

St John Vianney Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104812
Local Authority	St Helens
Inspection number	308676
Inspection dates	14–15 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Clare Henderson

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	180
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Shelia Seddon
Headteacher	Mrs Margaret Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	5 July 1999
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Elton Head Road Sutton Heath St Helens Merseyside WA9 5BT

Age group	4–11
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Telephone number
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St John Vianney is a small school. The school serves an area of significant social and economic disadvantage. An average percentage of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The majority of pupils speak English as their first language. However, a small but increasing number are from minority ethnic groups. A few are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The number of pupils joining the school within the school year is higher than average. The school has a Reception class which forms its Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision. There is a private run pre-school group located in the school building which was not included in this inspection. The school is an Investor in People and has received the Basic Skills Quality Mark and Early Years Kitemark in recognition of its work. There have been three acting headteachers and a high level of staffing disruptions since the last inspection; the present headteacher became permanent in March 2008.

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 in which pupils achieve well. A key factor in its success is the inspirational leadership of the headteacher. She has been pivotal in stabilising and moving the school forward following a period of prolonged uncertainty and staffing disruptions. Parents overwhelmingly agree. A comment typical of them is, 'all our anxieties as parents and children have diminished'. This, accompanied by the strong principles held by all staff that every pupil's individual progress and enjoyment matter, enables the school to give pupils a good quality of care, support and guidance.

Achievement is good. Most pupils begin Year 1 working within levels expected for their age. Standards reached by pupils in the national tests in Years 2 and 6 in English, mathematics and science, in the years since the last inspection, have fluctuated. This variable picture corresponds to the general turbulence experienced because of disruption in staffing within the school during this time. However, provisional inspection evidence about standards in 2008 is more positive. In Year 6, pupils reached above national expectations for their age in English, mathematics and science and particularly so at the higher level attained by more able pupils. At the end of Year 2, pupils exceeded national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. These improvements, matched well with current standards, are attributable to the introduction of more frequent tracking of pupils' progress and renewed stability within the school. The good support which pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those from minority ethnic groups or at an early stage of learning English receive accounts for their good progress.

Pupils' personal development is good. A strong sense of well-being enables them to become confident learners, secure in the knowledge that their interests are valued. They learn about local and international communities through performing at local venues and fundraising for improvements, for example, for developments in a Tanzanian village. Consequently, they leave school as caring, mature and articulate young people, well prepared for the future. Pupils' enjoyment of learning is good because teaching is good and the activities provided by the creative and interesting curriculum meet their interests well. On some occasions, tasks set in lessons are not matched closely enough to enable average ability pupils to succeed as well as they could. Pupils are given challenging targets. However, inconsistencies in the quality of marking means that pupils are not always clear about how to improve their work.

Leadership and management are good. Governors contribute effectively to this process. Staff, under the strong leadership of the headteacher, have a clear understanding of how their defined roles and responsibilities benefit the whole school and all its pupils. However, subject leaders are not sufficiently involved in checking the quality of provision, and its subsequent impact on pupils' achievement, within their areas of responsibility. Accurate, though at times overly cautious, self-evaluation ensures that the school knows itself well. This contributes to its good capacity to improve further and it provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children start school with skills that are below those typical for their age and particularly low in terms of mathematical and writing skills, particularly linking letters to sounds. Good quality teaching ensures that children receive a good start to their education in a lively environment that encourages them to be independent and yet caring for one another. Daily sessions focusing

