



St Richard's Catholic Primary School, Skelmersdale

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 119684
Local Authority Lancashire
Inspection number 291504
Inspection date 5 December 2006
Reporting inspector Geoffrey Yates

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Sandy Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Skelmersdale, Lancashire
Age range of pupils	3-11		WN8 8LQ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01695 722346
Number on roll (school)	227	Fax number	01695 735905
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Cath Lydon
		Headteacher	Mr Mike Holden
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school is of an average size and is situated in an urban area of below average social and economic circumstances. Nearly all the pupils are of White British heritage. There are average proportions of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has its own nursery provision situated in a separate building. The school building has been improved since the previous inspection.

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 that bears true witness to its Christian foundation. Its self-evaluation is accurate in all respects and the school provides outstanding value for money. The key reason for the school's success is that it values pupils' personal development as much as it values academic achievement. One governor summed up the school's whole approach by saying, 'Every child mattered at St Richard's long before it became a national initiative!' Parents are very supportive of the school and are consulted on a regular basis.

Outstanding teaching, which challenges pupils to think for themselves, is a further factor in the school's success. This involves not only the teachers but also the highly skilled classroom assistants. As a result, pupils make exceptionally good progress to reach well above average standards by the time they leave. Their achievement is outstanding in English, mathematics and science. From a below average start, all pupils achieved the expected levels in the most recent National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science and at least twice the national average achieved the higher levels in English and mathematics.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. This reflects their teachers' high expectations and the first-rate care, guidance and support they receive from all adults. Pupils say that they feel safe and that bullying is not a problem. They are very positive about 'their' school and have a real understanding of the need to stay healthy. Pupils enjoy the things they do and this is reflected in above average attendance. They enjoy taking responsibility and are proud of the fact that their work in the school council gives them a voice in influencing decisions; the appointed 'joint treasurers' look after their budget fastidiously.

The school's curriculum contributes very strongly to pupils' personal development by stimulating their interests and generating a love for learning. For example, Year 6 pupils talk proudly and with tremendous enthusiasm about the high quality project work they do. The school extends pupils' learning through a very wide range of extra-curricular activities ranging from gardening to sporting events.

Provision in the Foundation Stage is very good in the Nursery and, as a result, children get off to a flying start, especially with regard to developing their personal, social and communication skills. Children continue to make good progress in the Reception class but the lack of a well planned outside area limits the opportunities for outside play to support learning.

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and management. His vision, drive and determination to succeed are very apparent in all he sets out to do. He not only wants the very best for his pupils but makes sure they receive it. For example, the school building, a weakness identified in the previous inspection, has been tastefully adapted and now provides a good quality environment for learning to take place. He is supported very well by a very strong leadership team and by knowledgeable governors. All aspects of the school's work are continually and rigorously checked. Well planned records of assessments of what pupils know, understand and can do are

used effectively to ensure that all pupils make at least good progress. Pupils know what their targets are and work hard to improve on their previous best. The highly motivated staff are deeply committed to an ethos of continuous improvement and, as such, the school has an excellent capacity to improve even further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that children in the Reception class make good use of the outside area in order to support what they do in all areas of learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils' achievement is outstanding and standards are well above average by the time they leave. The school's assessment information clearly demonstrates that children start school with below average skills in all areas of learning. They make good progress in the Foundation Stage and are well prepared for their life in the school, especially in relation to their personal and social, and language and communication skills. Pupils meet the national expectations for children of their age in all the areas of learning by the time they enter Year 1. The school builds effectively on this good start so that, by the end of Year 2, standards are above average in reading, writing and mathematics and have shown an improving trend. Progress accelerates from Years 3 to 6 as demonstrated by the fact that in the last three years the school has been in the top five percent nationally with regard to the value added to the pupils' education. Pupils' results in national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2006 were well above the national average at both the expected levels and at the higher levels in English, mathematics and science. There are no significant gender differences. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make outstanding progress because of the high quality support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' behaviour is outstanding and relationships with one another and with adults are of the highest quality. They start school with limited personal and social skills, but quickly learn the importance of sharing and of treating others fairly. They are happy at school and are highly motivated to do their best. Pupils are well aware of what they need to do to improve because they are involved by the staff in target setting. They say that bullying is rare and when occasional incidents do occur, they are dealt with quickly when reported to an adult. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They particularly enjoy contributing to their own and the wider community by, for example, raising funds for charity or taking part in school productions. Pupils develop skills which prepare them very well for later life. They recognise the importance of caring for the environment and of staying healthy. One pupil commented, 'We all make a positive contribution to the three Rs, which are, Reduce, Re-use and Recycle'. They develop a good understanding of democracy by

voting for school council representatives whose members are proud to be involved in 'their' school. They demonstrate, by the time they leave, very good basic skills, which enable them to approach the next stage of their education with confidence.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding; there are three key reasons why:

