



St Joseph's RC Primary School, Halliwell, Bolton

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105223
Local Authority Bolton
Inspection number 287165
Inspection dates 25–26 September 2006
Reporting inspector Colin Smith

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Shepherd Cross Street
School category	Voluntary aided		Halliwell, Bolton
Age range of pupils	4–11		Lancashire BL1 3EJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01204 333055
Number on roll (school)	207	Fax number	01204 333056
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Fr A Barry
		Headteacher	Mr M Crawford
Date of previous school inspection	18 June 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Joseph's is an average sized Catholic primary school. The proportions of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those entitled to free school meals are above average. The majority of pupils are White British. A tenth have minority ethnic backgrounds, including a few pupils from mixed White and Black Caribbean and African heritage and an even smaller number from Pakistani, other Asian and Irish and Chinese heritage. All of these pupils speak English, although a few of them receive additional help with reading and writing. The last two years have seen extensive staffing changes. During the headteacher's absence prior to September 2005, three temporary headteachers took charge and in that period most of the teaching staff changed.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school's effectiveness and the value for money provided are satisfactory. The school is improving, not least because the headteacher, new members of staff and governors are gaining an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school is correct in all of its self-evaluations. The desire and capacity to make changes are illustrated well in the way pupils' achievement in writing is being improved. With the current leadership and the new teaching team, the school is in a good and more settled position to move forward.

Prior to 2006, standards had been rising and had reached average levels in all subjects by the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. Given that a substantial minority of pupils started school with attainment lower than expected for their age, progress had been at least satisfactory. However, the absence of the headteacher, at a time when pupils were taught by many temporary staff, took its toll. Pupils' progress faltered and the 2006 test results fell sharply. Although standards are currently below average overall, pupils are beginning to catch up again as new teachers settle in.

School records show that most pupils made satisfactory progress over the last year. It was in the year prior to this that pupils made insufficient progress. Teaching and learning and the curriculum are now satisfactory and improving. Lessons are purposeful and pupils acquire a secure understanding of the basics of English, mathematics and science. However, the development of their problem solving and investigation skills is not keeping pace in all classes.

Pupils' personal development and the overall quality of care, guidance and support provided are good and are strengths of the school. Pupils are happy, interested learners from the moment they start in Reception. Pupils behave well and enjoy school, not least because of the excellent range of additional activities available. Staff provide outstanding levels of care; this ensures that all pupils are safeguarded. Within this caring atmosphere, pupils are well prepared for the future. They fully understand healthy lifestyles and how to keep safe, and relish taking on more responsibilities. As one older child said, 'I have to set a good example for the infant pupils I look after.'

Leadership and management are satisfactory and strengthening, as new leaders bring their unique talents to the school. Checking and improving the work of the school, the key area of improvement from the previous inspection, has strengthened, although there is still more to do. The progress made by individual pupils is checked and prompt action is taken to increase their learning if it slows. This is largely why pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. However, the information is not used sufficiently to ensure that groups of pupils such as boys or more able pupils are making as much progress as others, or that pupils are equally proficient in all areas of English, mathematics and science.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' problem solving and investigation skills to raise their achievement in mathematics and science.

- Check pupils' progress more closely to ensure that all groups of pupils make equally good progress and take effective action to improve any weaknesses in specific skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are currently below average at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. However, given their starting points, pupils make satisfactory progress. Reception children make a positive start, particularly in their understanding of language and in their personal development, which develop at a good rate.

The 2005 test results show that standards were broadly average by the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 in English, mathematics and science. Standards had been rising and pupils were meeting the challenging targets set. However, during the most turbulent period of staff changes, pupils did not make enough progress, particularly in Year 5. Consequently, the 2006 results are significantly lower. This is mainly because some of the more able pupils did not fulfil their potential.

