



St Brendan's RC Primary School, Harwood, Bolton

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105246
Local Authority Bolton
Inspection number 287171
Inspection dates 6–7 December 2006
Reporting inspector Stephen Hardwick HMI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Brookfold Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Harwood, Bolton
Age range of pupils	5–11		Lancashire BL2 4DZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01204 333133
Number on roll (school)	208	Fax number	01204 333134
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mgr J Mallon
		Headteacher	Mrs A Thornton
Date of previous school inspection	25 February 2003		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Brendan's is an average-sized primary school that serves the Roman Catholic community of St Brendan's Church to the north-east of Bolton, a few families live further afield. Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average, the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The pupils' attainment on entry to the school is average overall.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Brendan's is an outstanding school. The pupils achieve well. From the Foundation Stage onwards they make good progress and reach standards that are consistently above the national average. This stems from high expectations, from skilful teaching and from a curriculum that, along with many extra activities, enables the pupils to develop their talents.

The school's Catholic foundation permeates its work. Provision for the pupils' personal development and well-being and for their care is a high priority for the staff and governors: it is an area of outstanding success. The pupils are very well behaved, keen and responsible. They enjoy school, as reflected in attendance that is well above average, and they learn the work habits and understand the lifestyle that should stand them in good stead for the future. The teachers steer work in lessons well, but the pupils lack the individual targets that would tell them exactly what they need to accomplish next.

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and management. There is a great sense of common purpose in the school, with excellent relationships and teamwork that harnesses the considerable expertise and commitment of all the staff in their different roles. The school knows its weaknesses and at times underestimates its strengths. Monitoring and evaluation are thorough but some elements are very dependent on the headteacher. As the school recognises, there is also some lack of clarity over the priorities in the development plan. Nonetheless, in practice, key matters have been dealt with and teachers know and are tackling the aspects of standards that have been identified for improvement.

The school has sustained its high performance over several years. There is a strong capacity to continue moving forward and no sense of complacency. The issues from the inspection in 2003 have been addressed well, although plans to develop outdoor provision have been hampered by a lack of funding. Parents, rightly, show a high regard for the school. It provides very good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Set clearer priorities and targets in the overall development plan.
- Set the pupils individual targets so they know exactly what they have to accomplish to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school's results in the national tests at Key Stage 1 and 2 have been consistently above, and sometimes well above, average. Almost all the pupils have reached the basic standard expected for their age and significant proportions have reached the higher levels. In 2006, for example, more than a third of the Year 6 pupils gained the higher Level 5 in English and mathematics and two thirds did so in science.

The children make good progress in the Foundation Stage and reach at least the standards expected nationally as they move into Year 1. In the years where figures are available, the pupils made average or better gains between Year 2 and Year 6. There was no significant variation in the performance of different groups. Given their starting points in Reception the pupils make good progress during their time at St Brendan's.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Provision for the pupils' personal development and well-being and for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is outstanding. The pupils are happy, well motivated, enjoy coming to school and talk with pride about the many exciting activities which are on offer. Their behaviour and attitudes are excellent and their attendance is well above average.

The pupils know about the need for a balanced diet and a great deal is done to ensure they take exercise. A governor leads an aerobics session for pupils each morning before lessons begin and the school has a national award for physical education. The pupils feel secure and safe and know who to turn to for help.

Mindful of the needs of others the pupils regularly take part in fund-raising activities and make a valuable contribution to the neighbourhood: for example, the unusually good choir performs locally and the school mounts other performances. The pupils readily accept school-wide responsibilities, for example, as councillors and play-leaders at break times.

The pupils are very well prepared for their future, at secondary school and beyond. They have good basic skills and organise themselves well as learners, for instance, in carrying out research and recording their findings. They take great interest in work and are confident to share their understanding with the class as a whole and to collaborate in groups.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The teachers have high expectations of the pupils, in the way they behave and apply themselves to their work. Lessons are prepared carefully and the tasks engage the pupils' interests, sometimes with an element of fun. The learning objectives are clear and shared with the pupils. Work builds systematically from one lesson to the next, ensuring that the pupils' progress is secure. Based on their good subject knowledge and awareness of the pupils' attainment the general level of work is well pitched at the needs of the class as a whole. However, there is sometimes too little variation in the demands in the follow-up activities for the different groups.

