



St Francis of Assisi RC Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134598
Local Authority Lancashire
Inspection number 294137
Inspection dates 16–17 November 2006
Reporting inspector John Ashton

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Blakehall
School category	Voluntary aided		Skelmersdale, Lancashire
Age range of pupils	3–11		WN8 9AZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01695 558560
Number on roll (school)	318	Fax number	01695 558560
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Miss Mary Reid
		Headteacher	Mr John Bowers
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3–11	16–17 November 2006	294137

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a new school, formed from the recent amalgamation of three smaller Roman Catholic primary schools. A completely new building is nearing completion and the construction work is restricting the available playground space. There is a high degree of social disadvantage in the area with, for example, above average eligibility for free school meals. A higher than average proportion of pupils has statements of special educational need. There are many more boys than girls. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic groups and few pupils speak English as an additional language. Attainment on entry to the Nursery is below that expected for children this age. The school provides a well-attended breakfast club and after-school club each morning and evening respectively.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's own judgement that St Francis of Assisi is a satisfactory school with some good features. Notable amongst these are:

- the effective way it enhances pupils' personal development and well-being
- the success of the 'well-being' approach to staff morale
- the enrichment of its curriculum
- the behaviour management skills of the teachers.

The school's amalgamation is proceeding very well. The staff and pupils of its three constituent schools have gelled together well and everyone is looking forward to the forthcoming move into the new building.

Parents are very supportive of the school and praise the good care their children receive. 'This school is fantastic', one parent wrote, 'My child's behaviour has improved 90% since coming here.' Pupils love the school's warmth and friendliness. 'The staff all have pleasant personalities', one pupil said.

Pupils make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes and satisfactory progress in Key Stages 1 and 2. Results in the national tests in Key Stage 2 in 2006 were disappointingly low, reflecting the effects of the disruption caused by the amalgamation. Current standards, though below average, are closer to average than they were last year.

The school is satisfactorily led and managed; it gives satisfactory value for money. The first priority of its leadership, that of bringing the staff and pupils onto the one site and transforming them into one community rather than three parallel ones, is coming to a successful conclusion. The thrust now is rightly upon working closely with key staff from the local authority to improve standards in more specific ways. For example:

- standards are not high enough in English, especially in writing, and mathematics
- teaching, though satisfactory overall and good in some respects, is not consistently effective enough across the school
- some school procedures are not formal or rigorous enough to ensure a consistent quality of teaching and learning across the school in order to raise achievement, especially of more able pupils.

Pupils enjoy their learning, feel safe in the school and are aware of the merits of exercise and healthy eating. Their developing social skills and adequate literacy and numeracy skills provide a sound basis for the next stages of their lives. Many of them serve their school community well in a whole range of different ways.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English and mathematics.
- Ensure that the more able pupils are sufficiently challenged.

- Increase the rigour of the monitoring of teaching and learning and of the quality and standard of pupils' work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils achieve satisfactorily from their below average start on entry to the Nursery through to their leaving the school at the end of Year 6. They make good progress in the Foundation Stage and satisfactory progress in Key Stages 1 and 2. By the end of Reception, the early learning goals are met by most children. Results in the national tests in 2006 were lower than the school's target levels, which were pitched relatively low because of the disruption caused by the schools being amalgamated. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those for whom English is an additional language make good progress in the school, reflecting the effectiveness of the extra help they receive. Work seen during the inspection confirms the school's own diagnosis of current standards as being below average in Key Stages 1 and 2 but closer to average in Key Stage 1. It confirms also the school's judgements of weaknesses in literacy and numeracy, particularly in writing. The respective levels of challenge set for higher and lower attaining pupils are not always appropriate enough. The result is that although higher attaining pupils make satisfactory progress overall, they underachieve in some lessons due to their being insufficient challenge to their work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good. From the earliest stages in the school, good behaviour and relationships establish a friendly atmosphere for learning. Pupils concentrate well and enjoy their work. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, and well supported by the school's commitment to the Catholic faith. Themed weeks on different cultures and links with a school in South Africa make pupils well aware of differences and similarities in ethnic backgrounds. They work and play well in groups, and support others in day-to-day contacts as well as through the school's 'buddy' system. They know about the benefits of healthy eating and exercise. They feel safe in school and report that bullying is very rare and when it does occur, the school deals with effectively. Their growing personal skills, including those in literacy and numeracy, and their maturity provide a good basis for their future well being.

