

Ursuline Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104937
Local Authority	Sefton
Inspection number	308710
Inspection dates	29–30 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Marguerite McCloy HMI

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	397
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Orr
Headteacher	Mr Mark McQueen
Date of previous school inspection	10 January 2005
School address	Nicholas Road Liverpool Merseyside L23 6TT
Telephone number	0151 9241704
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Ursuline is a larger than average primary school, mainly serving the parish of St Joseph's in Blundellsands, between Liverpool and Southport. The majority of pupils are drawn from the school's immediate locality, which is an area of generally favourable social and economic circumstances. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are below average. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and none are in the early stages of learning English. Children enter the Reception classes from a number of local early years settings which provide pre-school education. The school has recently achieved the Activemark award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Ursuline Catholic Primary is an effective school which provides a good education for its pupils. Pupils achieve well and standards are above average overall. The school provides good value for money.

Results in the national end of Key Stage 2 tests in 2007 showed that the proportion of pupils reaching expected levels in English, mathematics and science was well above average. This was a very strong performance to bring the school back on track following disappointing results in 2006. A particular contributing factor was the significant improvement in science where a large proportion of pupils reached the highest level, Level 5. However, the number of pupils achieving the highest level in mathematics and English was just below average. Inspection evidence indicates that recent improvements are helping more pupils to make better than average progress. However, the school acknowledges that some higher-attaining pupils could achieve even more.

The school is committed to ensuring that every child achieves their full potential and a key contributing factor to pupils' good achievement is their excellent personal development. Pupils thoroughly enjoy being at school, they concentrate well in lessons and are keen to do their very best. A strong aspect of the school's provision is the attention given to developing pupils' social and emotional skills. As a consequence of the school's success, pupils develop as considerate, friendly and polite individuals who bring to life the school motto 'believe, trust, love'. They have a very good understanding of the contribution they can make to the welfare of others through a range of charitable activities. The school's emphasis on pupils learning to work together and their acquisition of the basic skills in English, mathematics, science, and the use of computers, prepares them well for their future lives. The curriculum is good overall; it meets the needs of the great majority of pupils well and is enhanced by a good range of enrichment activities.

The school has a very good ethos, strong in the celebration of pupils' developing personal skills, attitudes and values. The effectiveness of subject coordinators, a leadership and management improvement area from the last inspection, has been slow to develop and is only recently beginning to show signs of improvement. Where subject leadership is strong, coordinators have a good understanding of pupils' performance within the subject, and what should be done to bring about further improvement. However, this level of knowledge is not consistent and in some subjects, coordinators do not fulfil their role effectively. This in turn means that the information required for accurate school evaluation is not always available and managers cannot always provide evidence to show that their actions have led to measurable improvement. As a result, the overall quality of leadership and management and the school's capacity for further improvement are satisfactory rather than good.

Much teaching and learning is of good quality. However, it is judged satisfactory overall, because of inconsistencies in the way teachers challenge pupils of different abilities, set targets and use assessment information to adjust future lesson plans. Common strengths in lessons include the excellent relationships between adults and children. Care, guidance and support are consistently good. Pupils cope very well with the limitations of the school building and its many sets of steps.

The school and its pupils benefit from the good support and involvement of parents and carers, as reflected in the high number of pre-inspection questionnaires returned to the inspection

team. The majority of these were very positive and a typical view expressed by one parent was: 'My child is happy, confident and loves school. He is making good progress.'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage provides a lively and stimulating learning 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. Practitioners 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, the skills of most children are above those expected at this age. Progress overall is good and the Foundation Stage is well led. Staff communicate with each other regularly and are clear about how well individual children are getting on. Staff use the information they record about the small day-to-day steps in children's progress well in order to ensure that learning 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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that learning activities are more consistently well matched to pupils' individual needs, particularly the higher attainers.
- Improve the quality and effectiveness of assessment and academic guidance so that pupils are better able to improve their work to meet or exceed their individual targets.
- Develop leadership and management skills so that all managers and coordinators are able to bring about improvement through rigorous monitoring and evaluation of performance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children enter the Reception classes with broadly average skills and particular strengths in personal and social development. They make good progress in the Foundation Stage so that by the time children enter Year 1 a significant proportion have met or are exceeding the level typical for their age in the majority of the early learning goals.