The pupils respond maturely to the well-established routines in each class. They are attentive, concentrate and complete good quantities of neat work. They learn good

habits, for example, in collecting the equipment they need or making notes as a basis for extended writing.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school's curriculum is outstanding overall. It meets requirements and the pupils' needs, offering them a varied and exciting range of activities, during and outside of the school day. Provision in the Foundation Stage is good, for instance in the way that the learning of early basic skills is made enjoyable. Throughout the school there is a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy, but other areas are not neglected. French and Spanish are taught and a high proportion of pupils are learning to play a musical instrument. The work in physical education is enhanced through links with a specialist sports college and the use of a games coach.

The curriculum is enriched in many other ways. The pupils make visits in the locality and can take part in a residential stay. Many join in the clubs that are organised after school and for those who arrive early in the morning. Activities include, for example, sports, writing, choir, a foreign language and gymnastics.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good overall. The staff work hard with parents to ensure that the pupils are safe and make good progress in their personal and academic development.

Governors and staff take their responsibility for health and safety very seriously. Risk assessments are undertaken, adults who work in school are vetted for their suitability and there are robust and up-to-date procedures for child protection. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well catered for and managed. Where necessary appropriate help is brought in from other agencies, such as the local authority and the health service. The care of the building exemplifies the school's high standards. It is clean, welcoming and has many stimulating displays of pupils' work and items of interest.

The school keeps detailed records of the pupils' attainment, for example in terms of the National Curriculum levels they have reached and their reading ages. The results of tests are analysed to identify weaker areas of performance and the pupils who need additional help. The teachers know the pupils well and provide well-judged guidance to pupils in lessons. However, the pupils themselves lack the personal targets that would tell them specifically what they need to accomplish to improve and move to the next level.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and management and she is well supported by the governors and the senior staff. Based on its Catholic foundation, there is a great sense of cohesion in the school, with high expectations in each aspect of work and for all pupils. This is reflected, for example, in relationships and in the care taken over the accommodation and resources. The staff complement each other well in the expertise they offer, in areas such as music.

Some aspects of management are not as strong as they might be, but these are recognised by the school: in particular the school's overall plan lacks clear priorities and the formal monitoring of teaching is too dependent on the headteacher. Nonetheless, these shortcomings have not detracted from the school's high performance and what it offers the pupils. The staff know where standards are to be improved and the school recognises its strengths and weaknesses, albeit with a tendency to underrate itself.

The governors fulfil their responsibilities, maintain close contact with the school and give a clear steer to the overall aims, particularly in ensuring that pupils enjoy school and leave well prepared for their lives ahead.

There are excellent links with other agencies, schools and the community, for instance through the church and through promoting sports. Communication with parents was criticised in the inspection of 2003. This is now good and parents are greatly supportive of what the school provides for their children.

The school has tackled the issues from its previous inspection thoroughly. In the last two years, for example, half the Year 2 pupils reached the higher levels in writing in national tests. Outdoor play is organised for Reception children and, while there is no designated area, this is planned for when funds allow.

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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?	1
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	1
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	2

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?	1
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?	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	2
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	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

Many thanks for all the help you gave us when we inspected St Brendan's. You were very polite and we enjoyed talking to you and watching your lessons.

We think St Brendan's is an excellent school. You make good progress and reach high standards. By the time you leave you are well prepared for secondary school. All the adults in school go to a good deal of trouble to ensure you are safe and well cared for and your teachers plan lessons that are interesting and sometimes fun. There are also many extra activities for you to join.

You make a big contribution to the success of your school in the way you behave well, work hard, act responsibly and attend every day. Your teachers know how well each of you is doing, but we have asked them to share targets with you so you know exactly what you have to accomplish next.

Mrs Thornton leads your school very well. St Brendan's has grown in popularity and continued to improve. We have asked Mrs Thornton to pinpoint just what the next developments at St Brendan's should be, so your school carries on moving forward.

We wish you all well for the future.