

St Catherine's Catholic Primary School, Lowton

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106507
Local Authority	Wigan
Inspection number	309149
Inspection date	30 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Janette Corlett

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	206
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mrs Connolly
Date of previous school inspection	23 June 2003
School address	Cranham Avenue Lowton Warrington Cheshire WA3 2PQ
Telephone number	01942 671528
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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: achievement and standards; care, guidance and support; leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, policies and observations of the school at work, discussions with staff and pupils, and parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but there is no evidence to suggest that the school's own evaluations were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Almost all the pupils attending this average-sized school are White British and most live in privately owned houses near the school. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is well below average, as is the percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Children enter the Reception class from a wide range of pre-school provision in the area. Their skills and levels of development are similar to those expected of children their age. The school holds Silver Arts Mark Status, and the Eco School Award parts 1 and 2.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the school is good, and some parts of its provision are outstanding. The school has made good progress since the last inspection and has good capacity to improve further. This is demonstrated by the rapid success of the school's strategies to improve writing.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They thoroughly enjoy coming to school, where they feel safe and understand the importance of taking plenty of exercise and eating a healthy diet. They behave well and have very positive attitudes to learning. Their attendance is good. Pupils enjoy helping one another and have many opportunities to reach out to the wider community through supporting charities and taking part in local events. Recently, fundraising for a local hospice encouraged them to develop their skills for their future adult lives through working out the costs involved in making and selling soft toys. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Respect for one another and for the cultural traditions and religious beliefs of our diverse society are embedded in the very fabric of the school. There are opportunities for spiritual reflection throughout the school day and pupils respond to these sensitively.

Parents appreciate that the school cares for their children exceptionally well and comment that the staff are friendly, welcoming and willing to listen to any concerns they might have. They also value the way in which the school involves them in their children's learning through Home-School diaries and holding evening sessions, which give them information on how to support their children's learning at home.

Standards are above average in English and science by the end of Year 6. They are well above average in mathematics. This represents good achievement. The school identified that standards in writing needed to improve. Recently introduced strategies to accelerate progress in this subject have been effective, and standards are now at the same good level as they are in reading. This is mainly due to the many opportunities given for pupils to develop their skills in writing throughout the curriculum. For example, in history lessons they are encouraged to explore the past through drama, increasing their understanding of why people acted as they did and encouraging them to explain this to one another. These valuable opportunities for speaking and listening make them eager to write about their experiences and improve the quality of their work. This work is regularly marked, but teachers' written comments do not always help pupils to understand how they might improve further and are not linked to pupils' individual targets for development.

The overall quality of teaching is good. Teachers plan their work well, making sure that there are appropriate activities for pupils of all abilities. They have good subject knowledge and use skilful questioning to ensure that all groups of learners can take an active part in classroom discussions and contribute their ideas. They make very effective use of 'talking partners' in mathematics lessons, encouraging pupils to share their ideas and discuss different approaches to solving problems. This results in consistently outstanding progress and an enthusiastic approach to this subject. Skilled teaching assistants give focused support for individuals and small groups of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They also work very well with larger groups of pupils, helping them extend their learning using information and communication technology (ICT) and drama.

Leadership and management are good. The experienced headteacher inspires a clear vision for continual improvement among staff. School senior leaders work well as a team, supporting the

headteacher in moving the school forward to provide a high quality of education for all its pupils. This is reflected in the outstanding curriculum, which is continually enriched by a series of outside visits and visitors to the school. ICT is used very effectively to engage pupils' interest and adds to their enjoyment of learning. Similarly, displays around the school demonstrate excellent provision for art and design, and technology.

School leaders ensure a high standard of pastoral care and support for pupils and their families. Although they collect extensive information about pupils' progress and standards, they do not make the fullest use of it to account for the school's overall performance. For example, the evidence on the progress of groups of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is not easily accessible. This reduces the capacity of teachers and support staff to evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies to help these pupils reach their targets for improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in all areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum. By the time they leave Reception the vast majority of children are working at the expected levels and some have exceeded them. The Reception classroom is well resourced and children are provided with a varied range of practical activities, which engages their interest and develops their skills well. The outdoor area is a good improvement since the last inspection and plans are in place to improve this further through the addition of a sheltered area. The classroom provides a bright, attractive learning environment where children feel safe and secure. Relationships are good; children work and play well together and have positive attitudes to their learning. Well planned induction systems ensure that children settle quickly and happily into school routines. Links with parents are good and parents are encouraged to support their children in their learning. Leadership and management are good. Staff work well as a team and they are aware of how young children learn. Recently introduced systems ensure that progress is assessed regularly and is being used to inform planned activities which take into account children's individual needs as well as giving them opportunities to choose their own activities in structured play.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure a consistent approach to assessment and marking of pupils' written work in English and science, which enables them to understand the next steps in their learning and how to achieve them.
- Improve the system for tracking and evaluating pupils' progress and share the findings more widely in order to facilitate swifter progress for all groups 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?	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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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?	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	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?	2
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?	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

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

Inspection of St Catherine's Catholic Primary School, Warrington, WA3 2PQ

Thank you for making me feel so very welcome when I visited your school. I really enjoyed spending the day with you, and was very impressed with your brilliant artwork and how good you are at using computers in so many different ways. A special thank you to the school council members who gave up their lunch break to tell me how much you all enjoy learning and playing together. You obviously care for one another a great deal, and try to help other people as much as you can.

I think you have a good school and are very lucky to have so many friendly and helpful adults to make sure that you are safe, happy and healthy. I was very pleased to see that you take part in so many exciting activities both during and after school. You also visit many interesting places, and the older pupils are looking forward to their trip to Cumbria where they will learn more about looking after the environment and take part in some adventurous outdoor challenges.

Your writing is getting much better because your teachers work hard to make writing fun, not just in literacy lessons but also in other lessons such as history and ICT. I have asked them to help you keep up this good work by giving you a bit more information on how well you are doing and some advice on how you can be even better! I have also asked your headteacher to try to make it easier for your teachers and parents to see how much you are improving and if you need a little extra help when you find some things difficult.

Your teachers really care for you and have made your school a great place for you to learn and have fun. You have helped them by coming to school regularly, behaving well and working hard. Please keep on doing this! I wish you all well for your future and hope you have a very Happy Christmas.