



St Dominic's Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124363
Local Authority Staffordshire
Inspection number 292973
Inspection dates 29–30 January 2007
Reporting inspector Lois Furness

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Station Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Stone
Age range of pupils	4–11		ST15 8YG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01785 354070
Number on roll (school)	208	Fax number	01785 615965
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Marian Humphreys
		Headteacher	Anne Bell
Date of previous school inspection	11 March 2002		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 29–30 January 2007	Inspection number 292973
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average-sized school serves mostly Catholic families in the local and wider community. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds and the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is well below average. Over the past three years there have been significant staffing changes. In January 2007, the headteacher left to take up another appointment and the deputy also left the school. A retired experienced headteacher has been appointed on a temporary basis working alongside a temporary deputy appointed from within the school, until a new leadership team is appointed. The school has very recently received the Activemark award.

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 school. Parents and pupils are proud of their school and pupils say there is nothing they would change. 'We like everything here,' is a typical comment. Pupils' academic achievement and personal development and well-being are good. They enjoy learning and, as a result, behaviour is exemplary and attendance is consistently above average. Pupils benefit from good care, guidance and support and they feel safe and secure in school. They eat healthily, take regular exercise and know how to keep themselves safe. One older pupil commented about how important it was to ignore 'peer pressure' when dealing with smoking and drugs. Children get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage (Reception). Children progress well and by the time they enter Year 1 they are working securely within expected levels. By the end of Year 6, standards are typically well above average. In 2006, however, while standards remained above average in mathematics, they dipped to average in English and science and fewer than expected pupils reached the higher levels in all three subjects. This resulted in the leadership making strategic staffing changes which are proving effective in returning standards to those of the past. Teaching and learning are now good although, because of a legacy of former weaknesses, there remains some variation in the progress made in different subjects and in different year groups. Progress is best in reading, mathematics and science but slower in writing, notably in the current Year 3 and 4 classes. This is improving, but there is still some way to go to ensure all pupils, particularly the more able, make the same progress in writing as they do in reading.

Teachers work hard to make lessons interesting, so pupils concentrate well and say that learning is fun. Teaching assistants effectively support pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, so they make good progress. The curriculum is good, with an extensive and imaginative range of enrichment activities. However, although the Reception indoor curriculum is exciting and stimulating, opportunities for outdoor learning are insufficiently developed. Leadership and management are good. The former leadership, including key subject leaders, had a secure understanding of weaknesses, evaluated the performance of the school accurately and took decisive action to rectify weaknesses in teaching and learning. This has resulted in getting pupils' progress back on track after a period during which it stalled. Improvement has continued with the appointment of the acting leadership team. The acting headteacher, who is very well supported by the acting deputy, has quickly pinpointed the next steps needed to continue to raise standards. Assessment systems are very detailed but the systems do not help teachers to identify easily if progress is as good as it should be or to consistently involve pupils in knowing how to improve their work. A more efficient system is being set up to do this. However, clear direction, good teamwork and the track record of improvement show the school has good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve progress in writing, particularly of those pupils in Years 3 and 4 and that of the more able throughout the school.

- Refine existing assessment systems so teachers can use information more easily to improve learning and involve pupils more consistently in knowing how to improve.
- Develop the outdoor curriculum for Reception-age children.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children enter Reception with skills that are typical for their age. Progress is good and by the time they enter Year 1, children are working securely within the goals expected. By the end of Year 2, standards are usually above average in reading, writing and mathematics and by Year 6, they are typically well above average in English, mathematics and science. Although progress is good overall, there are variations within subjects and in different year groups, as in the past there have been weaknesses in the quality of teaching. Good progress is evident in reading, mathematics and science, but in writing, notably in the current Year 3 and 4 classes, it is much slower. This is improving but as yet all pupils, and especially the more able, do not perform as well in writing as they do in reading.

Following the dip in performance at the end of both key stages in 2006, firm action was taken and standards in both Years 2 and 6 are expected now to return to those of the past. Year 6 pupils are in line to meet their challenging targets in English and mathematics, although writing remains weaker than reading. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities are well supported and make good progress as a result.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

From when children enter Reception, the school does its best to develop their personal skills and is successful in this. Good personal development is reflected in pupils' enthusiasm for learning, positive attitudes and outstanding behaviour. One pupil commented: 'I love school because of all the friends I have'. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Very good relationships reflect the school's caring Christian ethos. Pupils are thoughtful, reflective and care about each other. They have a good understanding of the arts and local culture, but their understanding of what it means to live in multi-racial Britain is less well developed.

