

St Matthew's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132793
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	294027
Inspection date	22 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Mark Madeley

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	389
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr D Keane
Headteacher	Mrs V McDonnell
Date of previous school inspection	9 December 2002
School address	Queens Drive Walton Liverpool Merseyside L4 8UA
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This school is larger than average. Most pupils are of White British heritage and live within a mile of the school. The very few pupils of minority ethnic heritage speak English at home. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also well above average, with the majority of these having moderate learning difficulties. The school has achieved many nationally recognised awards for its work. These include the Basic Skills Quality Mark (three times), the ArtsMark Silver, Sports ActiveMark and the Healthy Schools 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 with some outstanding features. It gives good value for money. There is a real 'buzz' about it as soon as you enter. This is reflected in the smiling faces of pupils, the calm, orderly atmosphere and the high quality of pupils' work which adorns the walls. Since the last inspection, outstanding leadership has overcome many of the significant barriers to learning which many pupils face, enabling all to make consistently good progress in their learning. Very high quality teamwork, based on devolved responsibility, is at the heart of the school's success. Management at all levels is self-evaluating and thus has a very clear view of the school's strengths and areas for development. This information is used very well to inform future planning. It has also developed outstanding partnerships with the parish, support agencies and secondary schools, which all make a major contribution to pupils' education and well-being. The vast majority of parents are absolutely delighted with the school and the education and care their children receive. The inspection agrees with the school's view of its overall effectiveness but believes that the quality of management at all levels is so good that the school has outstanding, rather than good, capacity to improve further.

Children start Reception class with skills well below those expected for their age. Good provision in the Foundation Stage helps children make good progress in all areas of their learning. By the time they join Year 1, children's language skills remain below average. Across the school, pupils' progress is good, and they achieve well, because consistently good teaching is effective in meeting their needs. In the national tests, Year 6 pupils reach broadly average results. Results in 2006 show that boys' attainment, especially in English, was much lower than average. Management has identified this and put in place effective measures to improve boys' learning. Pupils enjoy learning because teachers make lessons interesting, for example, by questioning them well, by ensuring that tasks meet their differing needs, by effective use of resources and by making tasks very practical, like the gardening work in science. Relationships are built upon mutual respect.

Another contributory aspect of pupils' outstanding enjoyment of school is the curriculum. The programme for English and mathematics is especially strong in improving pupils' basic skills. Two modern foreign languages are taught and pupils have lots of physical education sessions in which to exercise. Visits play an important role in broadening pupils' understanding of the world. The huge range of additional activities involves nearly all pupils. Some are exceptional, like the choir, which recently gained city-wide recognition for its performances, and the sports teams. Pupils' personal development is, in most respects, of high quality. Pupils behave very well, feel really safe and have an exceptional understanding of how to stay healthy. However, pupils' attendance, though improving slowly, is below average. Parents indicate that this is a very caring school and the inspection agrees. The school goes further than most in helping the pupils and their families. An excellent example of this is the Rainbow counselling group for those who have lost close relatives. Pupils have an adequate understanding of how to improve their work and work hard to reach their learning targets.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the attainment of boys in Key Stage 2, particularly in English.
- Improve pupils' attendance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children start the Foundation Stage with very varied pre-school experiences. Their language skills are often very weak. An effective mix of stimulating play activities and well planned group work promote children's knowledge and skills in all six areas of learning well, but particularly in their personal, social and emotional development, where most children reach the expected standard for their age. However, despite good provision, children's language skills remain below average as they join Year 1. Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 have been rising for the last five years and are now average in reading, writing and mathematics. There is a big difference between the attainment of boys and girls. The picture is similar in Key Stage 2, especially in English.

Most pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those of minority ethnic heritage, make good progress through Key Stage 2 from their respective starting points. This is particularly good because many pupils face significant problems in home circumstances which make learning difficult, but the school manages to overcome them. Standards are average in English, mathematics and science and have been similar for four years. Challenging targets are set for each year group and are usually met.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school judged this aspect outstanding but the inspection found it to be good because pupils' attendance is below average. One out of every eight pupils has a recent attendance of 80% or less. Pupils show great respect for the school, adults and each other. They are proud of the 'David Bellamy' awards for doing 'tidying' jobs. They care for each other especially well and say they feel very safe in school. They know what to do if bullied, but say that this is very rare. A typical comment from pupils is: 'If you have a balanced meal it's healthy because you have a little bit of everything.' This demonstrates the depth of understanding that pupils have about living healthily. They are very aware of the dangers of smoking, drugs and alcohol abuse and know to avoid them. The school council is democratically elected and very active, for example, improving relationships by installing the 'Friendship Stop'. Most pupils make good progress in their basic skills and have positive attitudes to learning; this prepares them well for secondary school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They have an exceptional respect for other cultures and beliefs. Older pupils say: 'We're all the same on the inside!'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good through the school. Teachers build well on pupils' desire to learn. They ensure that classrooms are orderly and use praise and rewards very well to maintain pupils' motivation. Pupils respond very well to teachers' questions and frequently explain how they arrived at the answer, which helps consolidate their learning. Some staff are exceptional at improving pupils' vocabulary. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, pupils used very interesting words to describe the feelings of a child who had fallen overboard from a boat because the teacher challenged them to give more examples. Most pupils are set