Pupils are willing to take responsibilities; they are monitors for many aspects of school organisation. The school council is well organised, providing a good example of democratic decision making. Attendance is below the national average but improving as pupils respond well to encouragement and rewards for good attendance.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Relationships are good. Pupils are managed well, are happy and generally enjoy their work. Learning assistants are suitably briefed and support learning well, especially for pupils with learning difficulties. When pupils are engaged particularly well by the enthusiasm and good subject knowledge of the teacher, learning is sometimes good. Teaching and learning are good in the Foundation Stage where staff have a good understanding of the age group and take great pains to find out what the children know and need to know as they enter the Nursery and move on to Reception. In other classes, although lessons are sometimes good, systems for assessment are in the early stages, limiting what teachers know about pupil's learning needs as a basis for lesson plans. The marking of pupils' work often congratulates them on their efforts but does not point out clearly enough their successes and where they need to improve. As a result, most pupils, particularly the more able, do not make as much progress as they could over time. The pace set in lessons is sometimes too slow with pupils spending too long listening to the teacher rather than getting on with learning tasks. The school's determination to ensure that no pupils are left behind means that in some sessions higher attaining pupils are not challenged sufficiently.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum satisfactorily meets the needs of the vast majority of pupils. It contributes well to the development of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and is a key factor in pupils' good personal development. The curriculum is, however, less effective in ensuring pupils' academic progress and the needs of the more able in particular. Curriculum provision is being reviewed in order to develop pupils' creativity fully and to make learning more relevant to their lives. Subject planning is being adjusted to enable the development of the skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology in all subjects, but the planned development of speaking skills and vocabulary remains weak. Good links with other organisations enable pupils to participate in sporting activities, for example, judo, curling and try-golf. Education for personal, social health and citizenship awareness is developing well. It is beginning to ensure that pupils have access to good quality information, for example, related to healthy living and drugs misuse.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory with strengths in support for pupils' personal development. Parents are accurate in their view that the school is very caring. Procedures for promoting pupils' health and safety and child protection are in place.

The learning mentors are particularly effective in supporting vulnerable pupils. They work closely with the staff that have responsibility for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and use effectively the support of outside agencies in education, health and community policing. The support for pupils' academic development is satisfactory. Although group target-setting is established, systems to check on individual achievement are not embedded in every class and are not yet linked closely enough to raising the achievement of each individual pupil. This results in some lack of challenge for more able pupils, in particular.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management and the capacity for further improvement are satisfactory. A very good start has been made in welding together staff and pupils from three separate schools. Positive leadership from an experienced headteacher and senior leadership team is strongly backed up by practical support from both the local authority and the archdiocese. The firm guidance and wisdom of experienced governors are helping to lay firm foundations for the new school to blossom in the final stage of its amalgamation when it moves into its new building at the end of next term. The staffing is settled, the budget almost balanced after a period of deficit, and staff well-being has been a high priority of the leadership. The result is that morale is reported to be higher than it has been for years. Self-evaluation is largely accurate and realistic. The school is aware of what it needs to do to improve. Systems are still being consolidated and the school is aware that those for monitoring the quality of teaching, the quality and standard of written work and the tracking of individual pupils' progress are not yet rigorous enough.

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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?	3
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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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

St Francis of Assisi RC Primary School

Blakehall

Skelmersdale

Lancashire

WN8 9AZ

18 November 2006

Dear Pupils

Thank you for making us so welcome on our recent visit to your school. A very special thanks to those children who gave up some of their time to share a working lunch with us as we discussed how well they were doing and how well they enjoyed being at St Francis of Assisi School.

Some of the things we particularly like about your school are:

- how well looked after you all are in school
- how pleased your parents are about your school
- how much you enjoy your learning and how well behaved you are in lessons
- the interesting activities staff organise for you outside of lesson times
- how friendly, cheerful and helpful all your staff are.

We have asked your headteacher and governors to do the following things in order to make your school even better: to check the quality of your written work more carefully, to speed up some of your lessons and to give many of you even more interesting challenges, especially in English and mathematics.

We wish every one of you well for the future and hope that you will always work as hard and enjoy school as much as you do now.

Yours sincerely

John Ashton

Lead Inspector