

St Sebastian's RC Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105963
Local Authority	Salford
Inspection number	308996
Inspection dates	2–3 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Derek Aitken

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	127
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr L Houlihan
Headteacher	Mr E McDermott
Date of previous school inspection	31 March 2003
School address	Douglas Green Salford Lancashire M6 6ET
Telephone number	0161 7366875
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small school serves an area characterised by considerable social and economic deprivation in the west of the city. This is reflected in the well above average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. While most pupils are White British, a substantial number of pupils are of minority ethnic heritage and there are some pupils from traveller families. A small minority of pupils are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. More pupils than is usually the case join or leave the school between Year 1 and the end of Year 6. The school is participating in the Intensified Support Programme (ISP) for literacy and numeracy. It holds the Activemark award. The school is being federated with a neighbouring school in January 2008 on the retirement of the current headteacher.

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 as the vast majority of parents and carers agree. Comments such as, 'My daughter's progress has started to show. She enjoys school and likes all her teachers. All the children are equal, no matter where they come from' reflect the opinions of many parents.

On entry to the Nursery, children's skills are much lower than typically expected of three-year-olds. When pupils leave school at the end of Year 6 standards are average because they achieve well in both key stages. Their progress is closely tracked. Well-considered programmes enable those pupils who find learning difficult to improve their basic skills. The curriculum has been equally successful in raising standards for pupils of all abilities, although some weaknesses in writing in Years 4 and 5 remain, as a result of previous underachievement in this skill. Staff relate well to pupils and ensure they work hard in lessons by having high expectations both for their academic progress and behaviour. Pupils learn well because of the good teaching.

Assessment, while satisfactory overall, does not fully support pupils' learning, because it is not used effectively enough in lessons.

Pupils enjoy school. They play well together and find most of their learning fun. They appreciate how visits, visitors and the Year 5 residential in Prestatyn have contributed to their education. They are proud of their recent successes in sport, although their commitment to physical fitness is not fully backed up by their eating preferences. The school cares for its pupils well. It makes a big effort to ensure newcomers are quickly accepted into the community and valued. Staff and pupils work well together to ensure all members get along in a safe, harmonious atmosphere. Pupils play a significant role in supporting this drive by being welcoming and considerate to others. Opportunities are limited for pupils to play a fuller part in the life of the school and so enhance their self-esteem.

The school benefits from a committed staff who are well led by senior leaders. Leadership and management are good at all levels apart from the Foundation Stage, where there is currently a vacancy. The majority of the arrangements to monitor the performance of the school are effectively focused on sustaining the recent improvements and directing future development. Arrangements for monitoring teaching and learning, through lesson observations, are less well developed. The school works effectively with a range of partners to develop the quality of education it provides. It has recovered well from its recent dip in performance and has good capacity to improve further. The school provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The Foundation Stage provides a satisfactory education for the young children. On entry to Nursery children's skills and knowledge are well below the level expected nationally for three-year-olds. They make satisfactory progress overall in all areas of learning. When they leave the Reception class the vast majority are working towards the early learning goals, but children's skills are still well below average in aspects of literacy and numeracy and in their knowledge and understanding of the world. They make a little better progress in their personal development because good behaviour and the importance of 'taking turns' is effectively emphasised. This is reflected in the children's friendly relationships with others, including adults. Their progress is hindered by some weaknesses in planning in the Nursery. These reduce the curricular experiences open to the children. The limited facilities to learn through outdoor

play restrict the children's opportunities to develop their creative skills. Classrooms are efficiently organised with appropriate displays to enable the children to feel settled and to support their learning. The Foundation Stage has lacked continuity in leadership over the past year. This has hindered developmental planning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the curriculum in the Foundation Stage.
- Enable pupils to contribute more fully to the work of the school.
- Use assessment more effectively to enhance pupils' learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