tasks which meet their differing learning needs because teachers use their assessments well. In Year 2, a teacher made very effective use of a 'Big Book' on elephants so that pupils used the contents to find information. This is one example of the consistently good use of resources to help pupils learn. Skilled teaching assistants successfully teach a range of additional programmes, like letter sounds and Springboard mathematics.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding curriculum meets pupils' needs because it is interesting, lively and exciting. From the Foundation Stage, where children quickly develop their social skills because the play activities are inviting and purposeful, through to Year 6, most pupils are engaged and challenged. The literacy and numeracy programmes are effective, partly because pupils develop their skills by using them purposefully in other subjects. The science curriculum makes full use of practical work and this is the reason why boys' attainment is better here than in English and mathematics. The high quality programme for pupils' personal, social, health and emotional development is instrumental in ensuring that pupils grow to be well-rounded citizens. The school offers a wealth of extra activities from music lessons to tag rugby which contribute a great deal to pupils' skills and personal development. These activities have been recognised by the many national awards the school has achieved. Parents and pupils greatly value the high quality musical performances put on by the school each year, which helps raise pupils' sense of self-worth.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school graded this aspect outstanding but the inspection finds it to be good.

Pupils are happy in school because staff know the pupils, and most of the families, very well and take time to help them when there is a need. All procedures are in place to safeguard pupils. Good attendance is rewarded and parents are frequently reminded about bringing their children to school on time. However, the school's systems for checking patterns of attendance are not robust enough to bring about improvement. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported very well in additional programmes, but some inconsistencies in the quality of their individual education plans mean that a few of them do not make the progress they are capable of in class. Some pupils do not understand how they can improve their work further because the quality of teachers' marking is inconsistent. Pupils' 'Record of Achievement' books are a valuable tool to see progress and a great joy for parents to receive.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Outstanding leadership has successfully united the whole school behind its mission statement - 'Working together to develop the whole person' - and this unity of purpose runs through all its work. Senior management has adopted a shared responsibility model of management and this has a major impact on two fronts. First, staff fulfil their well-defined roles, receiving encouragement and well-directed professional development. Second, staff recognise that pupils' progress is a collective responsibility and do their best to ensure that their pupils make good progress during the year. It follows that self-evaluation is very effective and at the centre of

what this school does very well because everyone is involved. Staff have class files and subject files full of current information on their pupils. This information is used exceptionally well to check pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and learning by direct observation, by review of planning and by looking at pupils' books. From this information, management identified that boys' progress was good through Key Stage 2 but that their attainment in 2006 was below average. Measures were put in place to improve their attainment, and early evidence suggests that these have been successful. The school achieves good outcomes with most pupils, and especially those with disabilities and those who have had a disrupted education elsewhere. Nevertheless, there remains work to do with some boys and some pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities before it can be said that all achieve as well as they can. Governance is outstanding. Governors are part of the self-evaluating community. They are in school frequently and use the information gathered well to inform their decision making. They have worked tirelessly to fund the new facilities for the pupils. A particularly astute overview is maintained on the school's finances. This will allow the school to employ a learning mentor, whose role will be to improve attendance.

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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?	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	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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	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	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	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?	1
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?	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	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	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

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

Inspection of St Matthews Catholic Primary School, Walton, L4 8UA

I was delighted by the way you all made me so welcome when I visited recently. You were quick to tell me all about your school and how much you value it. I am very happy to tell you that I agree with the school's view that it is good with some outstanding features. This is because consistently good teaching helps you make good progress in English, mathematics and science. You told me that you liked coming to school and that your teachers were always 'there' for you. I agree that staff care deeply about each of you and I thought that the 'Rainbow group' was an excellent way of supporting children and parents. You showed me that your behaviour is excellent and that in lessons you listen carefully and are keen to learn. I thought that you used playtimes well to be active and you talked knowledgeably about healthy living. I looked at some of your 'Records of Achievement' books. They were very impressive, particularly because both you and your parents had commented about the work in them.

You told me that you enjoy learning because the teachers make it interesting for you and I agree. I found the curriculum to be outstanding because so much is on offer. English and mathematics are taught well and you get to use the skills in other subjects, like using graphs in science. Additional programmes, like the letter sounds work, are having a big impact on your reading skills. You really enjoy the huge range of clubs and visits and are rightly proud of the success you have achieved, like the choir winning the recent competition.

One of the reasons your school is so good is that it is always looking for ways to improve. I have asked the headteacher to do two things which will improve the school further:

- improve the standards older boys reach, especially in English
- improve your attendance.

You can help your school by continuing to be attentive, working hard in lessons and always trying your best to reach your learning targets. Also, it is essential that you come to school on time every day in order to enjoy all the good things that are going on there. Thank you for being so helpful to me during the inspection. I hope that you are very proud of your school and continue to work in partnership with the staff and governors to make it even better in the future.