

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report - amended

Unique Reference Number	103436
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	308319
Inspection dates	5–6 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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	181
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dirk Hermans
Headteacher	Linda Howell
Date of previous school inspection	9 June 2003
School address	Rocky Lane Nechells Birmingham B7 5HA
Telephone number	01214 648140
Fax number	01214 648145

Age group	4-11
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Amended Report Addendum

Report amended due to a change to the report following a complaint

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a broadly average size school that is part of the Birmingham Nechells Education Action Zone (EAZ). Many pupils come from households with very high levels of social and economic need, as exemplified by the high proportion eligible for free school meals. They also come from a diverse mix of ethnic backgrounds. Around 10% of pupils are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language, including some who join the school other than at the start of their primary education. An above average proportion of pupils have moderate learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school operates a breakfast club.

St Joseph's has had seven temporary headteachers over the past three years. The current acting headteacher joined the school in April 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with Section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the curriculum and pupils' achievement and standards, particularly in writing, mathematics and science.

Despite recent improvements, St Joseph's is not providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The turbulence in leadership of this school has inevitably taken its toll. It is the many changes of staff, and particularly the succession of different headteachers, that most concerns parents. As one put it, 'We feel that over the past three years, our children's education has not been up to standard due to the lack of stability with teachers and headteachers'.

Although there are continued uncertainties because there is still no agreement between governors, the diocese and the local authority over securing the appointment of a permanent headteacher, the resolution to appoint an acting headteacher for rather longer than just a single term has resulted in tangible improvement. There are now more consistent systems for the day-to-day running of the school and for encouraging positive attitudes among the pupils from the Reception Year onwards. As a result, parents confirm that 'behaviour has improved a lot', so that St Joseph's is now a place where all pupils, including those with emotional and behavioural difficulties, get on well with each other and settle to work without fuss. This, and the good arrangements for pupils' pastoral care and welfare, helps pupils to feel safe and is among the reasons why they enjoy their time at school.

Teaching and learning are also much improved since the local authority evaluation just a year ago, when a high proportion of lessons were found to be inadequate. School leaders have drawn well on local authority support and resources made available through the Education Action Zone (EAZ). A largely new teaching staff has been recruited and is succeeding in helping pupils make satisfactory, and sometimes good, progress in lessons. Classes are managed well and work is now generally matched appropriately to pupils' different abilities. Marking, however, gives pupils insufficient guidance on how well they are doing and on how to improve their work, and pupils do not all have individual or group targets that are tailored to help focus them on the next steps in their learning.

Standards are still too low. There has been good improvement in pupils' reading skills in most year groups, following the introduction of more basic skills teaching and in response to ambitious targets set by the acting headteacher and leadership team. Many pupils are now beginning to catch up on previously lost ground in writing and mathematics, but there is still a significant minority of pupils who are not making the progress they should. The exceptionally low standards in science are due to gaps in pupils' knowledge and experience of science. This, and some other subjects such as history and geography, is not taught regularly enough in every year group. As a result, pupils make inadequate progress over time, even when their progress in lessons is satisfactory.

Although governors and school leaders know that it has further to go, the school has already come a long way in a short time. Whilst concerns remain over the lack of long-term stability of its leadership and management arrangements, the recent improvements confirm St Joseph's sound capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children join the school with standards significantly below those expected for their ages. They quickly settle into the Reception class and make especially good progress in their personal and social development, so that they play and work well together. Because of previous staffing changes, there have been gaps in the assessments of children's progress in the Foundation Stage. Assessments are now being checked by school leaders and the local authority to ensure greater accuracy. Progress through the Reception Year is satisfactory, with most children successfully working towards the early learning goals expected of children this age.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all subjects, including science, are taught regularly so that pupils are helped to build on what they have learnt before and standards are raised.
- Provide more thorough guidance to pupils through marking and target setting so that they know how well they are doing and what they need to do to do better.
- Regularise leadership and management arrangements to assure stability to the school and alleviate parents' concerns.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Standards at the school have been consistently very low and they have been exceptionally low in most of the years since the last inspection. In 2007, standards in the Year 2 assessments show that pupils were nearly a year behind pupils nationally in their acquisition of knowledge and skills. The Year 6 national test results in 2007 were even lower; pupils were the equivalent of around 18 months behind pupils nationally. Results were especially poor in science. These low standards leave pupils of all abilities, including those with moderate learning difficulties and those at an early stage of learning English, inadequately prepared for the next stage of their education.

