

St Aidan's Catholic Primary School, Wigan

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106463
Local Authority	Wigan
Inspection number	309135
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Eileen Mulgrew HMI

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	395
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr D Shirley
Headteacher	Mrs Christine Mason
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2005
School address	Holmes House Avenue Winstanley Wigan Lancashire WN3 6EE
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Aidan's is above average size for a primary school with the majority of pupils attending from the immediate area. It is in an area of slightly more advantage than the national average. The percentage of pupils eligible for a free school meal is very low. Most pupils are of White British heritage. Within the very small number of pupils from minority ethnic groups, very few are at an early stage of learning to speak English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is well below average.

The school has gained the National Healthy Schools Standard (2007), Eco Status Bronze Award (2006), Active mark (2006), Investors in People (2005), and the Wigan Quality Standard for the Foundation Stage (2007).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to teaching, learning, standards and achievement in mathematics. In all other respects St Aidan's provides a satisfactory standard of education for its pupils.

Children enter Key Stage 1 with skills that are broadly typical for their age, after making generally good progress in the Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception). Pupils reach expected levels in reading and writing by the time they take the national assessments at the end of Year 2, although the number of pupils gaining the higher levels is less than the national average. The headteacher and senior leadership team responded to the decline in standards in reading and writing in 2005 and 2006 by implementing changes to teaching and learning. As a result standards in English have improved; this has halted a decline in overall standards at the end of Key Stage 1. Pupils currently in Key Stage 1 are making satisfactory progress in reading and writing.

A similar decline in English standards in Key Stage 2 has been halted by the effective action by the senior management team. Standards, as shown by the most recent national test results for 11 year olds, indicate that progress between Year 2 and Year 6 was not good enough, with just two thirds reaching the expected Level 4 and one fifth reaching the higher level. These proportions are lower than those achieved by the same pupils when they were assessed as 7 year olds. During the last two years, the school has experienced staff turbulence resulting in instances of ineffective teaching which left gaps in pupils' learning. However, effective changes made by senior leaders more recently have ensured that pupils are now making improved progress. The teaching is now good in this subject and closing the gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills.

Standards in mathematics have declined since 2005, most markedly in 2007. Pupils in Year 6 attained well below the national average. This was because progress between Year 2 and Year 6 was too slow. Standards in mathematics for pupils aged 7 to 11 years are now broadly average although a large proportion of pupils in Key Stage 2 are not reaching the levels of which they are capable. Many pupils are not making fast enough progress to bridge the gaps caused by prior underachievement. This is because teaching and learning in mathematics are not always good enough. Teachers' knowledge and ability to extend pupils' skills in mathematics is not always sufficient. In some lessons the pace is slow and there is insufficient challenge.

Good pastoral care underpins the good personal development and well-being of the pupils. They are polite, well mannered and courteous. Enjoyment of school is shown by above average levels of attendance and good behaviour. The majority of parents are supportive of the work of the school. Pupils are ready to learn and have positive attitudes to learning. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe and are confident that any member of staff will help them if they are troubled. The award of healthy school status recognises the pupils' good understanding of the benefits of living a healthy lifestyle. The healthy school team has successfully organised activities to promote further the advantages of living a healthy lifestyle: for example, a walk to school week and rewards to pupils who bring healthy food in their lunch-boxes. Elected members of the school council take pride in their contribution to the

development of the school, which included designing, planning and budgeting for the adventure playground.

Curriculum provision has recently been reviewed, resulting in a 'contexts for learning' plan. Learning opportunities are planned around the interests and locality of the pupils in order to broaden knowledge and develop skills. Although pupils enjoy this new way of working it is too early to see any impact on their achievement in the core subjects. The curriculum is enriched through after school activities in the arts, physical education, information and communication technology (ICT), and modern foreign languages. Effective use is made of specialist teachers for ICT and music. Older pupils' experiences in athletics, sports and dance are extended through the weekly visits to use the facilities at Robin Park sports arena.

