

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Wallasey

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105073
Local Authority	Wirral
Inspection number	308757
Inspection dates	25–26 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael McIlroy 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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	238
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs E Allman
Headteacher	Mrs R Blakemore
Date of previous school inspection	6 March 2006
School address	Wheatland Lane Wallasey Merseyside CH44 7ED
Telephone number	0151 638 3919
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Introduction

The school was inspected by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school is of average size and serves a community of high deprivation. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is more than three times the average. Most pupils are of White British heritage and few speak English as a second language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average.

The school holds the Activemark Award 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: 3

This is a satisfactory school with a number of good features. In March 2006, the school was placed in special measures and asked to improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to raise achievement and standards in English, mathematics and science. It was also asked to improve leadership and management so that the school had clear direction, and to improve monitoring to ensure that staff were made accountable at all levels for standards and performance. In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. It is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils.

Key to the school's steady improvement has been the sound, stable and very determined leadership of the headteacher and deputy. Together they have given the school the clear direction that it needed in order to improve. It is now firmly focused on raising standards. Expectations of what pupils and staff can achieve are high. Regular monitoring of teaching and of pupils' progress and the leadership's firm resolve to tackle underperformance have greatly increased the accountability of staff.

Standards are average and pupils achievement is satisfactory. In 2007, results in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science rose sharply and were average overall. Assessment data provided by the school and inspection evidence suggest that this trend has been sustained. The progress pupils make in their learning is good in some classes in Key Stage 2 and satisfactory in others. This is partly due to inconsistencies in provision for pupils caused by some staff absence. Nevertheless, the leadership team has worked hard to ensure that any temporary teaching arrangements made for pupils are satisfactory or better. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1. Overall standards have risen since the previous inspection. However, they remain well below average in reading and writing, partly because of the weak language skills with which pupils enter school. In the Foundation Stage, pupils make adequate progress. There is scope to improve how resources in this key stage, including additional adults, are deployed.

The quality of teaching has been strengthened by extensive training, the tackling of weaknesses and new appointments. Teaching is now satisfactory and some of it is good. The appropriate focus of the satisfactory curriculum on the core subjects has contributed to the rise in standards. The consistent and good academic guidance pupils receive has also played a major role in raising standards. The effective 'tickled pink and room to grow' marking scheme, liked and easily understood by pupils, clearly informs them of how well they are doing in their work and what the next steps are that they must take to improve. Pupils are also well supported in their learning. Consequently, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The care pupils receive is satisfactory.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. They enjoy school, including the wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities on offer. They make a good contribution to the local and wider community. However, attendance is well below average despite the best efforts of the school. Behaviour is satisfactory. Pupils play safely and sensibly in the playground but occasionally in class some become distracted and their behaviour slips, especially when they are not fully challenged. Some pupils expressed concerns about bullying. The school has recently taken appropriate measures to tackle this.

Leadership and management, including subject leadership and governance, are satisfactory. Most parents who returned questionnaires are very supportive of the school's work but a few

echoed pupils' concerns about behaviour. Other parents who were spoken to during the inspection were confident that the school addresses this issue promptly if it arises. Given the sustained trend of rising standards at Key Stage 2, the clear direction provided by its stable and resolute leadership and the much greater accountability of staff, the school now provides adequate value for money and has satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children enter the Nursery with levels of knowledge, understanding and communication skills that are below, and sometimes well below, those expected for most children of their age. A key emphasis in the Foundation Stage is to ensure children settle well and enjoy school and this is achieved successfully. Parents appreciate the care that is provided. Pupils enjoy their time in the Foundation Stage. Topics for learning are suitably related to pupils' experiences, as was seen in one lesson where pupils enthusiastically played in the travel agent's office to 'prepare' for a holiday in Spain. Another key focus is the development of pupils' weak speaking and listening skills. Teaching is satisfactory. Planning is adequate but does not always provide enough detail on how resources will be used. Pupils make satisfactory progress during their time in the key stage and some leave the Reception class working at the early learning goals expected for children of their age. Teachers know their pupils well and track the progress they make in the key areas of learning satisfactorily. Separate learning areas, such as the writing area, allow pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils have access to a recently developed attractive outdoors area, but there is no separate covered outdoor area for children to learn and explore in. Leadership and management of the key stage are satisfactory. There is scope to improve the management of the considerable number of additional adults, volunteers and young people who help in the Foundation Stage, as at times this can cause confusion for pupils and slow the progress they make in their learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, particularly in reading and writing in Key Stage 1.
- Improve measures for dealing with short-term staff absence so that the progress pupils make is consistent.
- Improve the management of staff and volunteers in the Foundation Stage.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are broadly average. In Key Stage 2, overall standards rose sharply in 2007 and were just below average. Results improved strongly in all three core subjects. The greatest improvement was in English where results were above average. Those in science were average but those in mathematics, whilst improved, remained well below average. Assessment data provided by the school suggest that this improvement has been maintained and that results in mathematics are also set to improve further. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well. In Key Stage 2, the progress made by pupils is good where teaching is good and where there is carefully targeted support for those who have fallen behind

