

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Darlaston

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104235
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	308549
Inspection date	21 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Timothy Bristow HMI

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	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	235
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Dalton
Headteacher	Kevin Mee
Date of previous school inspection	16 June 2003
School address	Rough Hay Road Darlaston Willenhall WS10 8HN
Telephone number	01215 686496
Fax number	01215 686496

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School is of average size. The school takes pupils from a large catchment area serving three parishes. Children enter the Nursery with standards that are below national expectations. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and who have free school meals is average. The number of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school has the Basic Skills award.

The inspection evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated how the school is improving pupils' writing at Key Stage 1, the effectiveness of the senior management team, why the overall progress of pupils is good and the quality of the curriculum. Evidence was collected from discussions with the headteacher, senior staff, governors, pupils and from the parental questionnaires. Lessons were observed, school self-evaluation documents seen, samples of pupils' current and previous work were examined. 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 form, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Joseph's Catholic Primary is a good school that is valued by its pupils and their parents. Children get a great start in Nursery and continue to make rapid progress throughout their time in school and consequently their achievement is good. The reason for the school's success is the clear focus the headteacher has on raising standards. A dedicated team that provides pupils with consistently good lessons as well as good care and guidance with their learning supports him in this work. The school provides good value for money and has good capacity to improve.

Pupils' achievement is good. By Year 2, they reach standards that are often above average in most years, particularly in reading. In 2006, standards were significantly above average overall. Writing standards had increased steadily until 2006. However, in 2007 they dropped to below average. This is because pupils have not had enough opportunities to write independently. This means that standards overall were broadly average. The school has rightly identified writing as a priority for further improvement and measures taken are raising standards. Although standards in writing dropped in 2007, school records and lesson observations show that pupils made good progress in Years 1 and 2 from their starting points to reach this level of attainment.

In 2006, pupils made exceptional progress through Key Stage 2 in mathematics and science. Local authority information shows that in 2007 overall results for pupils in Year 6 were broadly average, but the best in the school's history. The school identified weaknesses in the achievement of boys and took action that has ensured that they now reach standards that are in line with the girls'. Standards of writing have increased steadily since the previous inspection and are above average in most years. There is good provision for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This is implemented consistently well by the teachers and the team of teaching assistants enabling these pupils to make good progress. Pupils from minority ethnic groups make progress that is in line with others in the school.

Pupils' good personal development is influenced by the strong Catholic ethos of the school. Outstanding spiritual development underpins the good behaviour and attitudes of pupils. Pupils report that they love coming to school. The day starts very well with prayers that create an atmosphere of inclusion and reflection. Pupils are considerate and courteous showing a respect for others. Attendance rates have risen gradually, but are only average because of the holidays taken by some pupils during term time. Pupils feel very safe in school. They report that incidences of bullying hardly ever happen and they know how to get help if they need it. Pupils take healthy eating and the need for exercise seriously; they take part in regular exercise and choose to have a balanced diet in school. Pupils feel their views are valued. The house system and school council ensure that the opinions of all pupils are taken into account and pupils are presently working on projects to improve the playground. Pupils have good opportunities to take responsibility in school. Each class has monitors responsible for jobs. Older pupils can be librarians, house captains and playground friends supporting younger children. Pupils make a good contribution to the wider community. As well as taking responsibility for regular fund raising activities for charity they organise events to benefit others, for example the annual Christmas party for the elderly. Pupils' good basic skills and their well-developed social skills mean they are well prepared for the next stage of their education and future lives.

The consistently good teaching ensures pupils make good progress throughout their time in school. Lessons are well planned and pupils are fully aware of what is expected of them.

Relationships between adults and pupils are good because teachers are focused on helping pupils to learn. Assessment takes place regularly and the information is used to plan lessons that are pitched at the correct level for most pupils. A well-trained team of teaching assistants ensures groups of pupils make good progress. The curriculum for English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology (ICT) and religious education is very good. The school has a range of extra activities and uses staff flexibly to ensure that all pupils get the support they need to make good progress. Good links with other subjects are exploited in English and ICT. Although there are a number of after school clubs these do not cover a wide range of activities, concentrating mainly on sports. The school meets all statutory requirements but does not offer as many enriching activities as it could in some subjects, particularly in art and history. Procedures for health and safety and child protection are in place and regularly reviewed. The use of assessment information to monitor the progress of all pupils and to help them to make further improvements to their work is a strength of the school and a major contributing factor in their good achievement.

The headteacher is continually trying to improve the education of pupils and is ably supported by a committed team. The quality of self-evaluation is good. All senior teachers are involved in checking the quality of teaching and learning and making recommendations for improvement. This has helped to ensure that the achievement of pupils is good. The good measures used by the school to monitor the progress of pupils mean that they are set realistic and challenging targets. Since the previous inspection the ability of governors to hold the school to account has improved and consequently the governance of the school is now good. The vast majority of parents support the work of the school.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Nursery gives children a good start. Children arrive with skills that are below national expectations, especially in communication, language and literacy. They make good progress that continues through the Reception class so that they start Year 1 with standards that are broadly in line with national expectations. The 'Ruth Miskin Literacy' programme has recently been introduced to further accelerate the children's progress in literacy. The Foundation Stage is well led and children thrive in a stimulating, happy and caring environment. Arrangements for transition ensure that children's learning is not interrupted by the move into Year 1. Arrangements for children before starting nursery, for example the pre-school toy library, mean children are well prepared to start school and parents establish good relationships with the teachers.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the standard of writing in Key Stage 1 by giving pupils more chances to practise different types of writing on their own.
- Offer a wider range of enrichment activities outside of lessons and in history and art.

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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?	2
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	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	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	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.

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	2
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

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Darlaston, WS10 8HN

Thank you for the help you gave me when I visited your school. I felt very welcome and I enjoyed meeting you and thought you were very friendly and well behaved. If you remember, I came to look at the work that you were doing and to talk with you and your teachers. I found that you work hard and do well in your lessons. You are kind and considerate to each other and get on well with the adults in school. You told me how much you enjoyed coming to school and that you feel safe and secure.

Your headteacher and all of the staff are doing a good job. Your teachers carefully plan lessons and try hard to make sure you are all able to do as well as you can. This means that you are well prepared for the future. Taking everything into account, I have decided that yours is a good school.

To make things even better, I have asked the school to help the younger children to improve their writing. I agree with you and a few parents when you reported that you would like more clubs. So I have also asked the school to offer a greater range of activities and to make some lessons more interesting.

You can help by continuing to work hard and by making sure you come to school every day.

Yours faithfully

Tim Bristow HMI

24 September 2007

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