

St Christopher's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106117
Local Authority	Stockport
Inspection number	309033
Inspection date	21 February 2008
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	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	211
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr K Burton
Headteacher	Mrs Colette Garner
Date of previous school inspection	17 March 2003
School address	Warwick Road Romiley Stockport Cheshire SK6 3AX
Telephone number	0161 4304473
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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 quality of provision in the Foundation Stage; the impact on standards of improved provision for information and communication technology (ICT); the impact of intervention programmes; a comparison between the key stages of the quality of progress and of teaching and learning. The inspector gathered evidence from the school's self-evaluation, national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, policies and minutes, parents' questionnaires and observation of the school at work. Interviews were conducted with senior members of staff, the chair of governors and pupils. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in similar detail.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school situated to the east of the town centre. Pupils come from a variety of social and economic backgrounds. The vast majority are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. The school holds several awards, including the Basic Skills Quality Mark, the Healthy Schools Award, the Activemark and the Eco-Schools (Bronze) Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school in which pupils achieve very well both academically and in terms of their personal and social development. Parents and carers value highly the contribution it makes to the education of their children. St Christopher's is, as parents agree, 'a place where the needs of children are carefully considered to enable each one to achieve her or his potential'.

On entry to Reception, the levels of children's skills and knowledge vary considerably but they are broadly at the level expected nationally for four-year-olds. A substantial number of children enter with weaker communication and personal and social skills. Children make good progress in Reception, especially in their personal and social skills, their knowledge and understanding of the world and in their physical development. Children's skills in literacy and mathematics are, however, below average when they join Year 1. Thereafter, pupils make very good progress. This is especially evident in Key Stage 2 and is directly linked to their growing maturity. They reach high standards by the end of Year 6, especially in mathematics and science. Standards have soared in science, in particular. Nearly all pupils achieved the higher Level 5 in science in the national tests in 2007. A significant factor in this improvement is the high quality of the planning for different subjects and the progress of individual pupils. When relative weaknesses are identified, appropriate action is swiftly taken and carefully evaluated to gauge the impact in raising pupils' competence in specific aspects of their work. For example, the school focused on ensuring full consistency in teaching methods in mathematics, and developing pupils' problem solving and their skills in interpreting data. The success of these initiatives is evident in pupils' work in other subjects, especially science. Boys and girls achieve equally well. The school's very successful commitment to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities shows in the exceptional progress these pupils make.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Pupils take great enjoyment in their education because of the excellent care, guidance and support they receive and their outstanding curriculum. The school works very successfully to provide pupils with a wide range of opportunities to help them develop a broad range of skills and interests. The eco-committee has tapped into pupils' concerns for the environment very effectively and pupils speak knowledgeably and confidently about topics such as recycling. Pupils are entirely convinced that their views are heard and acted upon. They refer with pride and approval to their role in securing their impressive new playground equipment. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Their multicultural awareness is enhanced by a good range of visitors from different faiths and ethnicities, and curricular topics such as Fairtrade. Pupils are welcoming, self-confident and articulate. They 'look out' for each other very well. The older pupils are very good role models for the younger ones and carry out a wide range of duties responsibly. Pupils have an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles and of how to stay safe. They feel safe from bullying and are confident that they are well equipped with the negotiating skills they need to sort out any minor disagreements with their fellow pupils. Their very good grasp of basic skills, including ICT, sets them up well for later life.

