

St Edmund's and St Thomas' Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104928
Local Authority	Sefton
Inspection number	308708
Inspection dates	21–22 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Mark Madeley

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	342
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Claire Newbury
Headteacher	Mrs Una Malcolm
Date of previous school inspection	12 January 2004
School address	Oxford Road Waterloo Liverpool Merseyside L22 8QF
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This larger than average and oversubscribed school takes most of its pupils from the immediate area, but approximately one quarter of them live further away. The area is a mix of owner-occupied and rented accommodation. Relatively few pupils are eligible for free school meals. Nearly all the pupils are of White British heritage. There are more boys than girls in most year groups, the exceptions to this being Years 1 and 2. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, though it is much higher in some years than others. For example, in Years 5 and 6 it is average. The school is now housed in one building after being in separate infant and junior buildings some distance apart for many years. The school was successful in gaining a Nursery class three years ago. Children start school in the term after their third birthday. The school has achieved Artsmark Gold, the Basic Skills Quality Mark and the 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: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. It ensures that pupils make good progress overall and also provides pupils with outstanding pastoral care and excellent academic guidance, through a system of learning targets and highly effective teachers' marking. Good management checks pupils' progress very thoroughly. However, teaching has not been monitored with the same rigour in the last year because the management emphasis was on a smooth transition to one school building. Senior managers are fully aware that this must be carried out in order to ensure that pupils make good progress in every key stage. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have improved markedly to above average and absence rates have decreased so that attendance is now above average. The move to a single school building was effectively managed, as was the rapid development of the Nursery into a centre of good practice. The governing body maintains a close overview of the school's work, in particular, the budget. These factors combine to demonstrate that the school has good capacity to improve further. The school gives good value for money.

Through the school pupils achieve well, though progress slows to satisfactory in Key Stage 1. Children start school with skills that are below average, especially in their language skills. Good provision in the Foundation Stage enables them to make rapid progress. They reach above average standards in all six areas of learning by the end of the Reception class but, despite good teaching, weaknesses remain in some aspects of language. Pupils' progress is satisfactory through Key Stage 1 because pupils are not challenged consistently by the tasks they are set. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics have declined for two years but recent effective action by senior managers has halted this trend. Current standards are average but could be higher if staff built more effectively on the good work of the Foundation Stage. Across Key Stage 2, pupils' progress accelerates because teaching is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. Standards are rising and are above average in English and mathematics.

The good curriculum focuses on skills which will help pupils in the future. It also promotes pupils' personal development very effectively. For example, there are many well attended sports clubs, which help them stay fit, and science lessons give them an excellent understanding of healthy foods and which things to avoid. A great variety of organisations reinforce the school's messages about personal safety. Pupils told inspectors that they felt very safe in school and demonstrated that they have an outstanding knowledge of how to stay safe in the wider world. In this and many other respects, the school makes exceptional use of outside agencies to promote pupils' well-being. The school council is very successful at making school a better place for pupils to work in. Additionally, French is taught effectively and through the 'Wider Opportunities Scheme', Year 4 pupils learn to play the violin. Parents support the school wholeheartedly.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children's skills on entry are below expectations because a growing proportion have weak language skills. For example, they know few nursery rhymes and traditional tales and have little awareness of the world around them. From this starting point, good provision in the Foundation Stage helps them make rapid progress and by the end of the Reception class they reach standards which are above average in all six areas of learning. Some aspects of language remain relatively weak, for example, children's grasp of letter sounds and this impacts on their learning in Key

