



St Begh's Catholic Junior School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 112354
Local Authority Cumbria
Inspection number 289255
Inspection date 28 November 2006
Reporting inspector David Earley

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

Type of school	Junior	School address	Coach Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Whitehaven, Cumbria
Age range of pupils	7-11		CA28 7TE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01946 852663
Number on roll (school)	311	Fax number	01946 852664
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr John McCoy
		Headteacher	Mrs Shirley Shaw
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average sized junior school near the centre of Whitehaven. The number of pupils who entitled a free school meal is below average. Attendance is above average and the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average. Most pupils are of White British backgrounds with a small proportion of pupils who are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school which gives excellent value for money. There is a clear determination throughout the school to provide only the best for its pupils and a relentless drive to improve. Pupils start school with standards above those typical for their age. They make excellent progress so that by the time they leave standards are significantly above average and achievement is high. A significant factor in this, and in the exceptional care provided by the school, is the dynamism of the headteacher and a clear vision for improvement shared by staff and governors. A parent accurately described the school as, 'a fantastic school with fantastic caring staff throughout.'

The outstanding personal development provided by the school ensures a very secure platform for academic achievement. Pupils love coming to school and are eager to learn because they feel happy and safe and work is stimulating and challenging. Relationships are excellent so that pupils approach their work with confidence and high self-esteem and are not afraid to learn from their mistakes. They know about the importance of keeping safe, healthy eating and exercise and are eager to help in the school and wider community. Careers fairs and links with business and industry help to prepare them exceptionally well for the world of work. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent overall, although there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to learn about the cultural diversity of society.

A significant factor in the high achievement is the excellent teaching. Teachers know pupils and their families very well and are very skilled at responding to individual needs. Assessment is used extremely effectively to provide work which is appropriately challenging and this is enhanced by the organisation of pupils in classes according to ability in literacy and numeracy. Teaching is lively and interesting and is often laced with humour so that pupils are eager to learn.

The excellent curriculum is carefully and imaginatively planned so that links between subjects help to make learning purposeful. Visitors and visits out of school provide very effective enrichment. It is enhanced by extra curricular activities and by links with business and industry, links with schools in Europe and access to the facilities of the community development centre.

Care and guidance are outstanding and make a significant contribution to personal development and achievement. There are very close links with parents and they are generally very positive about the school and feel that it is responsive to their views. Attendance is above average and there are very effective systems for tracking progress leading to targets for improvement. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is excellent and these pupils make very rapid progress. A parent commented, 'He is a different child from the one who entered school.'

Leadership and management are excellent. The headteacher has very successfully shared her vision and determination to improve with staff and governors. Self-evaluation is very thorough and no stone is left unturned in the drive to provide only the best. Staff work extremely well as a team to create a caring and challenging

learning atmosphere where pupils thrive. Governors make an excellent contribution in helping to shape the direction of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the opportunities for pupils to learn about the multicultural nature of society.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils start the school with attainment above that which is typical for their age. This strong foundation is built upon and improved because there is a relentless drive to raise standards. This is enhanced by the excellent teaching and the tracking of progress and by the rich and stimulating curriculum. In the 2005 tests at the end of Year 6 the school's results in English, mathematics and science were significantly above average and particularly high in science. School data show that this dipped slightly in 2006 because there was a large proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities in this group. However, the percentage of pupils reaching the higher Level 5 increased in English and mathematics. School data and inspection evidence show that by the end of the current Year 6 all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities and the small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, make excellent progress and achieve highly.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils love coming to school as shown by their above average attendance. They come in eagerly and look forward to meeting their friends and teachers because relationships are excellent, lessons are interesting and they say that they feel safe and secure. Their behaviour and attitudes to work are excellent and the school has created a happy, stimulating learning environment in which to learn and grow. Pupils adopt safe and healthy lifestyles, enhanced by healthy meals and snacks and regular exercise, including after school clubs and a lunchtime walking club. The school cook displays healthy menus on the school website where pupils can also request their favourite healthy meals. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are excellent overall reflecting the Christian ethos of the school. However, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to learn about the multicultural nature of society.

Pupils become confident and caring individuals because the staff are good role models and encourage them to think about others and reflect on a variety of issues important to them. Pupils willingly take on responsibility to help with the smooth running of the school. The school council reflects pupils' views and takes action to improve provision such as playground equipment and members make presentations to the governors about recycling.

'Playground Pals' help to support others and pupils organise fund raising events for charities to help those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils have excellent opportunities to discuss and consider future careers during the careers fairs provided by the school through its links with business and industry. This is linked with the close focus on the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) and helps to prepare pupils very well for the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is excellent, leading to very rapid progress in most areas of learning. A strong feature of teaching is the use made of assessment to plan work suited to different abilities and learning styles. This is enhanced by the organisation of classes according to ability in literacy and numeracy so that pupils are challenged to extend their learning. Lessons are typically conducted at a brisk pace and pupils are managed very well so that they sustain their concentration and learn quickly. Teachers ensure that lessons are lively and interesting so that pupils want to learn and improve. For example, Year 6 pupils' understanding of co-ordinates was increased when the teacher made imaginative use of the interactive whiteboard and laced her comments with humour. Year 4 poetry writing about the Lilliputians was enhanced when pupils were taken to the heights above Whitehaven to look down on the town. Because relationships are excellent pupils willingly engage in discussions with teachers about their work and are confident to learn from their mistakes.

