

St Agnes C of E Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105700
Local Authority	Oldham
Inspection number	308924
Inspection dates	25–26 June 2008
Reporting inspector	John Ashton

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	101
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Miss T Fuller
Headteacher	Mrs J Saggerson
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2004
School address	Knolls Lane Lees Oldham Lancashire OL4 5RU
Telephone number	0161 6248392
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The school was inspected by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Agnes is a below average sized primary school on a very compact site in a rural area on the Eastern edge of Oldham. It draws its pupils from a range of social and economic backgrounds. A broadly average proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals. An average proportion has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most pupils are White British but one in eight are from minority ethnic groups, largely of Caribbean, African and Asian heritage. There are no pupils at an early stage of learning English. The school holds many awards, including Investors in People, Healthy Schools, Platinum Tooth and Environmental awards. Staffing is more settled now after a number of changes in recent years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Agnes Primary provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. It is effective in many respects and has a lot of good features. Chief amongst these are the good quality curriculum and outstanding care, support and guidance its pupils receive, which are reflected in their good personal development and well-being.

Standards, usually average or above average by the end of each key stage, fell in 2007 to below average overall, especially in science. Pupils' overall achievement was lower than expected, particularly that of girls. Currently, standards are broadly average and pupil's achievement is satisfactory.

There are strengths but some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning across the school. The teaching of mathematics is stronger than science. In science, too much is task and worksheet based, too little of it investigative. The teaching of English is much improved, reflecting the school's hard work in this area recently. However, the quality of the marking of pupils' work is not as good as it should be. The comments do not inform pupils often enough why a piece of work is good or what is needed for improvement, and they sometimes praise work solely for its neatness rather than the quality of the thinking that went into it.

Parents are very supportive of the school. Pastoral care is a significant strength. The pupils feel very safe and secure. The curriculum they receive is good, especially in its stress on the use of computers across the curriculum. Pupils have an increasingly good awareness of healthy living. Their behaviour and their attitudes to learning are good. Pupils support and help each other and the community very well and are well prepared for the next stage of their education, particularly in their information and communication (ICT) skills.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The leadership of the headteacher is good. Her efforts over the years have brought about substantial improvements in the fabric, organisation and equipping of the school. Governors are increasingly involved in supporting but also challenging the school. They are also more involved in strategic planning than at the time of the last inspection.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the school with a wide range of pre-school experiences and widely differing skills but generally similar to those expected for children of this age. They get off to a flying start in the Reception class because of the good quality of teaching and excellent provision (small numbers of children, very good support from support assistants and very well used equipment such as laptop computers). Consequently, the children make good progress and achieve the skills expected by the start of Year 1. The children are very well cared for. They learn in a safe environment with adequate provision for outdoor play. There is a good balance between the activities which children initiate themselves and those which the adults lead. Assessment of children's progress and the subsequent record keeping is a significant strength. It is very well organised and peppered with masses of visual evidence.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement overall but especially in science.
- Improve the consistency of teaching and learning.

- Ensure that teachers' marking of pupils' work gives clear pointers for improvement.

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

After a very good start in the Reception class, most pupils make steady progress throughout the rest of their time at the school, reaching broadly average standards by the end of Year 2 and Year 6. However, at the end of both key stages, there was a dip in results in 2007 from above average to below average overall, except in mathematics where they dipped to average. The reasons for this included numerous staffing discontinuities and the effects of substantial building work on the very small site. The consequent drop in expected achievement was particularly noticeable in some girls' results in Year 6. It was most apparent in science.

Current standards indicate that this decline has been halted in English. Improved results are expected this year, as shown in this year's teacher assessments. The school took prompt action, for example, by improving its tracking of pupils' progress and early identification of pupils in danger of underachieving. It also grouped pupils more carefully in Years 5 and 6, based upon their preferred learning styles. Minority ethnic pupils and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make as much progress as the other pupils, due to the good support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The atmosphere around school is one of enjoyment, interest and hard work. This is reflected in the above average attendance figures. Typical comments from pupils include that they like the school because they don't have to just sit and listen in lessons. They feel safe and well cared for. Behaviour is very good. Attitudes to learning are more positive than they were reported to be last year. Social, moral, spiritual, and cultural development is a strength. This is partly due to the school's strong Christian ethos but also because of the school's drive to broaden its pupils' experience with modern foreign languages and with international contacts, in Spain and more recently Pakistan. Relationships are very good. Pupils relate well to one another and to adults and they have a good sense of right and wrong. The Healthy Schools and Platinum tooth awards reflect pupils' success in their pursuit of a healthier lifestyle. The buddy system has helped pupils to avoid problems at playtimes. Older pupils are particularly good at helping younger ones to; for example, listen well to each other in class. This is one of the key advantages of having mixed age classes. Pupils are well prepared to develop workplace and other skills, not only through acquiring basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT, but also through the emphasis placed on decision making and working together in pairs and groups.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Classroom organisation is mostly good. The support in class for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is particularly good. Lessons are carefully planned with clear learning objectives. Teaching assistants are used effectively. Pupils know exactly what is expected of

