

St Ambrose Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106115
Local Authority	Stockport
Inspection number	309032
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Kathleen McArthur

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	150
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Anthony Martin
Headteacher	Mrs Helen Hilton
Date of previous school inspection	3 May 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Rostrevor Road Adswood Stockport Cheshire SK3 8LQ

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2009
Inspection number	309032

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This school is smaller than most. The area in which it is located is affected by significant social and economic disadvantage. A higher than average proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals and more than the usual number of pupils move into and out of the school during the school year. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is lower than the national average but higher than the local average. Very few are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average.

Nursery and Reception classes work together as an Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) unit. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are taught in the same class. In recent years, there has been a considerable amount of staff turnover and the deputy headteacher has been in post for just over one term.

The school holds the Healthy Schools Award and Stockport Extended School status.

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 and improving school with many good features including pupils' personal and social development, the care, guidance and support provided for them, and the curriculum. Inspection findings did not fully match the school's evaluation of how effective it is but found that leadership has an accurate view of the areas for improvement. Good leadership by the headteacher is firmly fixed on the school's vision that everyone is welcomed, valued and feels safe and secure. Her persistence and determination has led the school through a difficult period of staffing change and is successfully promoting better quality teaching and learning. Parents are pleased with the school and find it open and approachable. A typical view is that the staff make every child feel important and many comment on how much their children enjoy school.

Achievement is satisfactory. Children enter the EYFS with skills below those usually seen at their age. By the time pupils leave the school they have made satisfactory progress and reached standards in English, mathematics and science that are broadly average. However, the progress pupils make as they move through the school is inconsistent and there is a legacy of some underachievement at Key Stage 2. Working closely in partnership with the local authority, rigorous actions to tackle this include better use of monitoring and target setting, involving pupils in assessing their own learning, raising attendance levels, and more effective staff performance management and training. Inspection evidence demonstrates that these actions are having a positive impact. Teaching is sound. Pupils know what they are to learn, behave well and have many opportunities to assess how well they are doing. However, good features are not seen in every lesson. The curriculum is good. Pupils say they enjoy their work, clubs and visits and many say, 'We like everything!'

Personal development is good. Pupils enjoy school, are very friendly to each other and to visitors and behave well. Many say, 'Everyone is so polite here.' Relationships are a real strength so pupils feel safe, secure and ready to learn, trust the staff to sort out any problems and are caring towards others. Pupils understand how to look after their health and are keen to contribute to the school and wider communities. Parents particularly value the excellent pastoral care their children receive. Good assessment systems help staff monitor progress closely and are being used more effectively in lesson planning and target setting.

Leadership and management are good. Issues from the previous inspection have been tackled rigorously, resulting in improved attendance, better provision for information and communication technology (ICT) and closer monitoring of school performance. The school is well aware that there is more to be done to ensure progress is consistently good and to raise standards. The school leadership team and the governors have the full support of staff and parents. There is good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Achievement in the EYFS is good. Children begin school with limited communication, mathematical and social skills. They are warmly welcomed and quickly settle into the friendly EYFS environment, ready to investigate the many exciting activities. Good teaching and well planned practical learning activities stimulate children's interest so they want to learn and make good progress as a result. Children really enjoy working outside each day where they experience a full range of activities in all learning areas even though the outdoor area is small, separate

from the classrooms and is not used at all times. Staff know the children very well and excellent welfare arrangements ensure they feel safe and secure. Snack-time is a pleasant social occasion each day when groups of children sit chatting happily with their key worker. The main priority is to increase vocabulary and communication skills and an external language worker provides valuable speaking and listening activities for the youngest children. Despite these efforts, communication skills still lag behind. For example, children observed playing in the puppet theatre had few words to express their ideas. Good leadership ensures the EYFS runs smoothly and progress is rigorously monitored and recorded in children's individual 'learning journey' files. Parents are involved through 'stay and play' sessions, pre-school meetings and family learning where parents and children work together. Most children reach the goals expected for their age by the time they enter Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in Years 3 to 6.
- Ensure the progress made by pupils is more consistent across the school.
- Improve the overall quality of teaching.

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

Attainment is broadly average when pupils enter Year 1, although it can vary widely as groups are small. Skilled support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those new to learning English enables them to progress in line with their classmates. Progress is good in Key Stage 1 and standards have been a little above average for several years. However, progress is inconsistent in Key Stage 2. In the last published results in 2007, standards were significantly below national averages, especially in science. Analysis shows staffing disruption and the high level of pupil movement in and out of the school have adversely affected progress over time. The rigorous actions of school leaders, including booster classes for pupils who need additional support and staff training, are proving successful in improving provision and fostering more effective learning. As a result inspection evidence indicates improvement in 2008, particularly in science, and shows that the year group made good progress, although the number reaching the higher level was still below national expectations. Whilst overall standards are broadly average and pupils' books, lessons and school assessment information show signs of improvement, progress in Key Stage 2 still varies and not enough pupils are fully on course to reach predicted targets. Pupils read well and most present their work with care, especially in Year 6.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Parents comment that their children enjoy school and pupils say there are many good things about their school. They understand the importance of looking after their health by taking plenty of exercise and eating healthy food, saying: 'School dinners always include vegetables.' They feel safe, report that bullying is not a problem and say that they learned a lot from the school's anti-bullying week. They know staff listen to them and they trust them to sort out any problems. 'Circle time' is used well to explore feelings and emotions. Responsibilities as