Supported by the governing body, the headteacher leads an experienced team of senior and middle managers with a shared vision and desire to raise standards and enable all pupils to succeed. Action to address the decline in English standards has been effective but weaknesses remain in the teaching and learning of mathematics. Day-to-day running of the school is smooth and senior leaders have a clear view of the overall strengths and weaknesses in the school's provision. The headteacher and senior leaders identified the dip in English standards and effectively introduced ideas such as 'big writing' and staff training to start to tackle this underachievement. As a result standards in this subject are starting to rally and the school has a more thorough and robust system of checking and tracking pupils' progress. However, evaluation of performance in mathematics underestimated the full extent of underachievement and, consequently, action taken to halt the decline was slow.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the Foundation Stage with skills that vary from year to year but are broadly in line with other children of their age. They make generally good progress. Much emphasis is placed on developing pupils' speaking, listening and independent skills so that, by the time they enter Key Stage 1, most pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have achieved standards expected for their age in all areas of learning. Well organised arrangements for children starting the Nursery and moving to the Reception class ensure children and parents get to know the school staff and become familiar with class routines. As a result parents feel confident the school will care for their children and children settle quickly. Children feel safe and become confident in their new surroundings, responding positively to the high expectations staff have of them. Using a well-planned curriculum staff work as a team to organise exciting activities which are well matched to the needs of all pupils. Thorough planning allows for teacher-led activities and opportunities for pupils to follow their own investigations within well-resourced and attractive indoor and outdoor areas.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and accelerate pupils' progress in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in mathematics.
- Set more challenging work for the more able pupils, especially in Key Stage 2, in mathematics.
- Deepen teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics to ensure that pupils' misconceptions are tackled quickly.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Standards overall are broadly average. Pupils' achievement in mathematics is inadequate. Pupils enter Key Stage 1 with the knowledge and skills which are broadly expected for pupils of similar age. Results at the end of Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics declined in 2005 and 2006. An improvement in writing in 2007 was as a result of intervention from senior leaders. Results from 2007 indicate that pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills are broadly average but too few pupils gain the higher level, especially in mathematics. This is because higher attaining pupils are not challenged sufficiently in lessons.

In the 2007 Key Stage 2 national tests, standards in English and science were below the national averages. In mathematics standards were significantly below the average. As in Key Stage 1, results showed that too few pupils did better than expected for their age, most significantly in mathematics. When compared with performance in similar schools, pupils' progress between Year 2 and Year 6 was inadequate. Much of this underachievement is due to ineffective teaching and disruption as pupils moved through Key Stage 2. Inspection evidence and the schools' own tracking system shows that standards in English and science are picking up due to good teaching. However, standards in mathematics are more variable and teaching is not consistently good enough to promote the rapid progress that pupils need to secure the standards of which they are capable.

Although some pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress, for most progress is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and reflects the mission of the school. Good relationships with staff and one another are firmly based on respect for all. Pupils love coming to school, 'It's a really good place to be.' typifies the views of many. Pupils know the difference between right and wrong and behave well in and out of lessons. An effective programme allows pupils to explore their social and emotional needs resulting in even very young pupils understanding their feelings. Pupils have a good understanding of other cultures through projects and assemblies.

Pupils welcome opportunities to make a contribution to the school and local communities through activities organised by the school council, healthy schools team and Eco squad. These include the introduction of paper re-cycling and raising funds for charities. Good links with the local special school develop pupils' understanding of the rich diversity in society. Whilst pupils' progress in basic skills is inconsistent, the school effectively promotes the skills of collaboration, investigation, research and independence that stand all pupils in good stead for their futures.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall although there are too many mathematics lessons which do not allow pupils to make the rapid progress of which they are capable. Good lessons were mostly observed in literacy, reflecting the actions the school has taken to improve standards

and achievement in this subject. Typically these lessons were exciting, motivating pupils to strive for improvement and make rapid progress. Teachers' strong subject knowledge and understanding promotes good progress and planning matches work to the differing needs of all pupils. In less effective lessons in mathematics, where teachers' subject knowledge is less secure, there is an overuse of simple worksheets which hinders pupils' progress; levels of challenge, particularly for the more able pupils, are not high enough to move learning forward. Consequently, pace is slower, learning time is lost and pupils do not progress at the rate necessary to achieve well.