From Year 1 upwards pupils build well on their earlier attainment and make especially good progress in Year 2, Year 5 and Year 6. There have been inadequacies in standards in both key stages in recent years. Standards rose, however, to below national average in Year 2 and to broadly average in Year 6 in 2007. For the latter group of pupils this represented particularly good progress from their below average starting points. Improvements in English and science were especially notable. The implementation of a focused writing scheme is enabling most pupils to write at greater length and with increasing accuracy. This is not yet reflected in the work of the present Year 4 and Year 5 pupils due to prior underachievement in this skill. A better understanding of scientific terminology is underpinning pupils' improvements in science. Overall, boys and girls achieve equally well and the present Year 6 pupils are on track to meet challenging targets. Pupils who require extra help make good progress. This is due to effective tracking and successful intervention programmes, for example in reading, and good support from teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They understand right and wrong and show, in the friendly way they mix together, their acceptance of, and respect for, cultural differences. Pupils behave well and they are provided with good opportunities in class to develop cooperative skills. They respond well to praise and encouragement. Pupils enjoy their lessons and the enrichment activities and are proud of their recent successes in football and netball. They are aware of the importance of healthy lifestyles but not all pupils choose to follow this in practice in their eating habits. Pupils demonstrate a good awareness of and concern for each other's safety, as shown, for example, in their sensible behaviour on the staircases. Attendance is satisfactory, but remains short of the target the school sets for itself. While pupils make some valuable contributions to the local and wider community, for example, through fundraising activities, opportunities for them to play a full role in school life are underdeveloped. Rising standards in basic skills, including information and communication technology (ICT), ensure that pupils, overall, are well-prepared to meet the challenges of later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils learn well because staff have good expectations for their progress. Teachers manage pupils skilfully and foster good relationships. Tasks are explained clearly so that pupils settle quickly and work hard. Teachers have good subject knowledge which provides an effective direction to pupils' learning. Lessons are interesting with a good mix of teacher input and practical activities to develop pupils' skills and understanding. Teachers use ICT effectively to sustain pupils' concentration and involvement in their learning. Questioning is usually good, but sometimes opportunities are missed to extend pupils' thinking. Classroom assistants provide a good level of support in helping those pupils who need extra assistance. Teachers' marking provides useful guidance for pupils on how to improve their work. This good quality of assessment is not fully supported in the classroom and this restricts the opportunities pupils have to reflect on, and contribute to, their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provides pupils with a good range of learning experiences and enables them to achieve well in both their personal and academic development. A strong emphasis on developing their basic skills is proving successful. New initiatives, such as a new approach to writing, are contributing to significant improvements in pupils' literacy skills, although these are still not strong enough in Years 4 and 5. Teachers have used the ISP well to raise standards of literacy and numeracy. The curriculum is flexible in meeting the needs of most pupils well. Targeted pupils benefit from well planned and modified programmes, especially for reading. Strategies to support higher attainers, including gifted and talented pupils, are less developed but booster sessions in Year 6 have proved effective in supporting their achievement. ICT is used well to support learning across a range of subjects, especially in Key Stage 2. The good quality of enrichment activities enhances pupils' learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Levels of support from staff to promote pupils' welfare are good, both in quality and quantity. This ensures that pupils, including new arrivals to this country, feel safe, nurtured and happy. Staff monitor pupils' behaviour well to ensure good relationships are maintained and they mostly succeed in resolving the few instances of bullying to the pupils' satisfaction. Rewards and incentives for hard work and good behaviour are used well to encourage pupils. The learning mentor has contributed effectively to the school's drive to raise the level of attendance. Despite some improvements in the school's systems and procedures, which have contributed to a small rise in attendance, managers recognise that this is a continuing priority. Arrangements for child protection, including the safe recruitment of staff, and health and safety meet current government guidelines. Pupils' academic progress is promoted by good tracking systems and, in the case of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, underpinned by carefully selected recovery programmes.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led and managed. Senior leaders have responded energetically and well to the challenges offered through participation in the ISP. This has sharpened their focus, raised the expectations and sense of accountability for pupils' progress amongst staff and improved the rigour of leaders' analysis of the performance of the school. Leaders have an accurate appreciation of the key strengths and weaknesses of the school and the priorities for future improvement. Effective action has been taken to improve the quality of teamwork and teaching. Although the legacy of underachievement has not been fully eliminated, leaders have made good use of external support to secure a considerable rise in standards and achievement in Key Stage 2 within a short space of time. This improvement has enabled leaders to set more ambitious targets for pupils. Resources are used well to raise standards, especially in the basic skills. Governors provide a good level of support and challenge to the work of the school.

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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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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?	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?	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 Sebastian's Roman Catholic Primary School, Salford

M6 6ET

I visited your school recently to find out how well you are learning. Thank you for making me welcome and being helpful when I talked to you. I was lucky to have the opportunity to speak to some of you at greater length. I was pleased to listen to your varied reasons for enjoying things in school. I was impressed to hear of your success in football and netball competitions. I was a bit less impressed when some told me of their eating habits!

Your school gives you a good education. You have good opportunities to develop your skills and talents. All this helps you to become more confident and develop well both personally and socially. I agree with you that the staff look after you well. They know each of you as individuals and work hard to ensure you all get along well with each other. You play your part in this by mixing well and showing respect for each other. Your teachers ensure that you learn many useful things and make your learning interesting. They keep you busy in lessons and this helps you make good progress. As you say, 'learning is fun'. The teachers have worked hard to help you improve your skills in English, mathematics and science. Keep up the good work here!

There are some things that I have asked the headteacher and staff to do to make your learning better. They need to bring about some improvements in the Nursery and Reception to help the younger children learn better. When I spoke to you, it was clear you felt you would benefit from more opportunities to contribute to the running of the school. I agree and have asked the staff to ensure this happens in future. The teachers mark your work carefully and give you helpful hints on how to improve your work. I have asked them to match that by giving you equally good opportunities in lessons to assess your work which should help you learn even better. You are attending school more often, but some of you are still inclined to have too much time off and are missing out on the good opportunities offered by the school, so your task is to try to attend as often as possible.