buddies or school councillors are willingly accepted and pupils are keen to help others through charity work and to contribute to the local community, for example by singing at a nearby care home. Adequate academic and good personal skills are satisfactory preparation for their future. Great efforts by the school and the learning mentor have led to a marked improvement in attendance which is now satisfactory. Pupils' good behaviour supports their learning. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Consequently, pupils acquire a clear sense of right and wrong and are considerate to each other because they are well cared for, saying: 'Everyone is friendly in our school'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching is improving, but as yet it is not consistently strong enough throughout the school to fully overcome the legacy of uneven progress. Professional development has resulted in an increasing number of good lessons featuring well planned activities and good use of resources, including ICT, that make learning fun. For instance, during the inspection pupils improved their mental calculation skills and progressed well whilst playing a lively game of bingo. Strong teaching was seen in the Year 6 class where a lively pace stimulated pupils' enthusiasm for learning. Pupils know their next steps in learning, and staff frequently remind them of their targets. However, writing the learning objective and date can reduce the time available for pupils to put into practice what they have learnt. Pupils know they are expected to work hard and say, 'teachers help us understand what we're learning'. Teaching assistants provide knowledgeable support, especially for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those new to learning English. In some lessons, there is a lack of pace and pupils are not fully challenged. They can become distracted as a result and this slows their progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum gives pupils a good basis for the next steps in their education. Literacy, numeracy, science and ICT receive appropriate priority but other subjects are not forgotten. Some lessons make links between subjects to make learning more interesting and meaningful and improved ICT provision supports learning effectively. For example, science, ICT and literacy are linked when pupils use Internet research notes on the planets as the basis for writing paragraphs. Suitable support strategies ensure pupils with additional learning needs participate in all activities and make satisfactory progress. The good programme for personal and social development helps pupils become increasingly mature and confident, and to consider the effect of their actions on others. Visits to the theatre or the zoo and visitors to school, for example drama teachers, enrich the curriculum well and older pupils look forward to their residential experience. Parents and pupils comment favourably on the range of popular after-school clubs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is excellent. Parents describe the school as a positive, nurturing environment. Staff know pupils and their families well and build helpful partnerships between home and school. Many parents comment that the school is open and approachable. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet current requirements. External agencies are involved effectively to

benefit pupils and their families and the learning mentor plays a very valuable link role between home and school. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those learning English is well organised. Good assessment systems provide clear information so staff can set challenging targets, keep a very close eye on how well their pupils are doing and direct extra help where needed. Pupils know their targets and are beginning to use appropriate methods to assess their own work such as 'thumbs up' or 'traffic lights'. Pupils find it helpful when staff show them what to do to improve when they mark their work but this is not common practice in all classes.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher's good leadership is ably supported by the skilled deputy headteacher, senior leaders and the governors. They are fully committed to raising achievement and standards and know what needs to be done to secure further improvement. Governance is good. Well informed and challenging governors contribute a wide range of expertise and parish links. Honest self-evaluation has identified appropriate areas for development, set challenging targets and implemented action plans, supported by professional development and performance management targets. Careful financial management, directed towards improvement initiatives, ensures satisfactory value for money. Good partnerships with the local authority, support agencies and local schools have helped improve teaching and learning. The school promotes equality of opportunity well and parents believe the school makes every child feel important. Strategies to promote community cohesion are good. Pupils enjoy participating in local community and parish events and learning about cultures, lifestyles and religions, which are different to their own.

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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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	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 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

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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	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**

I would like to thank you for making me very welcome in your school. You were all friendly and polite and helped me complete my work. In assembly, I was very impressed by your singing after Year 6 talked about their New Year resolutions. I hope they manage to keep them! Your parents say they are very happy with the school. I told your school councillors I would send this letter to tell you what I found.

St Ambrose is a satisfactory school. You have a good headteacher and school leaders. They make sure your personal development is good and look after you really well. You certainly know how to be healthy and you feel safe in school. You behave well and told me everyone is friendly and helps each other, as playground buddies, school councillors and by raising money for charity.

Your progress is satisfactory. You get off to a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes. You work hard and usually reach the standards expected for your age. Teaching is satisfactory too. Teachers carefully check how well you are doing and I saw you giving 'thumbs up' to show how well you understand your work. The good curriculum makes sure you cover every subject, including ICT and you told me you like all the lessons, the visits and the after-school clubs.

I have asked the school to help you make faster progress and reach higher standards in your work, particularly in Years 3 to 6. I have also suggested the staff make all the lessons as good as the best ones.

So be ready for more challenges and keep doing your best in everything you do!