in their learning. However, this good progress is not evident in all classes in this key stage, partly because of the discontinuity in staffing.

In Key Stage 1, good teaching and targeted support enable pupils to make good progress. In 2007, standards rose but were nonetheless well below average, on account of pupils' low starting point and weaknesses in their language skills. Standards in mathematics were just below average but those in reading and writing were well below average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory with a number of good features. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and reflects the school's strong Roman Catholic ethos. The school has rectified weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection in relation to pupils' preparation for living in a multicultural world. Pupils now are well prepared to appreciate and understand the feelings and cultures of different ethnic groups and religions. Pupils enjoy school and their behaviour is satisfactory in lessons and around the school. Learners' knowledge of how to keep safe and healthy is good. They make a good, positive contribution to the school, parish community and beyond. For example, pupils raise funds for international charities. A firmly established school council has had a major impact on improving the school's resources. Councillors proposed the football cage, climbing frame and stage in the playground, new seating for the dinner hall and equipment for physical education. The pupils' preparation for the world of work is satisfactory and is strongly enhanced by their involvement in an enterprise project. With the help of the home-school development worker, each class had the opportunity of doubling a starter gift of five pounds by making and selling a product or devising a scheme to increase their gift. Pupils stated that they are occasionally disturbed by bullying in and around school and that they did not always feel that this was dealt with sufficiently. The school is addressing this issue and has recently put into place an anti-bully scheme - 'Bully Busters' - whereby pupils check and report on any anti-social behaviour in the playground. Attendance is well below average, although it is improving slowly, following a concerted effort by the school and the local authority.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and some of it is good. In all classes, there are good relationships between pupils and adults. Pupils unanimously confirm that teachers are always ready to help. Resources, including interactive whiteboards, are used well. Teaching assistants provide good support for lower attaining pupils and for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teachers involve pupils well in assessing how well they have understood what they are learning and in setting targets for what to achieve next. The good marking in pupils' books bears witness to this. The pace of learning in lessons is satisfactory and time is generally used well. Harder work is set for the higher attaining pupils but some of this could be more challenging. Planning is adequate but does not always indicate well enough how additional adults are to be deployed. When asked, pupils work well collaboratively in pairs or small groups and this strongly supports their personal development. Occasionally, the attention of some pupils wanders which slows down their progress. In more effective lessons, the pace of both teaching and learning is fast and work challenges pupils of all abilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory with some good features. It is broad and balanced and focuses appropriately and firmly on the core subjects. There are satisfactory opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in information and communication technology. Some opportunities exist for pupils to learn French. There is a good range of intervention strategies, which contribute to the good progress made by pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. More able pupils have a number of opportunities to take part in challenging activities at local high schools. The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of clubs and extra-curricular activities, such as the gardening, judo, street-dancing and basketball clubs. There is also a popular Dr Who club. These activities contribute strongly to pupils' enjoyment of school. Visitors to the school include members of a local football club. There is a range of visits to places of interest such as Croxteth Hall, Chester Zoo and the local libraries and seashore. Educational visits, such as the residential trip undertaken by pupils in Year 5 each year, assist pupils' social and cultural development. Each year, Year 6 pupils journey to London to visit the House of Commons and to meet with a well known former politician and broadcaster who has longstanding links with the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The care, guidance and support for pupils are satisfactory with some good features. Support for pupils is good. There are strong links with external agencies. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who have fallen behind in their learning are well supported by teaching assistants. The strong links that exist with a local high school provide good support for older pupils in preparation for the next stage of their education. Pupils receive good guidance on how to stay safe and on growing up. The academic guidance pupils receive is also good. They know their targets and the 'tickled pink and room to grow' colour-coded system of marking ensures that pupils know not only how well they have completed their work but also the next steps to take to improve it. The care provided for pupils is satisfactory. In addition to classroom staff, volunteers and non-teaching staff play a significant role in supporting relationships with pupils and parents. There is a breakfast club for pupils and several 'walking buses' bring up to 70 pupils to school safely. Arrangements for the protection and safeguarding of pupils are in place. However, more care needs to be taken to prevent accidents being caused by broken playground furniture.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since the inspection in March 2006, a new headteacher and deputy have been appointed. Their sound leadership has brought about the school's steady improvement and their unyielding determination to improve standards is widely shared by staff. Issues from the last inspection have been addressed well. Expectations are made clear and are high. Communications within the school have been strongly improved. Frequent meetings and briefings ensure that all staff, including temporary teachers, know about improvement initiatives. Consequently, the school now has clear direction.