Stage 1. Nursery provision is very effective in promoting children's self-confidence. They move freely between carefully planned and well resourced activities showing independence of thought and becoming more curious each day. Adults encourage children's spoken language and their self-sufficiency well. Letter sounds and mark making skills are taught systematically. Children also get opportunities to 'have a go' themselves, for example, during role play but boys rarely take them up and this holds back their learning. Careful thought is given to transition to the next class so as to make it as smooth for the children as possible.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in reading and writing in Key Stage 1.
- Implement the plans to monitor teaching and learning rigorously so as to ensure that pupils make good progress through the whole-school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils start Year 1 with above average standards across the six areas of learning but their knowledge of letter sounds is below average. Adequate teaching helps them make satisfactory progress through Key Stage 1. Current standards in reading, writing and mathematics are average, thus halting the downward trend of the last two years. The new programme for teaching letter sounds is already having a positive impact on pupils' reading and spelling skills. At the end of Key Stage 2, standards in English, mathematics and science are rising and are currently above average. Pupils make good progress from Years 3 to 6 because teaching is particularly challenging. End of Year 6 national test targets have been regularly exceeded, in 2007, by quite a wide margin. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress against the targets set for them. Those with a statement of special educational need make very good progress because their individual support is very skilled.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress in developing their personal skills and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils love their school and most of them really enjoy lessons. Above average attendance figures reflect this. Pupils' behaviour is usually good, and often exemplary, but sometimes slips, for example, when tasks are insufficiently challenging or when teachers' introductions go on for too long. Pupils help extensively in the local parishes and the wider community. They are very active fund-raisers and, in addition, they have a good understanding of African culture as their school is twinned with a school, St Raphael's, in Sierra Leone. They work well in class in pairs or groups and their relationships with adults in the school are very positive. Their views are sought by the school council and discussed. For example, they have planned the outside play area and suggested colour schemes for their toilets. There is an active buddy system and a group of 'helpers' do numerous jobs around the school, such as waiting on at lunchtime and monitoring the behaviour of younger pupils during break-time. Such experiences develop their moral and social awareness very well.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy most lessons because teachers make effective use of new technologies and the tasks set challenge them. Most lessons start with a lively question and answer session. This enables pupils to show what they recall. High quality teaching, seen in Years 5 and 6, goes further and asks pupils to explain their answers. This strategy develops language skills and extends learning. Most pupils know what to do because teachers explain tasks clearly, though, occasionally, this does take too long and some pupils' attention wanders. In Key Stage 1, pupils make satisfactory progress because too often all pupils do the same task, for example, in a mathematics lesson on block graphs all pupils collected the same data, drew the same graph and answered the same questions. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very effectively supported in class and in additional sessions by skilled teaching assistants and so make good progress. All pupils are encouraged to work cooperatively. In the best lessons pupils assess their own learning and teachers help them focus on their learning targets and broaden their vocabulary. Pupils know how to improve their work because teachers' high quality marking both praises and points the way forward.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum offers a wide range of learning opportunities for the pupils, which extends beyond the norm and includes instrument tuition, three residential visits and a huge range of very successful and well attended sports clubs. The new programmes for writing and learning letter sounds are yet to be fully established, though early signs are that they are having a positive impact on pupils' learning. Planning emphasises the need to learn transferable skills rather than just facts. This 'Learning Journey' programme promotes the use of pupils' basic skills very well. For example, pupils researched, using books and the Internet, the fall of Adolf Hitler in May 1945 and presented their findings making effective use of their computer skills. This approach also supports pupils' personal development and raises their self-esteem. A highly positive feature is the taking of Years 4, 5 and 6 on residential visits which allow pupils to sample adventurous activities and further develop their social skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support for all pupils. The school is a 'family community' in which all pupils feel safe and valued. There is good support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the parents of these pupils are kept fully informed of their additional provision. Transition arrangements are excellent, allowing pupils to approach moving to high school with confidence. The high school also offers additional programmes. For example, gifted and talented pupils attend extra classes. Attendance rates have improved because the school has effective procedures for checking absence. Pupils know their individual targets well and strive to reach them. Parents are delighted with the school. Their views are echoed by one parent who wrote, 'We are always made welcome at the school and feel that our views are highly valued – our children feel happy and secure.' Procedures for safeguarding pupils are in place and the necessary information disseminated to all staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is very capably led by the head and deputy headteacher, who form a highly effective team. All the parents who responded to the questionnaire praised their work highly. They have successfully managed the introduction of a Nursery class, which provides children with a very good start to their schooling, and the establishment of the school onto one site. In conjunction with middle managers, they have put in place a very effective system for checking pupils' progress. This system helps them to set challenging targets for both the pupils and their teachers. Whilst pupils' progress is checked at least twice a year, teaching is not currently checked frequently enough because senior managers were occupied with the 'move' and other projects. They have a suitable plan to improve the satisfactory teaching, particularly in Key Stage 1, so that pupils will make good progress throughout the school. The Foundation Stage is very effectively managed and the good provision is used as a model for other schools. Governors are fully supportive of the school and carry out their duties diligently. They have been very vigilant with the budget, which has been in deficit because of the high cost of maintaining two buildings.

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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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
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	2

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

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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of St Edmund's and St Thomas' Catholic Primary School, Liverpool, L22 8QF

Thank you for playing your part so well in our recent inspection. We were delighted to listen to your views, which you expressed so clearly. You and your parents told us that your school is a good one and we agree. Good teaching helps you make rapid progress in your learning. It also develops in you important personal skills like good manners, how to keep yourself safe and the ability to work very well with each other. You respond well to school, working hard and being attentive to your teachers - well done! We think that you have an excellent understanding of how to stay fit and healthy and what to do to stay safe in a wide range of situations. You are especially good at helping each other and helping people in the parish and across the world, like the school in Sierra Leone.

You told us that you especially enjoyed the many visits the school takes you on. We agree that this is a very strong aspect of the good curriculum. We think that Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6 all going on a residential visit each year is exceptional. Also, when we talked to you about improving your work we thought that your responses were excellent. This showed us that the school is doing an exceptional job in setting your learning targets and in teachers helpfully marking your books.

We have asked your school to do the following things which will improve learning.

- Improve children's reading and writing skills in Key Stage 1.
- Check teaching more regularly and improve it so that you make good progress through the whole-school.

You can play your part in making your school even better by continuing to attend regularly and by continuing to work hard towards your learning targets. We hope that you like this report on your school. You should be proud of all that your teachers, governors and parents have achieved so far. We wish you and the school well for the future.