

St Sebastian's Catholic Primary School and Nursery

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104664
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	308645
Inspection date	3 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Bamber

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	283
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr Patrick Kelly
Headteacher	Mr D Hardiman
Date of previous school inspection	6 July 1998
School address	Holly Road Liverpool Merseyside L7 0LH
Telephone number	151 2609697
Fax number	151 2605679

Age group	3-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and particularly investigated the following issues: pupils' overall achievement and standards; standards on entry to the Foundation Stage and on entry to Year 1; the curriculum on offer to pupils; the quality of care, guidance and support; and the contribution the school makes to community cohesion. Evidence was gathered from: national published assessment data; the school's self-evaluation, assessment records, policies, minutes and other documentation; observation of the school at work; discussions with members of staff, pupils, the governors and a group of parents; and the questionnaires returned by parents. 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

This above average sized school has been in federation with another smaller Catholic school since April 2006. The two schools have the same headteacher and governing body. Most pupils live in an area that has considerable social and economic disadvantage. A much higher than average proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals. There are higher than average percentages of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than usual. There are a number of pupils who are refugees or from asylum-seeking families or who are looked after. There is a greater than average mobility (pupils entering or leaving the school at times other than those when they would join or move to another school). The school's Foundation Stage unit takes children from the age of six months and provides extensive extended services for many pupils.

The school has been very successful in gaining awards: it holds Investors in People status, Basic Skills Quality Mark, Eco Green Flag, National Healthy Schools Award, Activemark Gold, Artsmark Gold, International School Award, Inclusion Award Advanced Level, Charter Mark and NAACE mark for its work in information and communication technology (ICT).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school that gives pupils an excellent all-round education. Central to its success is extremely effective leadership, high quality teaching and a very rich and stimulating curriculum. Other significant factors that contribute to the school's excellence are the very strong partnerships the school has with parents, the church, other schools and the community.

Pupils make excellent progress as they move through the school. Having entered the Nursery with much lower than expected skills in their communication and mathematical development they flourish to such an extent that pupils leave Year 6 with standards above the national average in English, mathematics and science. It would not be possible for them to make such rapid progress if they did not feel extremely well cared for, confident in their own ability and highly motivated to learn. Their outstanding personal development plays a very significant part in their excellent behaviour and very positive attitudes to all that the school offers. The huge range of out-of-class experiences available promotes pupils' personal, physical and aesthetic development superbly. For example, up to 20 lunchtime or after-school activities are held over the course of the school year for Key Stage 2 pupils, 95% of whom participate. The large school choir rehearsing 'Beatles' songs, sung in Spanish, at lunchtime provided an excellent example of how extra-curricular activities promote pupils' confidence, ability to speak another language and their cultural awareness. In Key Stage 1, pupils join art and gardening clubs, sing in the choir or practise a range of physical skills. In Years 2, 4, 5 and 6, all pupils who want to can participate in residential visits to enjoy activities such as skiing, going abroad to use their Spanish, or taking part in a range of outdoor pursuits and team-building activities.

Members of the school council, who represent all age groups and different cultural backgrounds, speak warmly and excitedly about these visits, the out-of-class clubs and of the family atmosphere in the school. They also report how much they enjoy lessons and how well they are taught. It is obvious from the very positive atmosphere in lessons, where laughter is common, that the quality of relationships is excellent. When allied to pacy teaching, excellent subject knowledge, imaginative use of ICT and very focused target setting, these very warm relationships result in pupils achieving outstandingly well. Leaders make creative use of teachers' particular talents to provide pupils with specialist teaching in several subjects. For example, the school's status as joint Spanish Teaching Primary School of the Year results from the excellence of the Spanish teacher and her ability to train and enthuse other staff to teach the language. Excellent use of specialist support staff results in pupils who have difficulties with reading making excellent progress. Similarly, the extremely well managed and supported intervention and booster groups ensure that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who speak English as an additional language are helped to achieve outstandingly well. Those with particular gifts or talents, especially in sport or the arts, flourish and progress to represent the school in the city or nationally. The school has an enviable reputation for its success in both these fields. Successful links with local high schools and organisations such as the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra enhance pupils' expertise and experiences.

