

# St Columba's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	104480
<b>Local Authority</b>	Knowsley
<b>Inspection number</b>	308612
<b>Inspection date</b>	29 November 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mike Hoban HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3-11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	0
School	
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Fr M Lee
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Ronan Dunne
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6 May 2003
<b>School address</b>	Hillside Road Huyton Knowsley Liverpool Merseyside L36 8BL
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 4778360
<b>Fax number</b>	0151 4778361

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI). HMI evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: pupils' achievement; care, guidance and support; the quality of teaching and learning; and the effectiveness of managers in improving education and care for the pupils. Evidence was gathered by observing lessons, scrutinising school documentation and questionnaires completed by parents, and by talking with pupils, governors, staff and the headteacher.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but HMI found evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were justified.

## Description of the school

St Columba's is a larger than average primary school, set in an area of significant socio-economic disadvantage. The take-up of free school meals is much higher than average. Although the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is below the national average, there is a much higher than average proportion of pupils with learning disabilities and/or difficulties (LDD). Pupils are almost exclusively of White British heritage.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

St Columba's is a good school, with some outstanding features, including the pastoral care it offers to its pupils, enabling them to thrive as individuals and to make good progress in their learning. Most children enter the Foundation Stage with skill levels exceptionally below national expectations. However, by the time they leave the school, the standards they reach are in line with national averages. This means that, overall, pupils make good progress during their time at St Columba's. Parents and pupils value the dedication of staff, reflected in the good teaching and excellent care at the school. There is an atmosphere of respect and industry as pupils make the most of their time here. The new headteacher is building effectively on the strengths of the past and his impact and energy is evident through further improvements in attendance and in the school's infrastructure.

Children make very good progress during the Foundation Stage, where the careful adaptation of support and teaching meets children's needs, enabling them to develop their learning and social skills. Having entered Key Stage 1 with levels of attainment well below average, pupils make good progress there, although performance in writing is weaker than in reading or mathematics. At the end of Key Stage 2, pupils reach standards that are in line with the national average and make good progress overall. Pupils with LDD also make good progress. Pupils make better progress in mathematics and science than in English. Most pupils are keen to learn, know what their targets are and what to do next to reach them. Pupils at St Columba's reach challenging targets, given their starting points and capabilities.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social maturity is underpinned by the evident Catholic ethos at St Columba's, their good behaviour and their respect for each other. Pupils' views are heard here: for example, they led to a revised behaviour policy to ensure that good behaviour is recognised and rewarded, as well as reducing incidents of weaker behaviour. Parents are overwhelmingly appreciative of the work of the school and its staff. The school's imaginative efforts to improve attendance have borne fruit: it is now in line with the national average. Pupils are ready to share their views with adults, feel safe and have faith in their teachers and their school council (which was involved in the appointment of the new headteacher). Pupils are confident that they would speak to an adult in the school should they have any concerns. Pupils' enjoyment of school is evident in their demeanour, play and their involvement in lessons. The school's provision for healthy food and physical exercise is valued by pupils, as they understand the need to keep fit and avoid unhealthy foods and drink. Pupils are well informed about the nature of Britain's diversity, both through the curriculum and through involvement in such activities as the Knowsley against racism project.

Teaching and learning are good, with well-planned lessons and very good relationships between teachers and pupils. The best lessons are well paced, lively and informative, with a range of interesting activities so that pupils are well motivated and are clear about what they are expected to learn. In satisfactory lessons, a slower pace leads a few pupils to become distracted. The work of skilled teaching assistants provides the pupils with LDD with the confidence to tackle challenging work and other pupils talked of their targets and what they individually needed to do to reach the next level. Marking of pupils' work is strongest in the junior phase, where it is evaluative and supportive. Assessments of pupils' work enables effective support to be provided for groups or individuals, resulting in improvements to their progress and attitudes to learning. However, higher attaining pupils commented that, during some lessons, they were set insufficiently testing work.

The curriculum is well matched to pupils' needs and meets national requirements. It is strengthened by the variety of opportunities to learn from outside activities, enhancing pupils' learning and enjoyment. For instance, a visit to the Mersey Ferries and a meeting with evacuees from bombing during the Second World War led directly to more creative writing.

Care, guidance and support are of a high order: safeguarding procedures are in place and the school follows the local authority's guidance on risk assessment on educational visits. Parents appreciate the staff's commitment to pastoral care which in turn contributes to a harmonious atmosphere within St Columba's and to pupils' good achievement. This is clearest in the support for the most vulnerable, where carefully considered interventions result in improved attitudes and achievement. In addition, the learning mentor supports pupils encountering specific issues such as bereavement. The parent mentor's effective work includes encouraging parents to become more involved in education.

Leadership and management are strong: the new headteacher is determined to build on the good inheritance he has at St Columba's and he offers a vision of high academic expectations buttressed by strong pastoral care and guidance. Staff work well as a team, although monitoring is still developing as a means to improve achievement throughout the school. The governing body know this school well and is an effective source of support, although its role as critical friend has yet to develop fully. The school has a good capacity to improve.

## **Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 1**

The work in the Foundation Stage at St Columba's is outstanding. Children enter with skill levels that are significantly below those typical of their age, particularly in language and social development. They make very good progress as a consequence of the high quality education and care provided. Transition arrangements are very effective. Accurate assessment ensures that specific weaknesses are identified early and support is appropriately tailored to such needs, resulting in pupils making better progress in social skills and in their learning. Productive relationships with parents contribute to that work and to parents' close involvement in their children's progress. The curriculum has been shaped to cater specifically for the needs of all learners. It offers a rich range of stimulating activities which provide many opportunities for imaginative play, teamwork and the promotion of speaking and listening skills. The leadership and management of the Foundation Stage is outstanding, combining professionalism and a clear vision of what each child can gain here. Effective teaching and learning means that pupils enter Key Stage 1 having made very good progress.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve achievement in literacy, especially in writing.
- Ensure that the more able pupils are provided with higher levels of challenge in lessons and elsewhere.
- Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in order to improve achievement further.

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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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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	1

### 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?	1

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	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?	No



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

Inspection of St Columba's Catholic Primary School, Knowsley, Liverpool, L36 8BL

You may remember that I visited your school last month to see how well you were all doing at St Columba's. I am writing to let you know what I found. First of all, I appreciated your welcome and the time some of you gave to me so I could talk with you about things at the school.

I think St Columba's is a good school, and it has some outstanding features of which you can really be proud. But first of all, you impressed me in the classroom - I was pleased to see how keen you were to learn, and to join in activities. You are well cared for at St Columba's, and you enjoy your time there.

Here are some of the good things going on at your school.

- Your achievement is good. For instance, last year the SATs' levels were in line with the national average; this means that pupils make good progress in their time at your school.
- You demonstrate respect, care and good behaviour, and you are enthusiastic about visits and other activities, which help you to do better at school.
- You are well supported by your teachers, teaching assistants and other staff. They really do care a lot about you.
- The Foundation Stage is outstanding - it provides a super start for the youngest pupils at your school.

I want the school to be even better; indeed, to be amongst the very best. I have therefore asked Mr Dunne and the staff to do some further work on the following areas. Firstly, to improve your literacy skills, especially in writing; secondly, to develop a system to record the quality of your lessons, to improve teaching and learning further in St Columba's. Finally, lessons should stretch all of you, to ensure you all do even better! I hope you will all play your part in that work.

I hope that you continue to enjoy your time at school and I wish you all the very best for the future.