The school's own assessments which track pupils' progress through each school year show that most pupils made satisfactory progress in the academic year 2005/06. Progress in reading was good, but was barely satisfactory in writing and mathematics. The 'Big Write' project, aimed at improving achievement in writing, is working. This is evident in the improved standards in pupils' written work. In mathematics and science, although pupils' knowledge and understanding are secure, their problem solving and investigation skills are weaker. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the few pupils requiring help with reading and writing in English make good progress in response to the very good levels of additional support provided. In this school, boys in general start school with lower attainment than girls. The gap neither widens nor closes on their journey through school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' good spiritual, moral and social development is reflected in their good behaviour, in their friendliness and in the positive way they help each other. The school welcomes pupils from other faith backgrounds. Consequently, pupils learn about a range of cultures through first-hand experiences. Diversity is respected and celebrated. Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their good attendance. They like coming to school because of the very wide range of activities provided within a positive environment. 'Teachers help you and build your confidence,' said one boy. Pupils express their views through the school council and take responsibility for others. These experiences do much to enhance their understanding of citizenship and working in a community. Pupils have good awareness of healthy living and keeping safe. They are learning to work together, support others through charitable causes and make the right choices. This prepares them well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Pupils' satisfactory progress is a result of satisfactory teaching and learning over the past year. The school now has a settled team of teachers and support staff for the first time in three years. Much of the teaching observed during the inspection was good. However, this has not had time as yet to impact on pupils' achievement. Early indications are that teaching is improving quickly and pupils' learning is beginning to accelerate. In all classes, lessons are calm and purposeful. Pupils work hard and give of their best. This is reflected in the careful presentation of their work. In English and mathematics, teachers make good use of assessment to measure how well pupils are learning. The information is used well to provide tasks that are tailored well to pupils' different learning needs. Pupils who require additional help are always very well supported, hence their good progress. The range of teaching methods is narrower in some classes than others. Whereas all teachers attend to pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills, not all teachers improve pupils' problem solving and investigation skills to the same degree. This holds achievement back.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum, although satisfactory overall, is very successful in meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Very good individual and small-group support raises their confidence and helps them to reach their targets. Teachers plan their literacy and numeracy lessons well to ensure that there is sufficient challenge for the more able pupils. The curriculum ensures that pupils' knowledge and understanding develop smoothly from year to year. However, their problem solving, investigation and creative skills are developed more successfully in some classes than others. Teachers are now planning shared topics together; this is helping to overcome these differences. Opportunities to use computers regularly are giving pupils confidence and competence in information and communication technology (ICT). The excellent range of after-school activities, visits and visitors enriches pupils' wider education and fires their enthusiasm for school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The good levels of care, guidance and support provided make a real difference to pupils' personal development. The care provided by staff, in partnership with the church and outside agencies, is exceptional. Procedures for health and safety, child protection and safe staff recruitment are in place. Vulnerable pupils are nurtured and supported sensitively. This enables them to overcome emotional and behavioural difficulties and learn without distraction. Target setting, involving pupils and their parents, is being established. Pupils know that this is meant to give them, 'a goal to

aim for,' although they do not know exactly what their individual targets are as yet. Marking of pupils' work is constructive and shows them how to improve their work. Pupils' individual progress is carefully tracked and very good additional support is provided for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; however, the information is not used sufficiently to ensure that all groups of pupils make as much progress as others.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

After a period of instability, when the local authority made the key decisions, the school is back on track and leadership and management are satisfactory. Governors have taken back full authority with a renewed sense of purpose, not least by significantly increasing their personal contact with the school. The headteacher and governors now lead a united team of enthusiastic teachers and support staff. The good capacity for improvement is evident in the way all teachers are pulling together and raising pupils' achievement in writing. The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. Checking the work of the school is much better than it was, although there is still more to do, for example, in ensuring that different groups of pupils make equally good progress in all aspects of learning. Leaders now have a clearer picture of their responsibilities; even the new teachers have examined what is happening in their subjects and are making recommendations.

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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?	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	2
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	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	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	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?	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.

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 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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful to us when we inspected your school. Your enthusiastic singing of 'Light up the Fire' seemed just the right choice. Your school has a lot of new teachers. A new era is beginning.

We realise that your school has been through a difficult time. Without your headteacher to guide the school and with so many different teachers at work, it is not surprising that your school results fell below average levels in 2006. Now that you are all back together as one big family, we can see that your progress is increasing again.

There are many good things about your school such as your interest in learning, your behaviour and attendance. The way the school cares for you and provides so many extra activities is excellent. Any child who finds learning difficult is fortunate to have so much good support.

The teaching that you receive is improving quickly this term. We noticed what a good start you have made with your new teachers.

We have two recommendations to make your school better still.

- Your reading, writing and mathematical skills are better than your problem solving and investigation skills. We have asked your teachers to give you more opportunities to solve mathematical problems and plan your own science investigations to help you to achieve more.
- Teachers check how well you are learning and where any of you need extra help. We notice that girls often do better than boys and that not very many Year 6 pupils reached Level 5 in their tests last year. We have therefore asked the headteacher and staff to keep an eye on the progress made by these different groups of pupils to make sure that all make the best progress possible.