

St Helen's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106640
Local Authority	Barnsley
Inspection number	309188
Inspection dates	30 June –1 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Terry McDermott

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	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	150
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr E Goddard
Headteacher	Mr S Harrison
Date of previous school inspection	28 June 2004
School address	West Street Hoyland Barnsley South Yorkshire S74 9DL
Telephone number	01226 742172
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small school is situated to the south of Barnsley. It serves an area of social and economic disadvantage. The proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals, from a minority ethnic heritage, who speak English as an additional language or with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are below average. The proportion with a statement of special educational need is average. Pupils are taught in mixed-age classes. The school is federated with two other Catholic schools. All three share a single governing body. The school holds the Activemark, Bronze Healthy Schools, and Flowers in Bloom Awards.

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 and inclusive school. It has outstanding features in the personal development and well-being of pupils and in the media and film making aspect of the curriculum. The high value parents place on the pastoral work of the school is typified by the comment, 'The absolute dedication and commitment of all staff at St Helen's is second to none.' All pupils make good progress in their learning. The school gives good value for money.

Children enter Reception class with skills below those expected for their age. They make consistently good progress through the school and standards at the end of Year 6 are above average in English, mathematics and science. Achievement is good for all groups of pupils.

Pupils' behaviour is excellent and they are respectful and tolerant. They are willing to accept responsibility and they have a deep and genuine appreciation of the rights of others. These attributes, together with their good attendance, illustrate their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is a happy and harmonious school where the personal worth of every individual is recognised and celebrated. This is recognised by parents through the comment, 'St Helen's manages to bring together Christians and non-Christians with a true sense of family and community.'

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Relationships are excellent. Adults clearly enjoy being with the pupils, who behave very well, are unfailingly polite and work hard in lessons. However, in a few lessons, learning slows because teachers spend too long reminding pupils to focus on their work. Teachers set work that is well matched to the learning needs of all pupils. However, their marking does not always tell pupils what they need to do to improve.

The curriculum is appropriately organised in the mixed-age classes so that pupils make good progress. Each pupil has the opportunity to play an instrument, and many do. The use of cartooning, animation and film making as an aid for learning is outstanding. The school has won regional and national recognition for this aspect of its work. Recent initiatives to improve achievement in English are shown in pupils' books and demonstrated in the school's own tracking. They have yet to show their full impact in end-of-year test results.

The school takes all aspects of safeguarding seriously. Current statutory requirements are met. Staff and pupils know each other very well and there is a clear feeling of mutual trust. The school accurately measures the progress pupils make in English, mathematics and science. Teachers use this information well to plan effective lessons.

Leadership and management are good. The clear vision and personal example of the headteacher and other staff present a good role model for pupils and are strongly appreciated by parents. Because the school is self-critical, its self-evaluation is accurate. It knows its strengths, and has successfully maintained them through a period of some disturbance since the last inspection.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good. Children enter with skills below those expected, with particular weaknesses in their ability to express their feelings and thoughts and in their writing. Because resources for learning, the quality of teaching, and leadership and management are now good, children make good progress. The curriculum has been improved to provide a good balance between teacher-led activities and opportunities for children to develop

independently through play. By the time children leave Reception the skills of most are as expected nationally.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teachers' marking is consistent and that it tells pupils what they need to do to improve.
- Ensure that all pupils sustain their focus in lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Although the relatively small numbers in each year group make statistical comparisons unreliable, the trends in test results over the last few years indicate that pupils in Year 2 and in Year 6 reach either average or above average standards. Currently, in Year 6, standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. In English, standards have improved considerably since last year as a result of the school's successful drive to improve the quality of pupils' writing. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress because work is well matched to their particular needs. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make very good progress because they are well supported.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils attend school regularly. They are polite, well mannered, respectful and mutually supportive. They say they feel safe in school, because they are 'well looked after by the teachers'. Pupils are adamant that there is no bullying, but they know what to do if they were bullied. They take on responsibility enthusiastically, for example, as school councillors or playground buddies. A wide range of opportunities exist for pupils to display their skills through film, performance and creative activity to the benefit of the local, regional and national communities. They make informed choices about healthy eating, and participate well in a range of sporting activities. Their good understanding of the effects of exercise on the body is typified by the comment made by a group of four and five-year-olds, 'It (exercise) makes our hearts bump faster and keeps us alive better'. Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education. For example, they are confident young people capable of working both independently and in teams and they reach good standards in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT).