Standards reached in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 1 have been above average for the last five years. However, the gap between the school's results and those reached typically in other schools has gradually narrowed. In fact, the Year 2 assessment results in 2007 were just in line with the national average. A smaller than average number of pupils exceeded the expected levels, particularly in mathematics and writing. Work seen in lessons indicates that the pace of improvement is increasing and current Year 2 pupils are making good progress to reach above average standards.

Standards in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 2 have been above average for a number of years. This pattern was interrupted by a significant dip in 2006, when results were below average overall and well below in mathematics. The school's strenuous efforts to remedy this led to the much improved results in 2007. The school is aware of the variability of progress between subjects and groups of pupils. As a result, a number of strategies have been put into place and the impact of these is beginning to show in the good achievement and standards evident in most pupils' current work. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or

disabilities make similarly good progress to their peers, particularly in their social and emotional development. Higher attaining pupils reach high standards, although there is scope to provide further challenge for some pupils to ensure they fully reach their potential.

The school has set challenging targets for pupils' attainment in the 2008 Key Stage 2 tests. The target for the proportion of pupils achieving the highest level in English and mathematics may be a little too challenging. Nevertheless, evidence in recent assessments and the standard of pupils' work in class indicate that they are on track to achieve the school's overall targets, which will represent good progress based on pupils' previous attainment.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Pupils speak with pride about their school. The playground is a hive of activity with children of different ages playing very happily together. School assemblies and lessons ensure that pupils develop clear views on moral issues; for example, they understand why racism and bullying are unacceptable. They enjoy the school's 'Ursuline Forest' because it helps them to understand ecological issues and how they can contribute to safeguarding the environment. Pupils also have a good awareness of major world faiths and cultures. The school council has a positive impact on school life; it was instrumental in developing the school's code of conduct, working alongside staff and governors. As a result, pupils have a strong sense of ownership of the code and draw on its values to guide their actions both inside and outside school.

Pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning in lessons are excellent. They attend regularly because they feel safe and are happy with all the school provides for them. Many are eager to take part in sport and extra-curricular activities. Pupils make positive choices to lead a healthy lifestyle; for example, by walking to school whenever possible. Links with the local Catholic high school are well developed; consequently pupils are prepared very well for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teachers enjoy excellent relationships with pupils. They have a secure knowledge of the subjects they teach. Plans identify links between subjects where learning can be made more meaningful for pupils. Support staff make an effective contribution to lessons and help pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make good progress.

Learning is good when lessons are lively, well focused and taught at a brisk pace. In these lessons teachers engage pupils' interest and explain exactly what they are expected to learn. The effective use of short-term targets for the quality of work expected, as seen for example in a Year 3 class, results in pupils of different abilities working really hard and achieving particularly well. When pupils' learning is no better than satisfactory, it is because planning does not always identify learning activities that closely match the needs of all learners, particularly for more able pupils. Learning is not always checked rigorously enough to ensure all groups of pupils make the progress they could. In these cases the pupils' next steps in learning are not effectively planned for. Teachers are beginning to understand and make better

use of the school's new tracking system to contribute to assessment and target setting, although this is not yet consistent in all classes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Effective provision for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities helps them to make good progress. Provision for personal and social education is a very strong feature of the curriculum. It gives pupils opportunities to work together, to reflect, and to express their feelings. Learning is enriched by themed weeks, visits from musicians and artists and trips to museums and places in the locality. For example, pupils participated enthusiastically in the Year 2/3 transition work when exciting links were made between art, drama and literacy to enrich pupils' experiences and skills. The wide range of extra-curricular activities provided during and after the school day, such as for the arts, sport, Spanish up to Year 5 and French in Year 6, thoroughly capture pupils' interests and fosters enjoyment. Effective links with local high schools and community partners help the school to provide additional activities which increasingly give pupils wider learning opportunities.