Teaching assistants effectively support groups of pupils in their learning. However, in some lessons teaching assistants are not sufficiently directed and opportunities for guided intervention are lost.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory overall and enables pupils to develop good personal and social skills. Recently revised curriculum plans link subjects together using practical activities and first hand experiences to make learning more relevant and fun for the pupils. This has enabled opportunities for pupils to use literacy across the curriculum and the introduction of 'big writing' and 'soundwrite' are improving pupils' writing skills. However, there are few chances for pupils to apply their mathematical knowledge in purposeful tasks. As a result, pupils are not making the progress they should. High quality pupils' work is attractively displayed around the school celebrating pupils' successes in the performing arts, creative arts and sport which are strengths of the school. Pupils' learning is enriched by a good range of after-school clubs and activities, visits and visitors which effectively extend their learning experiences.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Teachers know their pupils well and work closely with parents to ensure that the level of pastoral support is good. Safeguarding arrangements meet current government regulations. Systems are in place for regular health and safety checks and risk assessments are carried out whenever necessary. Links with outside agencies are well developed and arrangements for supporting any vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well organised. Arrangements for transfer to the high school have recently improved allowing pupils to make a smooth transfer into the next phase of their education.

The support and guidance for academic progress is inconsistent. Pupils are set individual targets for learning in English and mathematics so that they know the level at which they are working. Although many pupils know what they need to do to improve their work in English, they are less secure in how to improve in mathematics. Whilst marking of their work generally affirms the efforts made by pupils, it does not always provide sharp and helpful feedback as to how well they are doing or give advice that helps pupils to progress further.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides satisfactory leadership. She is supported well by senior leaders and together they lead a team of enthusiastic teachers with a wide range of experience and expertise.

Leaders now check performance adequately and know the general strengths and weaknesses of the school. Although governors and senior leaders took action to tackle ineffective teaching in English, the resulting legacy of underachievement was underestimated. Action to deal with the problems in mathematics was not swift or effective enough. As a result, the school's performance in mathematics declined further. There is now a clear agenda for school improvement with appropriate priorities which include working with the local authority's advisers to improve provision and learning. The issue from the last inspection relating to the quality of accommodation has been dealt with effectively and there is now an effective environment for learning. Governors are now better placed to challenge the school to improve and to act as critical friends. Subject leaders have a clear overview of their subjects. Checking of pupils' work and teachers' lesson plans and management of a subject budget is provided by groups of teachers who work well together as teams.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
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?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
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	3

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?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
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?	Yes

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of St Aidan's Catholic Primary School, Wigan, WN3 6EE

On behalf of the inspection team I would like to thank you for your warm welcome when we visited your school to see how well you are learning. You impressed us with your manners and courtesy. It was a pleasure to talk to you and to hear you confidently tell us your views about St Aidan's. You have very strong views about the things you like about the school and some of the things you would like to change. For example, some of you told us you would like more challenges in your mathematics lessons. Your school council, healthy school team and eco squad help you all to put your ideas into practice.

Here are some other things that are good about your school.

J You have a good knowledge of how to stay safe.

J You get on well with each other, and behave very well.

J You are getting better at your writing.

J You have some good ideas on how raise funds and help others.

The school is satisfactory overall but we think that it needs to improve in some important areas. You can help by telling your teachers when the work is too easy. I have asked your headteacher and the governors to:

- improve the progress that you make in mathematics so that you can reach higher standards
- give those of you who find learning mathematics easy, harder work
- improve mathematics lessons so that your teachers can quickly sort out anything you do not understand.