Lesson objectives are usually shared with pupils, enabling them to check on how well they have done. Teachers have high expectations encouraging pupils to aim high, ensuring for example that their use of mathematical language is precise. Teachers and support assistants work very closely together, particularly with pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities so that most achieve exceptionally well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. It is very well balanced and enriched by a wide range of visitors and visits out of school and is a significant factor in pupils' excellent progress and personal development. When pupils talk to older people about their experiences their understanding of life in the past is increased. In a similar way when they visit the town and harbour they learn about geographical features and consider how their environment might be improved.

The curriculum is thoroughly planned in a stimulating and imaginative way, linking subjects together to give a purpose to tasks. This is described by the headteacher as helping to encourage pupils to develop a lifelong 'yearning for learning'. Further enrichment is provided by the wide range of extra curricular activities, including, sport, French, cycling, dance and drama. The emphasis on literacy and numeracy is enhanced

by the curricular links with schools in Europe so that pupils use their skills in many different ways. The school lies at the hub of a community development centre and this helps to extend the curriculum, for example, through further access to ICT. The school's comprehensive business links and its encouragement of collaboration help to develop enterprise skills. Strong links with local infant and secondary schools ensure that transfer to the next stage of education is usually a smooth one.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. This is an extremely caring school where each pupil is important. The school provides a high level of support for all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, those from minority ethnic backgrounds and looked after children, thus contributing significantly to their achievement and personal development. This is extended by the work of the school counsellor and by strong links with outside agencies. The school works very closely with parents and families and maintains a very strong family atmosphere. The 'supermam and dad' initiatives provide opportunities for parents, carers and grandparents to work in school so that they understand their children's learning more fully and establish close ties with the school. Most parents are pleased with the care shown to their children and are very confident to approach the school should they have any concerns. Child protection and risk assessment procedures are effective and the school carefully follows government recommendations for safeguarding children. There are very effective systems for assessing and tracking progress so that pupils and teachers know what pupils need to do in order to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are excellent. The vision and dedication of the headteacher are exemplary. She has built a very successful senior management team who, together with staff, share a commitment and determination to provide the best for their pupils within a caring and inclusive community. Staff work remarkably well together as a team in providing a very rich curriculum and in setting challenging targets for improvement. This leads to high academic and personal achievement.

The school evaluates its performance rigorously in order to make improvements. For example, an analysis of assessment data indicated weaknesses in writing. Following this a range of strategies was implemented leading to improved standards. The school development plan is based on a detailed appraisal of its strengths and weaknesses, shared by staff and governors, and is an important factor in school improvement. Subject leaders have a very good understanding of standards, achievement and provision in their subjects. Teaching and learning are regularly monitored. As a result, good opportunities provided for professional development in order to improve provision and help to raise standards.

Governors are very supportive. They know the school extremely well and play an important role in helping to shape its direction and hold it to account for its performance. Issues from the previous inspection have been successfully addressed and the budget is carefully managed in order to plan for fluctuations in numbers on roll and to support the raising of standards. Excellent leadership, realistic appraisal of performance and a shared determination to improve give the school excellent capacity to improve.

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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 effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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	1
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	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.

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	1
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

St Begh's Catholic Junior School

Coach Road

Whitehaven

Cumbria

CA28 7TE

29 November 2006

Dear Children

Thank you for making me so welcome in your brilliant school. I really enjoyed talking to you and learning how much you enjoy coming to school. One of the pupils told me that she is really proud of the work she does. I think you should all be very proud because you have a very impressive school. I was pleased to hear that you all feel safe and secure and thought that you have an exceptionally good understanding of how to keep fit and healthy. I was intrigued to learn how well the school council helps to improve things and that members even talk to governors' meetings about recycling. It was good to see that you think about the different jobs that you might do when you grow up and that you organise fund raising for charities and help a lot in school.

These are some of the things your school does well:

- the headteacher leads the school in an excellent way and all the teachers and governors work hard to help you to improve your learning
- all the teachers work extremely well together to make sure that the school is a happy place and that you always do your best
- teachers make lessons really interesting and exciting, including going on trips and having visitors to school so that you all want to learn and this helps you to make excellent progress
- you are looked after very well and because teachers check your progress very carefully they let you know what you need to do in order to improve your work

For your school to become even better, I would like you to find out more about the different traditions of people who live in our country.

Thank you once again for your very warm welcome.

Yours sincerely

David Earley

(Lead inspector)