

St Charles' Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104646
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	308640
Inspection dates	23–24 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Derek Aitken

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	126
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Rosemary Kay
Headteacher	Mr Christopher Davey
Date of previous school inspection	19 January 2004
School address	Tramway Road Liverpool Merseyside L17 7JA
Telephone number	0151 727 5830
Fax number	0151 475 3436

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

This inspection was conducted by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small school is situated to the south of Liverpool. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The vast majority of pupils are White British. The school has had three headteachers and an acting headteacher in the past five years. The present headteacher took up his post in January 2008. The school holds the Activemark award and the local Healthy Schools award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school. After a troubled period, effective action is putting the school back on track. Parents report very positively on the enduring commitment of the staff, for example, in freely giving their time to provide the pupils with the wide range of extra-curricular activities more commonly found in a large school. Their praise is also extended in equal measure to the work of the new headteacher.

Children's skills on entry to the Reception are broadly typical for their age. They make satisfactory progress there and this rate of progress is maintained until pupils reach the end of Year 6. In Year 6, standards have varied over recent years but are usually average. Pupils in both key stages do best in reading and mathematics, but they do not do as well in science. This is principally because science has, until recently, had much less emphasis in the curriculum than English and mathematics. The school's new leadership has put firm plans in place for September 2008 aimed at tackling weaknesses in provision and standards, including for science. Standards currently in Year 6 are above average in English but are below average in science, with very few pupils working at above the expected level.

The curriculum provides a satisfactory foundation for pupils' learning. Its strengths lie mainly in its contribution to pupils' well-being, health and security in school. Pupils' good awareness of healthy lifestyles is reflected in the school's awards. Pupils keep fit and active and say they have no wish to be 'couch potatoes'. Pupils throw themselves wholeheartedly into their 'Wake and Shake' routines, which get the school week off to an enjoyable start. Their personal development is good. The good variety of enrichment activities, which include team sports and the choir, foster good relationships amongst the pupils. However, opportunities are missed for reinforcing basic skills, such as writing, in other subjects. While there is some good teaching, the overall quality is satisfactory. Teachers' questioning is a strength, enabling the children to develop their speaking skills well. Sometimes, however, planning does not ensure that pupils' written skills are developed systematically or at a brisk enough pace when they are working independently. Marking offers little guidance as to how pupils can improve their work. Care and welfare arrangements are satisfactory. The caring attitudes of the staff ensure that a close rapport with the pupils is maintained. The school's systems for tracking pupils' progress and identifying pupils who would benefit from extra support are at a very early stage of development.

The school has made satisfactory improvement since its previous inspection due to satisfactory leadership and management. Despite frequent changes of headteacher, standards have been maintained. The new headteacher has put in place very quickly measures to lay the foundations for robust management systems and for sustained improvement. Staff are aware of what needs to be done to raise standards. The headteacher has an accurate awareness of immediate priorities, but systems for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the work of the school are not fully effective at all levels. Subject leaders do not yet have the tools and skills to positively influence standards in their areas. This weakness is reflected in some inconsistencies in the school's evaluation of its performance. The school has satisfactory capacity to improve and offers satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children make satisfactory progress in the Reception class so that by the time they join Year 1 their overall skills are slightly above those expected for their age. Children make good progress in the development of their speaking skills because both adults spend much time engaging them in purposeful conversation. Their progress in developing writing skills is less marked, because staff do not provide enough interesting resources and opportunities to practise these. The relatively small size of the class supports children's progress, as close attention by the staff ensures they remain fully involved in their learning. Staff look after the children well. Children quickly learn to become self-reliant and to behave very responsibly. Good quality relationships underpin the children's very positive attitudes so that they mix well and support each other in their independent learning. Lessons are structured so that they help children build effectively on what they have already learnt. However, some opportunities are missed to vary the depth of questioning so as to challenge higher attaining children. The Foundation Stage is led and managed satisfactorily. Leaders are taking action to strengthen assessment practice and tracking procedures from September 2008. Currently, assessment is not used sharply enough to target for extra attention areas of relative weakness in children's achievement, such as writing.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise pupils' standards and achievement, especially in science.
- Ensure lessons provide pupils with the best opportunities to develop their writing skills quickly and systematically.
- Improve the quality of guidance to help pupils improve their work.
- Ensure that monitoring systems are embedded and that subject leaders develop the tools and skills to enable them to raise standards.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement overall is satisfactory. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities build satisfactorily on their earlier learning as they progress through the school. Results at the end of Year 2 were above average in 2007 with a good improvement in reading. Standards in the current small Year 2 class are average in mathematics and reading, but the writing skills of a few pupils are well below average. Overall standards at the end of Year 6 have been broadly average over recent years. Pupils are keen, fluent readers and handle calculations in mathematics confidently. Pupils do less well in science as opportunities are limited to develop their skills fully and to stretch higher attaining pupils. Standards currently in Year 6 are a little above average overall and this represents satisfactory progress for this more able year group during Key Stage 2.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils forge close friendships with each other through play and conversation. They behave well and show consideration for

