

St Elphin's (Fairfield) CofE Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111296
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	288915
Inspection date	13 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Arthur Markham

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	261
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Canon M Finlay
Headteacher	Mr Neil Walsh
Date of previous school inspection	27 February 2001
School address	Fairfield Street Warrington Cheshire WA1 3AJ
Telephone number	01925 635143
Fax number	01925 635143

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This average sized school serves an area of private and local authority housing. Most pupils are of White British background with only a small number from minority ethnic groups. There are very few pupils at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below that in most schools. The number of pupils claiming free school meals is similar to that in most schools. When they start in Nursery, children have a wide range of skills and abilities but overall attainment on entry is below that expected nationally. The school is a member of the National Outstanding Primary Schools' Initial Teacher Training Consortium.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Elphin's C of E Primary was judged to be very effective at its last inspection; it has continued to improve and is now an outstanding school in which pupils flourish. Their happy faces clearly show how much they enjoy their learning; a view shared by parents, who rate the school highly. Parents are very pleased with the quality of education provided for their children and the way the staff work hard to provide an outstanding level of care for them. A major factor in the school's success is the committed leadership of the headteacher. His high expectations and determination to ensure that all pupils benefit from a rich and stimulating education are effectively conveyed to staff. His strong leadership sets the tone for this successful school where everyone matters and morale is high. As a result, staff are highly motivated and enjoy being part of a successful team. Teaching of high quality enables pupils to make rapid progress throughout the school. Lessons are very carefully planned to meet the needs of all pupils and the curriculum is rich and varied. Pupils say that teachers make learning interesting and fun, and they respond by working hard. Throughout the school, pupils respond well to the challenging targets they are set and strive to do well. Consequently their achievement is outstanding. Many children enter Nursery with skills that are below those expected. Increasing numbers of pupils are starting school with additional learning needs or at an early stage of learning English, but the staff work hard and successfully to help them gain skills that support them in developing as very effective learners. Children make a good start in the Foundation Stage where the teaching is lively and provision is good. This is built on well in Years 1 and 2, so that by the end of Year 2 standards are around average. Pupils' progress increases to an outstanding rate in Years 3 to 6. Standards are consequently high by the end of Year 6 and have been so for a long time. However, the school is not complacent and the rising trend of improvement reflects the school's determination for pupils to do even better. Pupils' personal development is outstanding and impacts strongly on their achievement. The school has a very warm and supportive atmosphere where pupils feel valued and secure. Relationships are very good and pupils like and respect their teachers. As a result, pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are mature, sensible and highly motivated, and have excellent attitudes to work. They carry out a range of responsibilities in a very sensible manner and their collections for a range of charities reflect their care and concern for others. However, their potential to be actively involved in the life of the school is not fully exploited. The lack of a school council limits the pupils' opportunity to have their views heard. The school works hard to overcome the limitation presented by the lack of a field to enable pupils to participate satisfactorily in physical activities and develop a good awareness of the importance of healthy lifestyles. The strong team approach evident in the school stems from the headteacher. He is supported well by the committed governors and staff, who all work hard together to continually improve the quality of education provided for pupils. Management systems are very well organised and self-evaluation procedures accurately identify the areas needing development, although the school has underestimated the quality of its leadership and the standards attained by pupils. Finances are well managed and the school provides excellent value for money. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection and the school has excellent capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more opportunities for pupils' views to be heard.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards are high and pupils' achievement is outstanding. Very effective teaching enables all groups of pupils to make rapid progress from below average skills when they enter the school. Children make a good start in the Foundation Stage, and the majority reach the nationally expected standards by the time they enter Year 1, though few exceed them. Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 1 and 2. Although standards at the end of Year 2 have fluctuated over the last five years due to the characteristics of the groups of pupils, they have generally been close to national averages. In 2006 there was a marked improvement when pupils' performance in writing and mathematics was above average. In Years 3 to 6 pupils make outstanding progress. For example, in 2006 the gains in learning made by Year 6 pupils, compared with their results at Year 2, was within the top 2% of schools nationally. This first-rate achievement is reflected in the consistently high standards reached in the national tests at Year 6. Over the last five years standards have been maintained at a level significantly above national averages with many pupils attaining the higher levels.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

