

St Basil's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111390
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	288946
Inspection dates	13–14 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Ian Thompson

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	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	389
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr M Findlater
Headteacher	Mrs Win Douglas
Date of previous school inspection	25 November 2002
School address	Hough Green Road Widnes Cheshire WA8 4SZ
Telephone number	0151 4247839
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Age group	5–11
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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 mixed area that includes pockets of severe social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and only one is at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average but the proportion with a statement of special educational need is below average. The school holds the Artsmark Gold, Healthy Schools and Sportsmark Awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good and improving school that has some strong features. The school's major strength is in pupils' outstanding personal development. As they move through the school, pupils develop self-confidence and excellent attitudes to learning. Pupils work very well together, listening to and respecting each other's ideas. It is clear from every conversation with pupils that they enjoy their lessons and are proud of their school. They have an excellent understanding of what they should do to stay safe and a good knowledge of healthy lifestyles. Opportunities to take responsibility are eagerly accepted. Pupils are prepared well for their future lives by the school's attention to teaching the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, together with their exceptional spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The school's pastoral care and support for its pupils are outstanding. Guidance to promote progress is good, with effective use of target setting and regular reviews that enable prompt action to be taken to deal with any difficulties. However, although teachers' marking is unfailingly supportive, it does not consistently contribute to progress by telling pupils how to improve their work. Even when it does, there is often little to show that checks have been made to ensure that pupils have followed advice.

Pupils enter the school with broadly average standards but many have difficulties in communication, language and literacy that persist in Key Stage 1 and slow progress. Nevertheless, pupils make good progress through the Foundation Stage, particularly in developing social skills. Most have reached the expected standards for their age by the end of Reception, except in communication, language and literacy because of their lower than average starting points. Achievement throughout the school is good so that by the end of Year 6 standards are above average in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). Although considerable improvement has been brought about in mathematics in the last two years, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2006 was smaller than in English. This is in part because of earlier difficulties in learning. It is also partly because pupils are not consistently given enough opportunities to reinforce their learning and extend their skills by applying what they have learned to solving practical problems

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers build well on excellent relationships to motivate their classes and to maintain the pace of learning so that pupils make good progress. There is a buzz of creative excitement in the great majority of lessons as pupils have fun in learning. Good achievement is supported by a curriculum that is designed well to promote enthusiasm for learning. A strong feature is the links that are made between subjects through which teachers reinforce pupils' understanding.

The school's strong features are the result of good leadership and management.

