

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Birkenhead

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105092
Local Authority	Wirral
Inspection number	308764
Inspection date	20 May 2008
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	459
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Annette Roberts, JP
Headteacher	Mr S Dainty
Date of previous school inspection	26 April 2004
School address	Woodchurch Road Prenton Merseyside CH43 5UT
Telephone number	0151 6526781
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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: the impact of the school's management; the teachers' work on pupils' current progress and standards, and on their personal development and well-being. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation; national published assessment data and the school's records of pupils' progress; lesson observations; interviews with staff, pupils and the chair of the governing body; the school's policy documents; and parent's questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work 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 is much larger than the average primary school. It serves two local parishes. About one third of pupils come from Oxton with the other two thirds coming from the less advantaged areas of Birkenhead, Prenton, Claughton and Tranmere. Ninety five percent of the pupils are of White British heritage. The numbers of pupils from minority ethnic heritages are relatively small but are growing. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is average, though the number of pupils actually taking their entitlement is below average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average.

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 which enables all of its pupils to achieve well. It also gives them exceptional care, guidance and support. As a consequence, pupils are happy at school, work hard for their teachers and make good progress in their learning. They, and their parents, are confident that they are being kept safe and well as the required safeguarding procedures are in place. Particular strengths of the outstanding academic support the pupils receive are the quality of marking in English which praises as well as explaining to pupils how they can improve further, also, the very effective use made of individual targets for pupils which they say, 'helps us know what to do to reach the next level'.

Overall, most children start school with skills which are in line with those typical for their age. Effective provision helps them make good progress in the Foundation Stage. By the start of Year 1 their attainment in the six areas of learning is higher than would be expected for their age. Through Years 1 to 6, pupils make good progress because the quality of teaching and the curriculum are good. Sessions are well planned to meet the needs of all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils are asked consistently to explain their answers and this helps consolidate their learning. Particularly effective use is made of visits, artefacts and food tasting sessions, for example, to help pupils understand what life was like in the past. The pupils confidently use their computer skills in a wide range of subjects. By Year 6, standards in English, mathematics and science are above average. These high standards have been maintained for five years.

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. They behave well in class, are keen to learn and work well in groups. They have a good understanding of their own culture. However, an awareness of the multicultural nature of British society is not quite so strong, particularly at a time when more pupils of minority ethnic heritage are being admitted to the school. The school council is very effective in making the school a better place for all. The work of the eco-committee, play leaders and those who help at the 'buddy bus stop' is outstanding. Also outstanding are the very strong links with the parishes and the work the pupils do for charitable causes. The school makes good use of visitors and sports coaches to help pupils understand how to stay safe and to keep fit and well. The pupil uptake for the extensive range of sports clubs is high. Additional music provision is good; pupils take part in the choir, including performing outside of school. Many pupils take up the opportunity to learn an instrument. The new drumming classes for Year 6 are extremely popular and the school regularly puts on plays and musicals.

Under the good leadership of the headteacher the school has improved significantly since the last inspection, especially the Foundation Stage provision. Good management by all staff with responsibilities results in effective teamwork. For example, Key Stage 2 staff, led by the assessment team, identified the need to improve standards in science; they are being successful in this, particularly for the more able pupils. The quality of teaching is good and is improving because senior staff check on it regularly. Where necessary, effective support and additional training are given to staff. The school has high expectations of all pupils. Their progress is checked rigorously and the information gathered is used exceptionally well. Particular strengths are the demanding targets set for Year 6 pupils and the early identification of pupils who need further challenge or additional support. Continuous improvements made to the school, plus the astute forward planning, indicate that the school has good capacity to improve further.

Good governance ensures that the school's management is held to account and that the relatively low level of finances are used to best effect. The school gives good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good provision in the Foundation Stage helps children achieve well. Children quickly learn the routines of the Foundation Stage 1 class because induction procedures are comprehensive. They engage in many exciting play activities which encourage them to make choices and to stay with tasks for increasing lengths of time. Input by all staff is of good quality so that children extend their language and social skills. Number is taught exceptionally well with children able to count and identify numerals to ten. In the Foundation Stage 2 class, the day is well planned. Activities in the classroom give children good opportunities to develop their independence and extend their concentration. Staff are often found joining in with children's games so as to improve children's language skills. Children make very good progress in acquiring knowledge of letters sounds and of early writing skills. The outdoor area is not as well developed as that for the Foundation Stage 1 class and presents fewer challenges. The Foundation Stage team, capably led by the manager, has been successful in making significant improvements to provision since the last inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the outdoor learning environment in the Foundation Stage 2 classes so that it is as challenging to children's learning as their classrooms.
- Promote pupils' awareness of the multicultural nature of British society further.

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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	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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
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	1
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**

Inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Birkenhead, Prenton, CH43 5UT

I enjoyed my recent inspection of your school because you made me so welcome. You spoke confidently when sharing your views of the school with me. I agree with you that yours is a good school. It helps you make good progress in English, mathematics and science and reach standards by the end of Key Stage 2 which are above average. The school has a good team of staff who make sure that learning is interesting. They also take you on a wide range of visits, like the Year 6 trip to North Wales, and help you stay fit and healthy through the many extra sports clubs. The school is well led and managed by your headteacher and his senior managers.

The school also helps you mature as individuals and learn to help each other. You told me that you really enjoyed school because the teachers are helpful to you. I thought the way that older pupils help everyone in school was especially impressive. You behave well and I saw some good cooperation in lessons, for example, groups in a Year 3 class wrote an imaginative description of a character from a story. The school brings in people to talk to you so that you know how to keep safe.

Your headteacher and his staff have brought about significant improvement since the last inspection. I have asked him to do two things which will make the school an even better place in which to learn:

- improve the use made of the outdoor area in the Foundation Stage 2 classes
- make sure that you know more about the broad range of cultures of people living in Britain today.

You can help your school to improve further by continuing to be kind and helpful to each other and by continuing to work hard towards your learning targets.

Thank you very much for all your help during the inspection. I wish you and the school well for the future.