

Sacred Heart School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103477
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	308334
Inspection date	6 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Christine Field

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	205
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Eileen Tamf
Headteacher	Lisa Fahy
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2004
School address	Earlsbury Gardens Birchfield Birmingham B20 3AE
Telephone number	01213 564721
Fax number	01213 443824

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: pupils' progress in mathematics, assessment and target-setting systems, and leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from observations of pupils at work and play, discussion with staff, governors and pupils, scrutiny of documentation and an analysis of parents' views. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school serves its local neighbourhood, which comprises a diverse range of ethnic minority communities. While these communities are all represented in the school, most of the pupils are of Black Caribbean heritage. The school also provides for a large group of asylum seekers and refugees, most of whom are from Africa. A number of pupils are learning to speak English as an additional language, with a growing proportion at a very early stage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average, as is the proportion with learning disabilities and/or difficulties. A significant feature in some year groups is the high number of pupils joining or leaving the school part way through their education.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school provides a good quality of education, with some outstanding features, for pupils from many different backgrounds, who learn together harmoniously and successfully. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning, as they enjoy school very much, work from a rich and exciting curriculum and feel safe and extremely well looked after. In the words of one boy, this is because 'the staff know everyone for who they are – special and individual'.

The school's exceptionally caring ethos pervades every part of the school, with all adults, whether teachers, support staff, governors or volunteer helpers, working together to ensure that all pupils receive a good education. Parents are very proud of their children's personal achievements. They rightly flag the good leadership, good teaching and high quality care as central to the effectiveness of the school and the good progress their children make.

Children start in Reception with skill levels that are below expectations. Boys and girls achieve equally well and reach above-average standards by the time they are in Year 6. The very good provision made in English ensures that all pupils develop good literacy skills, with writing a particular strength. The close attention paid to providing additional support for the most vulnerable pupils, including those who have very limited English language, enables them to learn with confidence and success. The work of teaching assistants is very effective, for example, in pre-lesson tutoring, so that pupils new to speaking and/or writing English are familiar with the key vocabulary they will use in science, geography and history.

The school's performance in mathematics is not quite as strong as in English. Effective action taken by school leaders is closing the gap between English and mathematics. Particularly good impact is showing from the well-targeted intervention in mathematics for those pupils in danger of falling behind. Nevertheless, despite the good provision, the school recognises that work remains to be done to ensure that some of the potentially more able learners are always set sufficient challenge in their mathematics work. Additionally there is some inconsistency in the checks made on pupils' progress and in the use of targets in mathematics lessons to help pupils improve. This applies particularly in respect of the more able learners.

Pupils benefit from good teaching and interesting lessons that capture their sustained effort and high-level concentration. The use of information and communication technology in lessons is a positive feature in stimulating pupils' good learning and helping them to keep focused on the task in hand, as the activities are very motivating. The very discernible work ethic amongst the pupils is helping prepare them well for the next stage of education and future careers.

A first-rate curriculum with an excellent range of extra-curricular opportunities with high-level take up, particularly in sports, not only promotes a great deal of enjoyment but also promotes excellent spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. Consequently, pupils are developing great respect for and have mature understanding of each other's different cultural backgrounds and about the various cultures of people in the world. Pupils are active in working with others, for example, through an education business partnership with a major supermarket and with local artists and musicians across a number of creative arts projects. These very varied opportunities are fostering their good future citizenship. In addition, a comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education is central to promoting the good set of values and principles which pupils of all ages uphold really well. This also helps pupils gain an excellent awareness of keeping healthy.

An excellent system of support is in place to give pupils full access to the very wide range of exciting curricular experiences. Child protection arrangements are robust and safeguarding checks rigorous. Pastoral care and guidance is excellent. In particular, the 'Rainbow Passport' reward system is very effective in enabling pupils to set their own targets to direct and promote their effort and behaviour. As a result, pupils say that bullying and name calling are rare and that adults deal with them quickly if they occur. Peer mediators have great confidence and take seriously their responsibility to sort out any problems at break and lunch times. Although, overall, pupils receive good day-to-day academic guidance, through marking and discussions, there is potential for their personal targets to tie in more closely with supporting their academic progress, particularly in mathematics.

The headteacher supported by the senior team provides exceptionally clear educational direction and this helps to achieve above-average standards and high quality care. Many of the successes of the school stem from the senior leaders' personal knowledge of the pupils and their work with staff to establish high expectations of what the pupils 'can do'. This has been especially important of late as there have been changes to staffing, after many years of stability. A monitoring cycle of lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work is well embedded and together with good data analysis of test results is supporting the school's largely accurate self-review. However, a lack of specific focus to some of this work results in evaluations not always pinpointing how well different groups are progressing. Emphasis has, understandably, been given to checking that pupils with particular barriers to learning are doing as well as expected but there has not yet been the same consistent focus on the more able learners. Governors are good 'critical friends' of the school and pursue best value effectively. They are supportive and knowledgeable about the school's strengths and weaker areas. The school has clear priorities for its future development and its track record of success means it has good capacity to build upon its many strengths and improve still further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The children make good progress towards reaching all their learning goals in the Foundation Stage because they are well taught and enjoy a well-planned curriculum. Very close attention to promoting positive play and nurturing children's confidence to 'have a go' are real strengths. A sensible balance between activities chosen by adults and those chosen by the children is achieved, with no opportunity lost for promoting purposeful talk. Children are alert and interested learners and show good recall of past learning, for example when finding about and discussing the life cycle of a frog. The children feel safe and confident to access the many resources available to them because of the very good attention paid to their welfare and well-being. There is a separate outdoor play area for the children's use but the space is cramped and poorly laid out. Development of this provision has been on the cards for some while, and governors now have sufficient funds to make their innovative plans a reality, with building work due to start very soon.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure checks on pupils' progress in mathematics, particularly for the more able, help teachers to set and review clear targets for them to improve more quickly.
- Sharpen the focus of lesson monitoring and work sampling so that senior leaders have a precise view of the progress made by different groups of learners.

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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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?	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.

Annex A

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	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

7 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, Birchfield B20 3AE

Thank you for your welcome when I came to visit you recently. It was lovely to see so many happy smiling faces. I found out quite a bit about your school from listening to what you, your parents, staff and governors told me and by checking things out for myself. Here are some that I would like to share with you.

- You go to a good school where everyone gets on great together and tries their very best to work hard and achieve well right from Reception to Year 6.
- You benefit from good teaching and interesting lessons and experience a very exciting curriculum – the number and range of clubs you can go to are fantastic!
- The adults in school take excellent care of you and because of this you feel confident and safe – your work on anti-bullying, peer mediation and health awareness all contribute very successfully to making this aspect of school life so positive.
- The headteacher leads the school very successfully and with the senior team, governors and staff is striving hard to make sure it goes from strength to strength.

There are two things that I have suggested that will help with this.

- Ask teachers to keep a better check on the progress made by the more able learners in mathematics so they can set clearer targets to help them reach the highest level possible.
- Ensure that when senior leaders visit lessons or check work in your books, they find out if the work being set is at the right level, so that all groups of pupils make good progress.

I wish you every success for the future.

With kind regards

Christine Field Lead inspector