Comments like, 'all the staff have helped develop my children not only in their education but their social skills and the confidence to have a go,' reflects the overwhelmingly positive support that the school has gained from parents. This comment, and many others, also recognises the unity of purpose that the school's leadership has established among all the staff. As a result, the school has made good improvement since the last inspection. A well developed programme of rigorous self-evaluation and a commitment to improvement give the school a good capacity to improve further. Value for money is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of marking so that pupils know what they need to do to improve and provide appropriate follow up to ensure that they respond to guidance.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills to solve practical problems so as to reinforce their learning and raise standards further.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils attain above average standards and their achievement is good. Data show that there was a declining trend of performance in Key stage 1 over recent years. The school recognised that progress in Key Stage 1 was not as good as it should be. The resulting deficiencies in learning also affected standards, particularly in mathematics in Key Stage 2. Firm action by the leadership team accompanied by restructuring of the curriculum to promote more effective teaching and learning has resolved the causes of underachievement. Standards are improving throughout the school and current pupils are on course to meet the school's challenging targets. Although girls reach higher overall standards than boys, there are no significant differences in the achievement of different groups of pupils. Effective, well-targeted support is provided for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to enable them to make similarly good progress to their classmates. Teachers carefully plan extension activities to ensure that higher attaining pupils are stretched and challenged appropriately.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding, as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils learn successfully how to deal with difficulties they might encounter and this also helps them to keep safe. They play a full part in supporting the school's anti-bullying and racial harmony policies. Pupils know what they need to do to keep healthy and the importance of exercise, particularly through their involvement in a good range of sporting activities. They really enjoy school. One commented: 'I can't wait to get back to literacy because we're doing myths.' Relationships between pupils and adults are excellent and behaviour is exemplary. Pupils are courteous towards their classmates and as a result they have the confidence to express their ideas and opinions when participating in class discussions or answering questions. The school council is very effective in introducing pupils to the meaning of democracy and to the decision-making process. Pupils are very pleased that their views and preferences are taken into account in the improvements the school makes. For example, they were involved in choosing the colour scheme for the refurbished toilets. Good standards in almost all aspects of pupils' learning prepare them very well for the next stage of their lives. Pupils are very eager to take on responsibilities. From ensuring that their classrooms are tidy to looking after others very responsibly, pupils make a very good contribution to the school and the wider community. For example, they have raised money for a variety of charities including a care project in Zambia. Pupils appreciate that such opportunities are helping them to become good citizens. Attendance is close to average and improving because of concerted efforts to remind parents of the effect of absence on their children's learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning throughout the school is good with some outstanding features. Teachers in the Foundation Stage provide children with a secure start to school life through a good mix of directed and free choice activities. In Years 1 to 6, pupils are eager to learn because teachers plan a very good range of interesting activities. As a result, pupils enjoy achieving to the very best of their abilities. Lessons are characterised by excellent relationships, thorough planning, the good use of resources and teachers' high expectations of work and behaviour to which pupils respond so well. Teaching assistants are fully involved in planning. This enables them to provide sensitive additional support for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities so that they make good progress and achieve their targets. Teachers use demanding questions to assess pupils' understanding and to reinforce learning by making them think. As a result, pupils gain confidence in expressing their ideas, marshalling thoughts and making considered judgements. The teaching of writing is a particular strength: teachers provide pupils with a good variety of opportunities to write for different purposes. In science there is a good emphasis on investigative skills. However, in mathematics there are too few opportunities for the practical application of skills. Teachers boost pupils' confidence by supportive comments in their marking but do not consistently provide pointers for improvement. In the outstanding lessons, pupils make very good progress because they are motivated by vibrant and enthusiastic teaching.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good with some outstanding features. The school has recently reviewed its curricular provision to make it more responsive to pupils' needs. This has resulted in a rich and exciting curriculum that emphasises the importance placed on pupils' personal development and the learning of key skills. The linking of subjects together under a topic heading makes learning more meaningful and deepens pupils' understanding. The programme for pupils' personal, social and health education is excellent. It makes very effective use of the school's strong partnerships with outside agencies to help pupils understand about growing up and the challenges they may meet. A good range of extra-curricular activities enriches the curriculum and contributes much to pupils' personal development. Pupils talk excitedly about the visits they undertake. They are enthusiastic about residential trips and the visitors that come into school to talk to them. In the Reception class, staff go to great lengths to ensure that the children receive the experience and activities that are appropriate for their age.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The very happy, caring atmosphere, safe environment and excellent relationships reflect the outstanding pastoral care and support given to all pupils. Every child really does matter and pupils feel valued as individuals. They say that staff are 'firm but fair' and are 'always there for them if they have any little worries'. The current requirements for the care, safety and protection of pupils, including child protection, are in place. Very good support is provided for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, as it is for more vulnerable pupils, to ensure that they are fully included in all that the school has to offer. The school's very good links with outside

agencies provides more specialist support when needed. Guidance for academic progress is good because the school has a good overview of how well pupils are doing and where they could do better. Pupils are often involved well in assessing their own work and that of their classmates.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The clear direction provided by the headteacher is a key factor in the school's improvement. Aply supported by senior managers she has gained the support of the staff in restructuring the curriculum to provide better learning opportunities across the school. Another strong feature contributing to rising standards and better achievement is the introduction of 'quality improvement teams' for different aspects of learning. Every teacher is a member of at least one team and consequently all have a clear part to play in the school's improvement. The positive impact is seen in innovative curriculum development and improved planning to support teaching and learning that are in turn reflected in pupils' excellent personal development.

Rigorous systems for monitoring classroom performance linked to professional development, training and target setting enable senior staff to have an accurate view of the school's strengths and an understanding of aspects requiring attention. The school's evaluation of its performance matches inspection findings. There is no complacency. The school improvement plan provides a very good analysis of what needs doing, how it will be done and when it will be done by. Progress towards improvement targets is reviewed regularly in reports to governors. Governors bring a wealth of professional expertise to support the school's work and hold it appropriately to account for its performance.

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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?	2
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	3
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?	2
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
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

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

Thank you very much for the friendly way in which you made us welcome. Thanks particularly to those who talked to us about their work and their time in the school. You will be pleased to know that we agree with you that yours is a good and improving school.

We were very impressed by your behaviour, the way that you get on well and work together and the respect you show for other people's ideas. You make good progress through the school because you are taught well and lessons are fun and interesting. You help to make lessons enjoyable by your very good attitudes. After visiting your 'thinking hats' lessons, I am sure that in future I will be looking to see what colour hat everyone is wearing! Everyone in the school cares for you well so that you feel safe and know who to turn to if you have troubles. You also take care of each other well and it was good to see how sensibly you take on responsibilities, particularly the way that older pupils are keen to help out the younger ones.

Your headteacher and staff are working hard to make sure that your school continues to improve. We have suggested two things to help you learn even better. When we looked through your books we could see that your teachers are very good at encouraging you but do not always point out what you should do to improve your work. So, we have asked them to make sure that you are given clear steps for improvement as well as encouragement. You can help by paying attention to any pointers that you are given. We have also asked your teachers to help you make even better progress in mathematics by giving you more practical problems to solve.

Thank you again for making our visit to your school so enjoyable. We wish you well for the future.