each other's needs. They have a good cultural awareness, promoted by a range of visits within the local community, some of which are linked to current 'Capital of Culture' activities. Pupils take advantage of physical activities to keep fit and active. They make good use of opportunities to have their voice heard in school. The very active school council plays a keen part in the development of the school, for example, in the design of the new playground. It has also been successful in organising fundraising projects both for charity and for the school. Pupils have a strong sense of responsibility and commitment. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in a good level of attendance for the vast majority of pupils, although overall, attendance is satisfactory. Pupils' average command of basic skills sets them up satisfactorily for later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Good relationships foster good attitudes to learning. In most classes teachers use a good variety of questions to develop pupils' thinking skills. All pupils are included in the questioning and this very effectively promotes their speaking skills. Pupils mostly listen well and this encourages pupils to express new ideas in front of the class. Lesson planning does not fully capitalise on these good elements. The purposes of the lesson are not always made fully clear to pupils. Techniques and resources are not always adapted well enough to help pupils to make most productive use of their time, for example, in enabling them to develop their ideas fully in writing. On these occasions, a minority of pupils lose focus and confidence as they are unclear how to proceed. Overall, teaching assistants make a satisfactory contribution to pupils' learning, but their effectiveness varies in relation to their expertise and the quality of joint planning with the teacher.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets the needs of pupils satisfactorily. The good enrichment includes a wide range of popular sporting activities. Pupils' enthusiasm for music is reflected in the flourishing choir, which has a strong local reputation, and their good take-up of opportunities for musical tuition. Opportunities to reinforce pupils' learning, such as in writing, across different subjects are isolated, because the strategic development of the curriculum is at an early stage. Pupils' achievement in science is restricted by planning which is not adapted well enough to meet the needs of all pupils, especially those capable of higher attainment. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are adequately supported through focused individual education plans and the individual tuition which pupils with more severe levels of need receive.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Systems to ensure pupils' welfare, and health and safety are satisfactory. Child protection and other arrangements for safeguarding pupils are in place and meet statutory requirements. Satisfactory use is made of outside agencies to support vulnerable pupils and to promote regular attendance. Pupils feel confident that they can approach any of the staff if they are worried and they say that the staff know and care for them well. The school has useful strategies in place to encourage good attitudes and behaviour, for example, the class charter. Tracking, target-setting and assessment systems are currently underdeveloped, but major improvements

are due for implementation in September 2008. While staff are now starting to acquire a growing understanding of pupils' strengths and weaknesses, at present, this is not used sharply enough to ensure good achievement for pupils. Marking is regular and supportive of pupils' efforts, but gives too few pointers to pupils as to how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The new headteacher has worked with determination and skill to implement within a short time many measures to strengthen management systems. He has an accurate awareness of immediate priorities. This has been acquired through a comprehensive review of provision, including several lesson observations. Subsequently, he has made some improvements to the deployment of resources, including staffing. However, there has not been time for all these measures to take effect. Staff have pulled together well to ensure that the recent, frequent changes of headteacher have not had a negative effect on pupils' standards and well-being in school. Opportunities for subject leaders to acquire training, plan effectively to develop their subjects, and acquire a close knowledge of pupils' progress have been limited. Consequently, despite their keenness to seek advice to develop better practice, they lack the confidence necessary to make precise evaluations. The school has ensured that its statutory targets for pupils' progress have been met. The governors have supported the school satisfactorily through its recent difficulties.

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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?	3
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?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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	3

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	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.

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	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	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of St Charles' Catholic Primary School, Liverpool, L17 7JA

I am writing to thank you for your help when I visited your school recently, and to tell you about my inspection findings. I enjoyed meeting you. Seeing you take part so energetically in the 'Wake and Shake' routine first thing in the morning left me in no doubt about your keenness for sport and physical activities.

I judge that all of you, including the Reception children, are receiving a satisfactory education. The Reception children develop their speaking skills well and this helps them to get on well with each other and become independent. In the older years you build on this well to become confident speakers in class. Your progress is steady as you move up the school, which helps you to reach the standards expected of your age by the end of Year 6. However, there are some differences in how well you do in the subjects, with science being a weaker area. I have asked the staff to concentrate on raising your achievement in this subject.

Your personal development is good. You behave well and enjoy school, especially the after-school activities. You make good use of the chances to make the school an even better place, for example, through the school council. You get on well with the teachers and are keen to offer ideas in class. Sometimes, your lessons are not planned to make sure all of you understand what to do and to make the best use of time for writing activities. I have asked the staff to improve this for you. The staff care for you and are on hand to help you when you need extra support, for example, in the playground. I have asked them to support you better in your learning, by keeping very careful notes on your progress. I have also asked the teachers to make sure you know how you can improve your written work.

Your new headteacher has worked very hard in a short time to sow the seeds to keep the school moving forwards. I have asked him to make sure that the subject leaders get the support they need to check more carefully on how well you are doing in your subjects and then to take action aimed at raising standards and achievement.