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers know pupils well, have high expectations and plan work that generally matches pupils' individual needs and capabilities. They use questioning well to consolidate previous learning, to clarify new ideas and to make pupils think hard. Throughout the school, pupils routinely make confident use of ICT resources to underpin learning. Consequently, they clearly enjoy classroom activities, and make good progress. The very best lessons demand that pupils work independently and think for themselves. When these lessons also include an element of quiet reflection and consideration, the results are remarkable. In some lessons, the pace of learning slows because teachers have to spend too much time reminding pupils to focus fully on their

work. Though marking is regular and affirmative, it is not consistent enough in giving pupils written guidance on what they need to do next to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good overall and has some outstanding features. In Key Stages 1 and 2, well planned themes build on pupils' interests and take advantage of the school's outstanding and well founded reputation for using film and other media as vehicles for learning. The school is now developing cartoon, animation and filmed projects, linking many subjects to extend pupils' interest and motivation further. These and other innovative and very promising developments have already raised standards in English throughout the school. They have yet to show their full effect on standards reached in Year 6 tests. The confidence and competence of even the youngest pupils in using ICT and a range of software is clearly evident. Excellent displays of pupils' work in the styles of different artists around the school inspire pupils to emulate them. There is a good range of out-of-class clubs and visits, including residential outings to Hesley Wood, Robin Hood's Bay and Castleton, which contribute well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support provided for pupils are good. All parents who expressed a view, approve of the school's work. More than one said they found the school 'friendly and welcoming' and many commented on the 'dedication and commitment' of the staff. The Parents' Association raises considerable amounts of money annually to support the work of the school. Staff pay full attention to health and safety. Child protection arrangements are robust and meet the latest government requirements. Pupils have complete confidence in the staff and the school. They say they feel safe from bullying and know that any worries they have will be dealt with quickly. Systems for supporting pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or who are talented and gifted, are well managed and inclusive. The school gathers regular and accurate information about the progress pupils make in English, mathematics and science. This is not the case in other subjects. There are excellent links with other local schools and a wide range of outside organisations to ensure that the personal and creative needs of all pupils are met quickly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has the confidence of staff, governors and parents, and is popular with pupils. The school evaluates its performance accurately and its good analysis of data ensures that areas for improvement are quickly identified. The school sets challenging but realistic targets for pupils' performance which are usually met. All staff carry out their responsibilities effectively. Their collaborative work in developing and refining the curriculum has been instrumental in providing creative, stimulating and cohesive activities for pupils. The newly federated governing body has come together very quickly and effectively. Its experienced members give unstinting support to the school, but also challenge performance and seek clarification when required. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well. The school has improved attendance markedly, has come through federation, overcome

staffing issues, and maintained its high standing in the community. Its capacity to make further improvements is good.

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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?	1
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	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	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 Helen's Catholic Primary School, Barnsley, S74 9DL

Thank you for the very friendly welcome you gave me when I inspected your school recently. I was really impressed with the lovely way you all get on together and with how polite and happy you are. Your behaviour is excellent, though sometimes some of you lose concentration in lessons. You told me that you enjoy school very much because 'teachers make learning fun' and because you are all such good friends. I could see clearly that was the case everywhere I went in and around the school.

I found St Helen's to be a good school with some outstanding features. I was particularly impressed with:

- how much you learn about how to be a good person; you clearly value tolerance, patience and respect for the individual
- the work you do in cartooning, animation and film making is very exciting and unusual for children of your age; it gives you wonderful opportunities to learn in a different way.

I was also impressed with the dedication of your headteacher and all the other adults who work so hard to keep you safe and happy. Your parents are impressed with this as well. However, even in a school as good as yours, there are still some things which could be better. So I have asked the school to make sure that when teachers mark your work they tell you clearly what you need to do next to make it even better. I have also asked the teachers to make sure that in every lesson you all focus fully on your work.

You can help to make your school even better by carrying on being respectful, polite and hard-working young people you already are. May I wish you all good luck for the future.