Pupils lead active lives, eat healthily and know what to do to keep themselves and others safe. They respond with enthusiasm to opportunities to take responsibility as play leaders and monitors. They contribute well to the local community through singing, church events and taking part in the annual 'Stone in Bloom' horticultural event, for example. Their good basic skills and positive attitudes to work stand them in good stead for their next stage of education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching has varied in recent years; however, this has been rectified well and good teaching and learning are evident throughout the school. In Reception, there is a good balance between adult and child-led activities. Here, as in the rest of the school, very good relationships contribute to pupils' confidence and progress. Pupils enjoy lessons and concentrate well on the interesting tasks that are given them. Teachers bring work alive, and lots of practical activities motivate the pupils to learn new skills and knowledge in a meaningful way. A particular success is the introduction of 'talking partners', which encourages pupils to use adventurous vocabulary which they then use to make their writing more interesting. Pupils are becoming more involved in knowing how to improve their work and there are some good examples of teachers using marking to set pupils learning targets. However, as yet this practice is inconsistent. Teaching assistants provide effective help for those pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, ensuring they are well included in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well planned. There is a good balance between subjects that support pupils' personal and their academic development, including a strong emphasis on the creative arts and sporting activities. Pupils themselves say, 'We do lots of things here, not just English and maths.' As a part of the drive to raise standards in writing, pupils are given lots of opportunities to practise their skills in different subjects and this is proving effective. The Reception indoor curriculum is imaginative and well organised. However, the lack of a secure outdoor area restricts outdoor learning opportunities.

There is a wide range of activities that enrich the curriculum. Visitors and visits, including the very good provision for residential education, together with opportunities to perform and take part in the many after-school activities add much to pupils' personal development and their enjoyment of school. Pupils enthusiastically say: 'The trips away are fantastic, and great fun!'

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Outstanding pastoral care underpins the pupils' strong sense of security and well-being. 'Staff are fair and look after us,' said one pupil. 'There is very little bullying and when there is, it is handled well,' said another. There are effective procedures in place to ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for. Child protection procedures are fully understood, showing good improvement since the previous inspection. Good support for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities ensures they progress as well as their classmates and there are effective partnerships with outside agencies to support pupils' care and well-being.

Academic support and guidance is improving. The school has lots of assessment information about pupils' performance. However, the system for tracking their progress is unwieldy and does not allow teachers to identify easily the learning needs of different ability groups. A more efficient system is being introduced which is already improving the use of assessment information to plan work which is more carefully matched to pupils' needs.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership of the school provides clear direction, and monitoring and evaluation are good. The former headteacher identified weaknesses in provision and implemented good action to remedy these weaknesses. Staff were deployed strategically to improve pupils' progress and the influence of this can already be seen. The acting headteacher and deputy, working closely together, continue with the drive for school improvement. The English, mathematics and science subject leaders support staff well to ensure standards return to those prior to 2006. For example, the English subject leader has encouraged staff to plan 'hands-on' activities such as role play which enthuse pupils, giving them a purpose for their writing. The acting leadership team recognise that the school improvement plan has some shortcomings and has too many areas for development. A new, more focused plan is being produced.

Governors are enthusiastic, very supportive and fulfill their statutory duties well. Although many are new to their responsibilities, they have a good capacity to contribute to the school's longer-term development.

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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
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	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.

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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and for being so friendly and helpful. It was very useful to hear your thoughtful and perceptive views about your school. We really enjoyed our visit and want to share with you what we found out.

Here are the good things we found out

- We think you attend a good school where you make mainly good progress in your learning.
- By the time you leave Year 6 you reach well-above-average standards in reading, mathematics and science.
- Teaching is good and your teachers work hard to make learning interesting and fun.
- Your behaviour is excellent; even when you are doing 'magic tricks' you still try hard to do your best.
- The adults in school help those of you who finding learning difficult to make good progress.
- It is good to know that you think the adults in school look after you and keep you safe. We agree.
- It was also good to find out that you have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy diet and how to keep fit and healthy.
- The staff do a great deal to provide extra activities like sport, music, dance and drama which we know you enjoy. We know you are very enthusiastic about your trips to Alton Castle, for example.

What we have asked the school to do now

- We have asked your teachers to help you make your writing as good as your reading.
- We would like the school to make it easier to track your progress so that your teachers can better use the information about what you know and help you to understand what you have to do to improve.
- We think that the children in the Reception class should have more opportunities for outdoor learning.

Thank you again for your help and we are sure you will all work very hard with your teachers to help make the school even better than it already is.