The school, parents and the community all work together extremely well for their mutual benefit. The school manages and leads a day care facility on site that takes children from the age of six months. It also offers before and after school care and activities in the holidays for the benefit of working families. This has a very positive impact on the partnership with many parents who have close contact with the school from when their children are very young. It also has a profound effect on children's personal, physical and creative development that stands them in

very good stead as they move through the school and in preparation for their life in the future. The work of the learning support coordinator, a member of the senior management team, is crucial to the strong partnership with parents. For example, through her considerable influence, attendance is at the national average, which compared with many schools in similarly disadvantaged areas represents a considerable achievement. The school plays a leading role in promoting community cohesion. For example, staff act as mediators when different cultures clash. It also celebrates those different cultures by inviting visitors from different faiths and backgrounds into the school to work with the pupils. The young people in this school have an outstanding understanding of what it means to be both physically and mentally healthy and realise that their own actions impact significantly on those around them.

The headteacher provides inspiring, 'hands-on' leadership. He sets high expectations and, with his highly competent senior management team, continually seeks to maintain high standards in all areas of the school's work. Despite being judged as an excellent school at the last inspection, the school has continued to improve standards, the accommodation and the range and richness of the experiences it offers to pupils. All staff and governors respond most positively to the lead given by the headteacher. Some parents and staff were concerned that because the headteacher was asked in 2006 to lead two schools that St Sebastian's might suffer as a result. However, his shrewd delegation and the very effective training of other senior staff has meant that the school has maintained its excellence. Senior leaders and middle managers have developed their skills to ensure continuity. The deputy headteacher very ably manages the day-to-day running of the school when necessary. Other senior leaders contribute significantly to rigorous assessment practice, to improvements in literacy standards and as exemplary teachers. Parents understandably feel that their children are fortunate to attend this excellent school. Their views are typically summed up by the comments, 'The school provides a truly inclusive education and gives the best for all children' and 'The children are loved in this school, not just professionally cared for.'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

For some children their Foundation Stage starts when they are six months old. In this day care centre, children are wonderfully well cared for and closely supervised by a team of dedicated and knowledgeable staff. They cater extremely well for the diverse needs of children from babyhood to age three. The centre is very well equipped and stimulating resources play a large part in promoting children's physical, personal and creative development very well.

This good start means that by the time these children join the Nursery class they have a head start in these areas. Overall, however, when children join the Nursery, their ability to communicate and their mathematical development are weak and have declined over the last four years. The purpose built, attractive and very well resourced accommodation that houses the Nursery and Reception children provides very flexible provision to which children respond extremely well. They make very good progress because they are taught and supported so well. Adults provide a stimulating range of activities for children and constantly encourage them to choose for themselves, to cooperate and to pursue their own ideas. For example, a group of Nursery children decided that after listening to a piece of music they would take themselves to a separate room with a range of untuned instruments and make their own music. Children's progress is tracked thoroughly and as a result their work and play is very well tailored to their needs. They enjoy learning both inside and out and continue to develop their physical, personal and creative skills to at least expected levels by the time they enter Year 1. They make equally

very good progress in their communication, language and literacy skills and in their mathematical development but having had so much further to go to catch up, still enter Year 1 with below expected attainment in these areas.

Parents are fulsome in their praise for the sensitive way in which their children are introduced to school and for the high quality of care they and their children receive from all the Foundation Stage staff.

What the school should do to improve further

- There are no areas for improvement that the school has not already identified.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	1
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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	1
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?	1
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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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

Inspection of St Sebastian's Catholic Primary School and Nursery, Liverpool, L7 0LH

I very much enjoyed my day when I visited your school recently. You will know that I was there to find out how well your school helps you to learn and to become good young citizens. It does both of these extremely well and you are very fortunate to go to an outstanding school.

You told me how much you enjoy your lessons, that your teachers are very kind and that they organise lots of extra things for you to do out of the classroom. You obviously respond to that very well because you make excellent progress with your work and many of you attend lunchtime and after-school clubs that help you to be healthier and to develop your skills in things such as art and design, dance, drama and singing. You also told me how excited you were about the many visits you go on and I agree with you that these help you to get on really well together and to understand more about yourselves. Your visits to Spain also mean that you can practise your Spanish which many of you speak very well already.

Your headteacher, and those teachers who particularly help him, run the school extremely well. They are always looking for ways to help you learn better, to improve your standards and to give you as many different opportunities as they can. They are very clever at knowing what the most important things are to improve. This means there was nothing of great importance that I could suggest to them which I felt would make the school any better.

Keep working hard and being such positive and friendly young people.