Over the past few months, school leaders have focused successfully on creating a more settled climate for learning. Improved progress has followed improvements in behaviour and attitudes. There has been good recent improvement in reading standards across most of the school as a result of the school's focus on developing pupils' key skills. For many pupils there has been a similar improvement in writing and mathematics, but there is still a significant minority of pupils who are making insufficient progress in these subjects. Achievement continues to be inadequate in science because this subject is not taught regularly enough in every class.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are polite and well mannered. They enjoy coming to school because they feel safe and secure in the caring environment it offers them. Behaviour is generally good in lessons because of the positive relationships with adults in school. This represents a very significant recent improvement, as both parents and pupils confirm, and good progress in tackling the specific needs of those with pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Attendance is satisfactory overall, however, despite the best efforts of the school, some children still do not attend regularly enough. Pupils are proud to take on responsibility, such as being a member of the school council. They also have a good understanding of eating healthily and taking regular

exercise. Pupils make a good contribution to the local community through being involved in a variety of events, including singing to the elderly and raising money for a range of local, national and international charities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are much improved over recent months, with pupils now making satisfactory, and sometimes good progress in lessons. Teachers plan work for pupils that matches their particular needs and abilities. They manage pupils' behaviour well so that they concentrate on their learning. The high quality of relationships also has a positive impact on learning, with pupils increasingly eager to please their teachers because they like them. Teachers know their subjects well and make good use of the interactive whiteboards in every class to engage pupils to good effect. Teachers assess their pupils' learning through their good use of questioning, but their marking does not give pupils enough guidance on how well they are doing or on what they need to do to improve their work. Teaching assistants often provide well targeted support for pupils with learning difficulties and those new to learning English. However, they are not always used to best effect when the class teacher is working with the whole class, for example at the start and end of lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

Although the curriculum has recently been revised to provide more enjoyable activities, coverage of some subjects remains uneven. In some classes, particularly in Years 3 to 6, there is insufficient science work this year for pupils to build and develop their knowledge and skills. The same is true in respect of other subjects, including history and geography. Where pupils are not taught subjects regularly, they are not helped to build steadily on what they have learnt before. As a result, they make rather less progress over time than they do in individual lessons.

Themed weeks, such as the recent Black History Week, contribute well to pupils' personal development, and good use is made of the facilities of the EAZ. However, parents express disappointment with the modest range of after-school clubs on offer, and there are calls particularly for more sports and more school trips.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school has good procedures for ensuring the safety of all pupils, and pupils know they can seek help from any adult if they have a problem. A range of strategies designed to support individual needs are in place, and teaching assistants play an important role in supporting these pupils. The school has good links with external agencies who provide additional support when needed. Pupils with learning difficulties are well supported and this ensures they make at least similar progress to others in their class. The introduction of a breakfast club has helped to improve the attendance and punctuality of some pupils.

The academic guidance provided to pupils is not as good as the arrangements for their welfare. Pupils are not routinely aware of their group targets, which show them what they need to focus

on to improve their work. These targets are not tailored closely enough to each pupil's individual learning needs.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Parents' apprehension over the many changes of leadership are justified because the lack of stability has contributed to the drift in standards. Though unable to recruit a permanent headteacher who is a practising Catholic, the governors' decision last year to make a longer-term temporary appointment has yielded significant recent improvement. A parent with long association with the school told inspectors that that they had considered moving their child but had been greatly reassured by 'the many changes to the school', explaining, 'The acting headteacher has an excellent understanding of the needs of young children and is determined to get the best out of each and every one of them'. Another parent wrote to praise the way 'she has put some stability into the school, which is what is strongly needed'.

Until governors, the diocese and the local authority reach agreement on a permanent way forward, uncertainties remain and there is continued fragility to the still temporary leadership arrangements. Nevertheless, the current school leaders have succeeded in arresting the school's decline, and they have a realistic picture of the further improvements needed to ensure that all pupils are making the progress of which they are capable. Monitoring of teaching and learning has been rigorous, and school leaders have not shied away from taking action where staff have been ineffective.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

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?	4
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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

6 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Birmingham B7 5HA

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school. With so many changes of staff and headteacher, your school has been going through a very difficult period. The school is already changing for the better but it is not yet doing enough to make sure that you all do as well as you should. We are asking the staff and governors to make some more improvements and we are recommending that the school gets some more help over the next year.

We were very pleased to see how well behaved you are. You told us, as did your parents, that that is a big improvement over the past few months. Keep it up! You are enjoying your lessons and that is helping you to make better progress. Your teachers are doing an effective job and are helping you to learn, and we were impressed at how your reading has come on this year. Many of you are also doing much better than before in writing and mathematics, but there are still a number of you that are not making the progress that you should in these subjects.

Standards in science are way below where they should be, and this is a subject where most of you are doing much less well than you should. This is because you do not do enough science regularly so that you can build on your knowledge and skills. The same is true in some other subjects, so we have asked the school to look at its curriculum so this can be improved.

We have also asked the school to make sure that you all have clearer guidance on how to improve your work, both through targets and through your teachers' marking. You can help, too, by asking teachers how you can make your work better.

We know that many of your parents are especially worried about all the changes of headteacher that there have been in recent years. We agree that this needs to stop so that the school can build a clear direction for the future. We are therefore asking the governors, diocese and local authority to get together and agree a way of ensuring that more permanent arrangements can be put in place for leadership and management without further delay.

Best wishes, Selwyn Ward Lead inspector

Annex B

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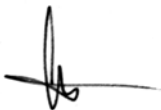
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Selwyn Ward
Lead inspector