

St Ambrose Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104672
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	308648
Inspection date	30 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Clare Henderson

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	247
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr E Cain
Headteacher	Mr A Buckley
Date of previous school inspection	12 January 2004
School address	Alderfield Drive Speke Liverpool Merseyside L24 7SF
Telephone number	0151 4252306
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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: whether standards and achievement for boys and more able pupils are high enough in writing; strengths of tracking systems in ensuring all pupils achieve their best; the quality of pupil's personal development and well-being, pastoral care and curriculum strengths. Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons, discussions with pupils and scrutiny of their work, discussions with the staff and the chair of governors, and analysis of the school's documents and parents' questionnaires. Other aspects 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 school, above average in size, serves an area of Speke with significantly high social and economic disadvantage. Almost half the pupils are eligible for free school meals. The number identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities or vulnerable is well above average. Although most pupils are of White British heritage, a small but increasing proportion are of minority ethnic heritages or at an early stage of learning English. The school has gained a number of awards, including the Healthy Schools, Activemark, School Travel Plan and Basic Skills Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with outstanding features. Pupils flourish in this very caring, warm and welcoming school so that they make outstanding progress in their personal development and achieve well, academically. Excellent partnerships, for example, with parents and within the locality, help pupils to feel a strong sense of belonging and, as a result, they are very eager to contribute positively to all aspects of school life. Parents are confident that their children receive a high quality of education, saying, 'all members of staff are friendly and approachable and are very supportive of children and parental views and needs,' and again, 'coming to this school is the best start anyone could give their child'. The school is mostly accurate in its view of its own effectiveness and provides good value for money.

Most pupils start Year 1 with skills below those typical for their age. Standards reached by the end of Year 6 have risen steadily since the last inspection and, in 2007, were above the national average in mathematics and science, and average in English. Similarly, pupils in the current Year 6 are on track to reach levels above those expected nationally. Good quality teaching and support from skilful teaching assistants enable all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those at an early stage of learning English, to progress well. Consequently, by the time they leave, pupils' achievement is good. Through end of year assessments, teachers identified that a number of boys and more able pupils were underachieving in writing in Years 3 to 6. To address this, they provided more opportunities within the curriculum for pupils and, in particular boys, to develop their interest and skills in writing. The impact of this is not yet being fully seen in the standards pupils reach. This is because pupils are not always given enough guidance in their marked work as to what they need to do to improve their work further.

Pupils are excellent ambassadors for the school. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Attendance has improved and is currently above average. Behaviour is excellent and pupils treat their classmates and, in particular, those who are new to the school with dignity and respect. They are proud to share what they do to promote healthy and safe lifestyles and to develop their enterprise skills. Pupils thoroughly enjoy learning because the curriculum includes an outstanding range of enriching experiences, both in lessons and beyond the normal school day. These include the opportunity to learn Spanish and to develop their musical and sporting interests and talents.

Pupils' growing confidence and maturity are seen in the wide range of responsibilities they eagerly undertake. Pupils who are school councillors, playground leaders or 'peer mediators' ensure that everyone is happy and safe in the playground, helping younger children to benefit to the full from the activities available. Within these roles, pupils gain valuable skills that help them prepare for their future.

Within the good teaching there are some first-rate features. For example, the lively and fun way mathematics lessons are taught in Year 6. These lessons expertly link speaking and listening, physical education and mathematical skills and are extremely popular. They contribute both to pupils' enjoyment and to the above average standards reached in this subject by the end of Year 6. Similarly, as a result of the improvements to provision for information and communication technology (ICT) since the previous inspection, pupils have many opportunities to practise their skills across the subjects of the curriculum.

Leadership and management are good. A key factor in this is the effective leadership of the headteacher. Making sure that every child is nurtured in the excellent caring and supportive

environment so that they can reach their full potential is never off his agenda. As a result, standards are rising, particularly in mathematics and science. The school does not stand still and is continually searching out opportunities for achieving more. Although leaders and managers are extremely committed and supportive, they do not monitor or use information about pupils' progress regularly enough in order to have a clear picture of whether all pupils are on track to reach their targets. Governance, which is supportive and challenging of the school's progress, has improved significantly since the previous inspection. The good improvements seen since then demonstrate that the school has a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

When children join the Nursery, their skills are below those typical for their age and, for many, well below in their speaking, listening and social skills. A lively, stimulating environment, both indoors and within the recently improved outdoor environment, good teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants, and strong links with parents ensure that children get off to a good start. Adults make the most of every opportunity to help children to learn to get along well together, grow in confidence and behave well. As a result, by the time they start Year 1, children have progressed well, despite reaching standards below those expected for their age. Leadership and management are good. Staff communicate regularly and are clear about how well individual children are getting on. The information about the small day-to-day steps in children's progress is used well to ensure that activities help children to build on what they can already do. There remains scope, however, to use this information more robustly in order to identify where children's progress might be accelerated, and to pinpoint how the curriculum could be adjusted accordingly.

What the school should do to improve further

- Refine and strengthen tracking systems in order to monitor pupils' progress more closely.
- Improve achievement in writing in Years 3 to 6 and, in particular, for boys and the more able pupils.
- Ensure that marking consistently guides pupils in the next step in their learning.

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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?	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	2
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?	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

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

Thank you for the friendly welcome you all gave me when I visited your school recently. I really enjoyed my day with you and seeing you in some lessons, even if it was only for a short time. I promised the group of pupils I met that I would let you know what I thought. I am pleased to tell you that your school is a good school. You do well in lessons and in tests because you work hard and understand the importance of this for the future. I agree with you that your teachers and other adults make lessons interesting and fun and that, if you need help, you get it.

Your behaviour is excellent and I was impressed with how polite you were. You all benefit from the excellent care your teachers and support staff give to you and your families. You told me that you feel safe in school and that, if problems occur, an adult will sort it out quickly when you tell them about it. In very many ways you are given a super curriculum, and you have lots of opportunities to visit interesting places and to work with musicians and sports persons.

I have asked your teachers to do the following in order to help you do even better in your work:

- to check more often how well you are doing in your work
- to set work in writing lessons which is hard enough for you, particularly in Years 3 to 6
- to make sure that, when they mark your writing, they let you know what you need to do next to make your work better.

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