- the class teachers have very good support from capable classroom assistants and together they ensure that only the pupils' best efforts will do
- the school has excellent assessment systems in place and the information is used very well to ensure that work is suitably matched to pupils' needs so that they are able to make the progress they should
- pupils want to learn because work is made interesting and they know that all members of staff will listen to what they have to say.

Teachers and classroom assistants work well together to keep pupils' interest and maintain the pace of lessons. Good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to enliven lessons. Teachers build on their very good relationships with pupils to maintain high standards of behaviour so that little time is wasted. Marking is very good; it shows pupils how to improve their work. Homework is also used very well to support learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is enriched greatly by the teaching of Spanish and by a very wide range of extra-curricular activities. The school takes every opportunity to involve itself in curriculum initiatives such as that in music, which provides instrumental tuition. A high priority is given to planning experiences to ensure that all pupils have the basic skills they need and also that they get the chance to use them. For example, every opportunity is taken for pupils to use their writing and information and ICT skills. The curriculum makes outstanding provision to promote the progress and personal development of all pupils. It makes very good use of links with other schools and organisations to extend the curriculum. There are very good links with the church. Visits, including residential, and visitors to the school have a considerable impact on learning. Pupils get off to a very good start in the Foundation Stage but limited outside resources for the Reception age group do not allow full integration of the outside environment into their curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

High levels of care are provided for pupils and have a strong impact on their progress and personal development. All pupils are safeguarded well. Staff understand the pupils' needs and all who work in the school contribute to making them feel cared for and supported. Parents are very happy with the care and guidance their children receive. One parent commented, 'The school does a great job in bringing out the best in the children. The children feel they can talk to teachers openly and this helps to give them the confidence they need to prosper at school.' Pupils say that they feel safe and secure in the school and are happy to be there. Child protection and health and safety policies are robust. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do well because very good support, in and out of classrooms, is matched carefully to their needs. Assessment procedures for checking pupils' progress are very well developed. They enable teachers not only to identify and deal promptly with difficulties that pupils may have in learning but also to ensure that higher attaining pupils are challenged appropriately.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The well respected headteacher provides outstanding leadership and management and, as a result, the school continues to be highly successful. He strives continually to ensure the best possible education for the pupils entrusted to the school's care. Academic results speak for themselves but what matters most to him is the development of the whole child. As a result, all aspects of the Every Child Matters recommendations are met and documented to the highest standard. Parents and pupils are consulted on a regular basis. There have been significant improvements in the quality of the building since the previous inspection. Academic results have improved dramatically. Members of staff at all levels make a significant contribution to maintaining and improving the school's performance because they feel valued and are fully committed to it. The school's knowledgeable business manager is included in the senior management team, the members of which play a highly effective part in all aspects of school life and give very good support to the headteacher. Subject leaders know their subject areas well. Self-evaluation is a continuous and rigorous process involving all staff and through which the school identifies where it might do better. Governors are fully involved with the school and know it well. As a result, they are able to provide both support and challenge, playing a full part in shaping its direction.

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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	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 Richard's Catholic Primary School,

Sandy Lane

Skelmersdale

Lancashire

WN8 8LQ

8 December 2006

Dear Children

Thank you very much for welcoming me into your school and answering all my questions so politely. I think your school is one of the best I have ever been in.

I was really impressed with how well you all work, the standards you achieve and the way you play together. You are like one big happy family. You look after each other, with the older pupils taking responsibility for the younger pupils. You thoroughly enjoy your learning and your behaviour is excellent. Your headteacher, staff and governors all work very well together and make sure that your school keeps improving. They take very good care of you and help you to learn about keeping safe and healthy. I have asked your school to do all it can to improve the outside area for children in the Reception class.

I really enjoyed my visit to your school and I hope that you all continue to do your very best in the future.

Yours sincerely

Geoffrey Yates

Lead inspector