The accountability of staff has been greatly increased. Weaknesses in teaching have been tackled. Clear job descriptions and the good use of academic targets ensure that all know what

is expected of them. Performance management procedures for all classroom staff are in place. These are usefully linked to raising pupils' attainment. Regular meetings are held between the headteacher and teachers to check on the progress made by individual pupils. Extensive training has contributed to improvements in teaching. The monitoring of teaching and learning is now well established, although some of the school's assessments of the quality of teaching are too generous. Good testing, assessment and tracking measures have been developed. The school now has a good overview of how well pupils are progressing. This information is well used to identify and target underachievement. This data also inform the school's self-evaluation procedures and, although broadly accurate, some assessments of the school's effectiveness are overgenerous. The combination of better teaching, targeted support for pupils and the leadership's determination to raise standards enabled the school to exceed most of its challenging targets last year.

Subject leadership is satisfactory. Leaders of curriculum areas have been trained in their role and this helps them to contribute to the school's improvement plan. Some are involved in checking teaching and learning in their subject and are beginning to make an impact on raising standards. Parents are kept informed of developments in school through regular newsletters. Most parents who returned questionnaires for inspectors strongly support the work of the school but a few have concerns over bullying. Governance is satisfactory. Finances are carefully administered. Governors are informed about the work of the school through a variety of means, such as studying school performance data, and are providing more challenge to the school. They continue to grow into their role as critical friends to the school.

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?	3
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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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?	3
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
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	4
The behaviour of learners	3
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	3

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?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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	2
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	3
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 St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Wallasey, Merseyside, CH44 7ED

Thank you for being so polite and helpful when we inspected your school recently. We are writing to tell you what we found. As you know, your school was placed in special measures over two years ago because it was not doing well enough. It has improved and is now a satisfactory school. Some of the best things which we saw were:

- you enjoy school and like the wide range of clubs and extra-curricular activities that are on offer
- you make a good contribution to both the local and worldwide communities
- you understand well how to keep safe and healthy
- the teachers, and other adults, support you well in your learning
- you receive good guidance about how to improve your work. The 'tickled pink and room to grow' system for marking really helps you.

We have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to make a number of further changes in order to make things better for you at school. We have asked the school to help you learn more, especially in reading and writing for those of you in Key Stage 1. We have also asked the school to improve how it organises the large number of people who work and help in the Foundation Stage. Finally, we have asked the school to do more to make sure that you do not lose out in your learning if teachers are absent.

Once again, many thanks for being so helpful and polite when we visited your school recently.