on letters and sounds help to boost their early reading and writing skills well. Leadership and management are good. Assessment information is used well in providing a range of learning opportunities within the classroom areas. However, although plans are in place, the outdoor area is not used well enough on a daily basis to extend the children's learning experiences across all areas of learning. There are good partnerships with parents, who appreciate the welcoming ethos and care their children receive. Links with the private run pre-school facility located in the school building are well developed and enable a smooth transition from Nursery to Reception. By the time children leave the EYFS and move into Year 1, most are working securely within the levels expected.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure activities in all lessons meet the learning needs of the average ability pupils.
- Ensure the quality of marking is consistent to enable all pupils to know what they need to do next to improve their work.
- Extend the role of subject leaders in checking the quality of provision within their subjects and its impact on pupils' achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Currently, most pupils in Year 1 to 6 are making good progress to reach challenging targets and are achieving above average standards in English, mathematics and science. This is as a result of rigorous tracking of pupils' progress and the introduction of initiatives to improve writing, thinking and investigative skills. In all year groups, extension work used to challenge pupils' learning is being particularly successful in raising attainment, particularly for more able pupils. Occasionally, some average pupils do not do as well as they could because work is not matched closely enough to their capabilities. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those from minority ethnic groups make the same good progress as their classmates, as a result of the well considered support they receive in lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils in the words of one say, 'it's brilliant here; everything is just so much fun'. Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. This is reflected in positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour. Their cultural diversity is effectively celebrated. For example, the recent Gypsy, Roma Traveller History month enabled pupils to develop respect and understanding of different traditions and beliefs of pupils within the school community. The school council is fully involved in decision making, having been involved in the appointment of the new headteacher and in choosing new playground equipment. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe, healthy and fit. They make healthy choices at lunchtime and enthusiastically take part in the many sporting activities on offer. In spite of the school's best effort in bringing about some improvement in attendance since the last inspection, it remains below average. This prevents this aspect from being outstanding.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Strong and harmonious relationships are a consistent strength of lessons. High expectations of what pupils can achieve lead to good levels of engagement in most activities. There is frequent use of paired work to develop pupils' skills in speaking and listening. When practice is outstanding, the pace of lessons is lively, questioning is particularly effective and makes pupils think more deeply about their learning and tasks are very challenging but tightly matched to pupils' abilities and, so, learning is rapid. Good assessment of pupils' work plays a successful part in making sure that work is generally set at the right level. However, on a few occasions, tasks are not suitably matched to the learning needs of average ability pupils. Consequently, progress is slowed. Teaching assistants are adept at showing pupils who find learning more difficult how to take small steps in their learning. As a result, they are fully involved in lessons and make good progress and thrive on their success.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is imaginative and carefully organised. Role play, music and creativity are strengths and have a positive impact on pupils' speaking and listening skills and promote their self-confidence well. A more focused approach to developing pupils' skills and knowledge through subjects linked in themes is now central to the school's planning. For example, as highlighted in the Gypsy, Roma Traveller project which helped pupils centre their learning within their own experiences. Information and communication technology (ICT) is firmly planned for throughout the curriculum and supports pupils' learning well. Pupils' learning is further enhanced through opportunities to learn Spanish. Activities outside the classroom such as trips and residential experiences enhance the curriculum, excite pupils and inspire them in their work. A large proportion of pupils eagerly participate in sports, the arts, crafts and other activities after school. The weakness in planning to meet the needs of the average attaining pupils prevents the curriculum from being outstanding.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils say they feel safe and secure within this calm and welcoming 'family' environment. They confidently say, for example, that bullying or racism, 'do not happen in our school', but if they did teachers would 'sort it out'. Skilful and committed teaching assistants give good support so that those pupils with additional learning needs are fully included in all activities. Good links with outside agencies provide extra specialist support as needed. Parents work very much in partnership with the school to support pupils' learning. Arrangements are in place to promote safeguarding, child protection, and health and safety. Progress is meticulously tracked and information helps identify those in need of extra support or challenge. Pupils know their targets, however, greater consistency in the quality of marking would help them all in gaining a clear understanding of the next steps in their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and senior leadership team provide a good blend of sensitivity and determination. All staff take good care of pupils and make a strong contribution to the smooth running of the school. They make sure that challenging targets have been used to raise standards, particularly since staffing has become more stable. However, the involvement of subject leaders in checking the quality of provision within their areas of responsibility is underdeveloped. Good partnerships with other schools and outside support agencies help the school with its work. The leadership team has a clear knowledge of the school's needs, has identified the correct priorities for improvement and set in place good action to achieve them. Governors contribute well to this process. Their clear understanding of the school's work and their support for the headteacher's high aspirations enable them to give the school good guidance and challenge.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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 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

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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**

Inspection of St John Vianney Catholic Primary School, St Helens, WA9 5BT

I would like to thank you very much for your help when we inspected your school. We enjoyed our visit very much and thoroughly enjoyed meeting you. Now I would like to share with you what the inspection found out about your school.

Yours is a good school, for instance:

- the staff take good care of you all and teach you well
- you are very happy with all that your headteacher has done to make yours a very happy school
- your attitude to lessons is good and it is clear that you enjoy school
- I was impressed with how well you are doing in mathematics and writing
- the school works well to make your learning exciting and interesting, for instance, in planning trips and special events
- the staff provide you with good opportunities to enjoy activities after school.

To make the school even better, for teachers:

- to make sure tasks in lessons match closely to your capabilities
- to let you know, when they mark your work, what you need to do next in order to improve further
- who are responsible for subjects to become more involved in checking on how well you are doing in your work.

Thank you for helping us so much with the inspection of your school. We hope that you will carry on working hard and help the teachers so that St John's can become an even better school.