased opportunities for training and are enthusiastically beginning to put their new learning into practice. There is a strong sense of teamwork. On her arrival, the headteacher accurately identified the areas that needed development, prioritised their urgency and began to implement change, for example, in the Foundation Stage provision. Whole-school development planning is at an early stage, but now all are clear about priorities and have criteria related to their desired impact on pupils' achievement against which to measure success. The arrival of the deputy headteacher has allowed the pace of change to quicken but it is too early for new ways of working to have become fully embedded in school practice. The school is able now to monitor pupils' progress at different points in the year as they move through the school but the information this generates is not yet being used to full effect. Governors are very supportive of the school and were steadfast in their determination to secure good quality candidates for the most recent senior appointments. The school has successfully tackled its deficit budget of the past two years and efficient administrative support ensures that it runs smoothly. The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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 behaviour of learners	2
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	2

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	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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**

Thank you very much for the warm welcome that you gave to all the members of the inspection team who recently visited your school. I would now like to tell you about the inspection findings.

St Joseph's is a satisfactory school that is particularly successful in helping you to form good quality relationships. You were very keen to tell us how much you enjoy school and we were pleased to see that you almost always behave well and settle down quickly to work. You are thoughtful about others' needs, and are generous fundraisers. It is good that the suggestions made by the school council have led to more after-school activities.

Your teachers organise interesting things for you to do, and generally explain them clearly. What we have asked them to do now is to use the information they have about your progress to make sure that they plan lessons that better suit everybody's individual needs. We have also asked them to give you more guidance when marking your work to help you understand clearly how to improve it. These changes will help you all to achieve better, particularly in Key Stage 2. Your teachers and teaching assistants give you helpful guidance in lessons and are also good at helping you sort out any other problems.

Since your headteacher and deputy headteacher arrived, there have been quite a few changes, especially to the way in which the youngest children learn. Once staff are more used to helping the younger children make the most of their play activities, we are sure that their learning will move forward in leaps and bounds. Another necessary change is to make sure that you all have more opportunities to use ICT across a range of subjects.

Everyone in the school works together really well and is determined to provide the best possible education for you. Your job will be to continue to enjoy school and work hard so that you make the best of the opportunities it provides.