them in every session. Some good use of drama was seen to improve pupils' oral and listening skills as well as their self-confidence. There is some especially good use of ICT by both teachers and pupils to enliven the learning of other subjects. Occasionally, the pace of some parts of a lesson is slower than it should be, due to time limits not being given often enough. Changes in staffing over a short period of time have had an effect upon continuity of pupil experience, with a consequent effect upon their achievement, in science more than in English and mathematics. The marking of pupils' work is conscientiously carried out on the whole but it sometimes focuses on praise rather than clearly explaining what is needed for improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's curriculum is rich, broad and well balanced. Its significant strengths include the extensive use of visits and visitors to bringing learning to life. Of particular note also is the good use of the excellent computer equipment by pupils to both challenge and extend learning. All pupils have been learning Spanish, Years 2 and 6 are learning French. The breadth and range of extra-curricular activities that such a small school provides is especially good. The mostly well planned activities cater well for pupils' different stages of development and individual needs. This latter is backed up in Years 5 and 6 by good use of pupils' preferred learning styles in order to help match work to their particular needs. Activities in science are not always sufficiently focused on developing pupils' investigative skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides a very warm and caring environment which is greatly appreciated by parents. The way the school cares for the pupils is outstanding and a significant strength of its work. Safeguarding arrangements meet current guidelines. There have been no reported incidents of bullying or racism this academic year and no exclusions. 'Bullying is very rare here', say the pupils, 'and it is quickly sorted'. The school works very hard to integrate pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Parents are extremely well informed of their children's progress and appreciate the way that they are fully involved by the school in their children's education. The monitoring of pupils' academic progress has improved since the last inspection and is now good. This is being used well to ensure all pupils do as well as they should.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

There are strengths in the leadership and management. Chief amongst these are the stamina and determination of the headteacher, who has gradually and progressively improved the fabric and facilities of the school over the years. Her enterprise and skills have also brought about exceptionally good ICT provision in the school. Just as in every other small school, each member of staff necessarily has many leadership and coordinating roles. The teamwork at St Agnes is good. Staff are enthused, and have opportunities to develop their interests and use their initiative. School self-evaluation is accurate and realistic on the whole, but a little generous in judging pupils' achievement. School development planning is well organised and corporate and is bringing about noticeable improvements in pupils' writing and speaking and listening skills, but less so on improving achievement in science, the area where standards dipped the most last year.

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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?	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	2
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	3

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	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?	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?	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	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	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

Thank you for making me so welcome on my recent visit to your school. I was impressed by how hard you all were working, how well behaved you were and how thoroughly absorbed you were in your lessons.

A very special thank you should go to the lively group of children who gave up part of their lunchtime to talk to me about why they are so happy at St Agnes School.

I agree with you and your parents that St Agnes gives you a satisfactory education in many ways, a flying start in the Reception class, and the knowledge and skills to enable you to make steady progress throughout the rest of the school, particularly in mathematics and, increasingly, in writing and speaking and listening.

I know that you feel safe in school, that you are very well looked after and your lessons are full of interesting activities that both interest and challenge you in all kinds of ways. I liked how the older pupils look after and guide the younger ones when they need it. I was impressed also with the ease with which you make good use of those magnificent computers the school is blessed with.

I have asked your headteacher to make sure that you improve all your work and especially your science work, to make it as challenging as some of the work I saw you doing in mathematics. I'd especially like you to do more investigations to develop your interest in the subject. I have also asked your teachers to make sure your lessons get better and better because that means you will learn more. I have also asked the headteacher to ensure that the comments on your written work tell you more often what you are doing well and why, and what you need to do to improve.

You can play your part by continuing to attend school as regularly as you do and working as hard as I saw you doing during my visit. Carry on enjoying school, behaving well and looking after each other.