As pupils progress through the school they become mature and confident, take on responsibilities enthusiastically and develop excellent attitudes to learning. Their obvious enjoyment of learning is reflected in the above average attendance rate. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are excellent. They follow school rules very well and have a very good understanding of right and wrong. Assemblies enable the pupils to gain excellent insight into spiritual matters. The very rich curriculum enables them to develop a good understanding of the diverse beliefs and values of people from different backgrounds. They are very considerate towards each other and show care and concern for others in their charity work. Pupils say they feel safe in school and would confidently go to an adult if they had any worries. They understand the importance of healthy eating and exercise. They respond well when given responsibility, although the lack of a school council limits their ability to influence certain aspects of school life. Their excellent achievements in basic skills and personal qualities prepare them very well for the next stage in their schooling.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is excellent. Teachers' high quality relationships with pupils are a key factor in pupils' outstanding achievement. Teachers assess pupils' progress carefully in order to plan work that effectively meets the range of learning needs evident in classes. Activities are explained clearly and questions used skilfully to check that pupils understand what they have to do. The successful use of interactive whiteboards stimulates pupils and makes learning interesting for them. Opportunities to work together in pairs and groups successfully develops pupils' understanding. Teaching assistants work in close partnership with teachers and make a very positive contribution to the learning in the school. The close attention given to developing all pupils' self-esteem and confidence results in their becoming very effective

learners. Pupils are attentive and keen to do well, and work hard. Parents are consequently very pleased with the teaching in the school and their children's achievements.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is rich and stimulating and meets the needs of pupils very well. Provision for children in the Foundation Stage is good and places a strong emphasis on developing good learning habits at an early age. Throughout the school a strong emphasis is given to the basic skills. Learning in other subjects is also developed well and made more relevant and interesting through a wide range of visits to places of interest, together with contributions from visitors to school. The strong emphasis given to personal, social, and health education and citizenship is reflected in the pupils' outstanding personal development. Residential experiences enrich the curriculum, add greatly to pupils' enjoyment of learning, and make a very positive contribution to pupils' personal development. A programme of after-school activities makes a good contribution to pupils' enjoyment and achievement.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, support and guidance are outstanding. Parents appreciate the high level of care provided by all staff which contributes strongly to pupils' progress, enjoyment and well-being. Very careful attention is paid to all health and safety issues, and child protection procedures are in place. Pupils rightly feel safe at school, and are comfortable about confiding in staff if the need arises. Well organised induction procedures help them to quickly settle into school, and good transition arrangements ensure that they make a smooth transfer into the secondary school. Pupils particularly value the clear academic guidance they are given through their individual targets and teachers' marking of their work, which helps them understand what they need to do to make their work better. Pupils' performance is carefully monitored in order to plan intervention for any identified as underachieving. Those pupils with additional learning needs and those at an early stage of learning English consequently make very good progress because they receive very good additional support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Outstanding leadership and management underpin the school's success. The strong and effective leadership of the headteacher motivates staff, who are enthusiastic and committed. The resultant strong team approach ensures that all staff carry out their responsibilities very effectively and work hard to provide an education of high quality for pupils. Equal opportunity is promoted very well, with great care taken to ensure that all pupils achieve their potential. School improvement planning is well organised and accurately focuses on the important areas needing development. Strong links with the local community successfully enhance the learning opportunities presented to pupils. The governors are committed and knowledgeable. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are supportive yet challenging.

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Annex A

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	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	2
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.

Annex A

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	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

I really enjoyed my recent visit to your school to find out how well you are learning. Thank you for being so friendly and talking to me. I was most impressed by the warm and friendly atmosphere and the way the staff take outstanding care of you so that you feel safe and happy. It was very pleasing to hear how much you like your teachers and appreciate the way they make learning interesting for you so that you do well. Your behaviour is excellent and your enthusiasm in lessons was a joy to see. You really work hard for your teachers and try to do your best. This is the main reason that you make such very good progress and achieve so well. I was very pleased that many of you told me how much you enjoy school and all the exciting things you do. Your awareness of the importance of a healthy diet and how to keep fit and healthy was clearly evident when I talked to some of you at lunchtime.

The headteacher and the staff work hard to give you a very good education. I could not find many things your school needs to do better but I have asked the headteacher and governors to make sure that you are more involved in the life of the school by being able to express your views as to how it could be even better.

Thank you for being so helpful while I was inspecting your school. I hope that you will continue to work hard and help the teachers so that St Elphin's C of E Primary becomes an even better school.