The careful analysis of pupils' performance, which influences appropriate changes to the curriculum, is complemented by an effective system to track pupils' progress. The school uses this information well to build in-depth profiles of all pupils. These are shared very well with staff to ensure that pupils achieve as well as they can. Targets for pupils' progress set high expectations for staff and pupils alike. Nonetheless, these very challenging targets are regularly met and often exceeded. The high quality of education provided ensures that pupils' attendance,

which is satisfactory rather than good, does not have a significant impact on their progress. A lot of pupils' absence is due to parents taking their children on holiday during term time. Precise individual education plans and specialised programmes, for example, in occupational and speech therapy, form the basis for the excellent support for pupils who need extra help with their learning. The school has very effective liaison with outside agencies to provide additional support as required.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Teachers build excellent relationships and capitalise on pupils' enthusiastic response and very positive attitudes to learning. A highly effective mix of precise explanations and challenging questions ensures pupils are kept on their toes. Paired discussions are used very well to enable pupils to develop their ideas and extend their oral skills. Teachers plan carefully to meet the needs of all pupils. Resources, including ICT, are used well to sustain pupils' interest and concentration. A particularly strong feature is the quality of academic guidance. Pupils are given just the right amount of support to help them structure their thinking and plan their independent work. Assessment, including lesson summaries, is exceptionally well used to consolidate pupils' understanding. Marking is conscientious and helpful and ensures that pupils have a secure knowledge of how they can improve their work.

A key factor in the success of the school lies in its outstanding leadership and management. The headteacher, ably assisted by the other senior leaders, sets a very clear direction for the school and a strong steer for the staff, who meet high expectations well. The work of the school is well organised and systems are monitored, evaluated and reviewed efficiently to promote steady improvement. Middle leaders are reflective and enthusiastic practitioners. Opportunities for their professional development are exploited well to enable them to acquire new skills and implement school priorities successfully. School leaders use resources astutely to raise standards and further develop the quality of education. Governors work very well both to support the school and to hold school leaders rigorously to account. The school has taken considerable strides forward since its previous inspection and demonstrates the capacity for similar improvement in the future. It provides excellent value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage provides a good education for the youngest children. Children join Reception from a wide range of pre-school settings. They make good progress in their learning, so that when they leave the Reception class, most pupils are working within the early learning goals and some achieve them. Early weaknesses in aspects of children's literacy development, however, are not fully overcome. Staff have put increased emphasis on phonic work this session, but it is too early to measure its full impact conclusively. High levels of pastoral care ensure children settle into school routines quickly. For example, when it was noted through early assessment that some of the present children in Reception had low levels of personal and social development, an additional adult was employed to support them. This arrangement is proving effective in promoting their progress. A wide range of carefully chosen activities form the basis of the good curriculum. Teaching is good with strengths which are particularly evident in the carpet sessions where multi-sensory techniques are used well to keep children engaged in their learning. Arrangements for recording children's skills and progress are detailed and effective. The Foundation Stage is led and managed well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further improve attendance within the outstanding personal development of pupils.

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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?	1
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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 Christopher's Catholic Primary School, Stockport, SK6 3AX

I am writing to thank you for your help when I visited your school recently and to tell you what I found out. One of you told me 'the staff really support us in all that we do to make sure each and every one of us does our best'. I saw that on many occasions, too.

Your school is outstanding. After the good start the young ones have in the Reception class, your school helps you do really well, especially in mathematics and science. In both these subjects, and in ICT, you have come on in leaps and bounds in the last few years. The excellent way the school helps you to be confident and to care about your community and the environment means that you have very good attitudes to school and life. I saw good examples of this, for example, in the Eco-show assembly, when you spoke very confidently about recycling. You are really alert in lessons and are very keen to answer your teachers' questions. This is one of the reasons you learn well and make such good progress. Your teachers play their part by teaching you very well and ensuring you work hard and making learning both fun and challenging. They check your work very carefully to make you understand your work and give you lots of opportunities to show what you know and can do. This helps to build up your self-confidence. You told me how safe you felt in school and how the staff were always available, if needed, to help you.

Staff work very hard to make things better for you and their efforts (and yours!) have been recognised by the awards which you have received in the last few years. This, together with the fact that your work has improved so well, means that your school is in very good hands. I have asked your headteacher to do one thing to make your school even better. This is to make sure that some of you are not absent quite so often so that all of you get the very best from what school has to offer. Good luck for the future and keep working hard.