Since its last inspection, the school has improved its provision and planning for multicultural education, recognising the importance of this when the majority of pupils are of White British heritage. This enables pupils to develop a good knowledge and understanding of other faiths and cultures, enhancing their already positive views on the benefits of tolerance and harmony in society.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The outstanding relationships between staff and pupils underpin the school's excellent level of care and support. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe and to deal with difficult situations. Parents are confident that their children are safe at school and most are happy with the progress they make. Procedures for child protection, risk assessment and health and safety are in place and are effective in identifying and dealing with any concerns. There are effective systems for monitoring absences and promoting good attendance and punctuality. The school maintains very good links with outside agencies which contribute positively to the level of care provided. Examples of this include a programme for children experiencing bereavement and close links with the before-and after-school provision on the site to support working parents.

Academic guidance is satisfactory overall. Recent developments in the assessment of writing give clear direction as to what pupils need to do next to improve and their progress is tracked well. Similar procedures are being developed in other subjects where academic guidance is not clear enough and assessment information is not used effectively. This is identified as an action point in the school improvement plan. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported effectively.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school has a good ethos. The headteacher articulates a strong belief in the importance of developing pupils' personal skills, attitudes and values, and this view is fully shared by staff,

governors and parents. Ursuline is recognised as a leading practice school for its work in promoting cooperative learning and children's emotional intelligence.

The school has a detailed improvement plan in place, although aspects of this are so complex that not all staff and governors have full understanding and ownership of it. There are strengths in the effectiveness with which Ursuline's mission statement is communicated to pupils and parents and reflected in the work of the school, particularly in its 'family atmosphere' and high levels of care and concern. The school's action plans lack clear timescales of how and when intended actions are to be completed. It is not made clear when targets will be monitored and reviewed. Not all subject coordinators can demonstrate the impact of their actions on improving outcomes for pupils. The headteacher is taking a lead in developing the use of the school's performance tracking system to set more challenging targets for pupils. The management recognises that this process is not yet fully understood by all staff and it is taking action to improve consistency in its use.

The majority of parents who returned the inspection questionnaires hold very positive views on what the school provides for their children. A smaller number expressed a range of views about areas which concern them, including: homework arrangements and marking; variations in the progress of different year groups; the use of 'golden time'; and whether pupils with dyslexic tendencies receive sufficient advice and support. Most agree that there are effective avenues of communication to discuss any concerns with the headteacher, and the school tries to ensure that their views are responded to and taken into account.

Governors are supportive and well informed. They hold the school to account; for example, when considering key issues regarding financial management and staffing deployment. Governors are generally aware of the school's strengths and areas for development, although not sufficiently rigorous in challenging variability in the effectiveness of some aspects of the school's work.

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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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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	2
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	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 the learners' needs?	3
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?	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	2
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 Ursuline Catholic Primary School, Liverpool, L23 6TT

As you know, inspectors visited your school recently. We enjoyed joining your lessons and were very interested to hear about all the things you do and what you think about your school. We agree with you that Ursuline is a good school, and these are some of the particular strengths we found:

- you really enjoy school and reach good standards in your work
- your behaviour, attitudes and personal development are excellent so you get on very well with each other and with the adults
- all the adults in school care for you very well
- the good curriculum provides you with a range of interesting trips, visits and visitors
- the school motto 'believe, trust, love' comes to life at Ursuline!

To help make the school even better, we have made the following suggestions for improvement to the headteacher and governors:

- improve teaching and learning so that all lessons are good or better
- set clear targets for each of you and make sure that you know exactly what you have to do to improve your work
- improve the way leaders and managers check on the school's work and take action to make things better.