

St Clare's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111311
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	310561
Inspection dates	14–15 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Paul Bamber

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	116
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr F Titley
Headteacher	Mr Terry Daltrey
Date of previous school inspection	17 March 2003
School address	Hawthorn Road Lache Chester Cheshire CH4 8HX
Telephone number	01244 682294
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Pupils who attend this smaller than average school come from predominantly White British backgrounds and are from an area which is more socially and economically disadvantaged than normal. The proportions of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who are entitled to a free school meal or have a statement of special educational need are all above average. A tiny percentage of pupils speak English as an additional language. The school has a Cheshire Healthy School Award.

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 school. It is well led and managed which results in pupils' good achievement and personal development. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school's work, especially of the good quality of care and support given to their children. A typical comment from parents is, 'St Clare's is a wonderfully friendly school, not just the children but the staff too. They welcome everyone and foster a community of caring children who look out for each other.'

From entering the school with lower than expected skills in the key areas of English and mathematics, pupils make consistently good progress in these subjects throughout the school. In science they make satisfactory progress. They attain broadly average standards by Year 6 in science.

As a result, they move on to secondary school having achieved broadly average standards. Pupils are enthused by school. This is because they are taught well, have an interesting curriculum and they are encouraged to assume a wide range of responsibilities. It is heart warming to see older pupils taking care of younger children at the dining table and in the playground. This has a very positive effect on the personal and social development of both groups of children. Within pupils' overall good social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, their spiritual development is outstanding. This means that they have a keen awareness of the place of prayer and worship and are sensitive to the faiths and beliefs of different cultures. For example, pupils from Years 3 to 6 responded very sensitively to the question, 'What have we to be thankful for?' Answers ranged from, 'for my family' to, 'having enough food' and 'the world around us'.

As well as ensuring that pupils are safe and secure, senior managers rigorously and successfully focus on raising standards and achievement. They have implemented over the past few years, effective systems to track pupils' progress and to assess their attainment in English and mathematics. This has been particularly potent in raising achievement in mathematics in Years 3 to 6 (Key Stage 2) and in aspects of writing. Those systems have not been in place for science and this is partly the reason why pupils' progress has only been satisfactory in this subject.

Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and to each other. Very warm relationships are evident in lessons. Considerable strengths in teaching are in the way in which humour is used to lighten the atmosphere in lessons and teachers' use of praise and encouragement to enable pupils to take considered risks and to learn from their mistakes. Most pupils behave very well and are clearly frustrated that a small minority do not always pay enough attention in lessons. Pupils have a good range of experiences and acquire effective personal and academic skills because of good teaching and careful nurturing. This means that they are well prepared for their future education and given the basic skills to cope with work and life.

The school knows itself well because it has secure systems to evaluate its own performance. Its judgements about its effectiveness predominantly match inspection findings. It has made good improvements since the last inspection, especially in: raising standards in Years 1 and 2; improving pupils' skills in information and communication technology (ICT); the quality of assessment; and in checking more rigorously on the quality of its provision. Despite strenuous efforts, the least improvement has been made in improving attendance which remains below the national average. The improvements, together with pragmatic plans for further, sustained improvement, mean that there is a good capacity to improve further. The school provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Most children enter the Reception class having had pre-school experience. The close partnership with the adjacent Nursery is very effective in settling children happily when they enter the Reception class. Their attainment on entry is generally below expectations in communication, language and literacy and in mathematical development. In other areas of their learning, they enter with skills typical for their age. As a result of good teaching, sensitive support and systematic assessment children progress well and most enter Year 1 having achieved and sometimes exceeded the targets set for them nationally. They make particularly good strides in their personal, social and emotional development and in their physical development. The latter is nurtured well as a result of the many opportunities for them to play and learn outside and because of the good partnership with an outside agency that provides specialist teaching in physical education. Children benefit from being taught alongside Year 1 pupils because they have good role models regarding behaviour, listening and working together. There are times, however, when Reception children have too little responsibility for choosing activities. This key stage is well managed and children have a good start to their schooling.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that pupils in Key Stage 2 make as good progress in science as they do in English and mathematics.
- Raise attendance to at least the national average.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well overall. Over the last five years, standards have fluctuated between average to above average, depending on the nature of individual year groups. There is a clear trend of better achievement in English and mathematics than in science in Key Stage 2. This is because, until this academic year, assessment and the analysis of test data have been absent in science. The school implemented new systems at the beginning of this term but it is too early to see success. In English and mathematics the more able pupils attain well, with higher than average proportions reaching above expected standards in Year 2 teacher assessments and the school's Year 6 national tests. They do not do as well in the Year 6 science tests.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with emotional problems are supported effectively by able and knowledgeable support staff. This enables them to make good progress both academically and in their self-confidence. The school makes good arrangements to help those very small numbers of pupils who speak English as an additional language to learn the language quickly and to achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Although good overall, there are aspects of pupils' personal development that are outstanding. Pupils' spiritual development is outstanding and this underpins much of their positive attitudes and their caring nature. They have a keen sense of fair play and a developing social conscience. Most demonstrate these characteristics both in lessons and around the school. One or two are not so well disposed but the pressure put on them to conform by their classmates often minimises the impact of their less good behaviour. Pupils eagerly accept responsibility and are proud of

their school. Elected school councillors are disappointed that so far they have only met once and that their officers have yet to be appointed. They feel this has, up to now, prevented them from continuing the good work of the previous councils responsible, for example, for promoting healthy eating, better play facilities and in fund-raising.

Despite the overall positive picture, pupils' attendance is below average. This is due mainly to a few poor attenders and to parents taking their children on holiday during term time. This together with a few pupils' less good behaviour explains why this aspect is good rather than outstanding as the school judges.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Most lessons are taught well, which results in pupils' good achievement and positive attitudes. There is some very good teaching which is exemplified by careful planning, effective use of resources, subject knowledge and well targeted teaching methods. Learning is made relevant and subjects are linked well together. In a Year 6 literacy lesson, for example, pupils were taught how to rewrite a biography and to interpret the author's feelings and motivations, within the context of a historical character. Pupils were totally involved in discussion and producing ideas that aided their good writing. Warm relationships are evident in all lessons and less confident learners benefit greatly from the knowledge that it is okay to make mistakes. Where teaching is less effective, staff do not set well matched tasks or ask challenging questions throughout lessons. Science teaching in Key Stage 2 is less effective because it does not promote pupils' good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum generally meets pupils' needs well and is good rather than satisfactory as the school judged. Pupils' skills are developed well, academically and personally. There is a good programme to help pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to achieve well. Pupils' learning and social development is enhanced effectively through a range of visits, including residential experiences for those in Years 2 to 6. Close links with a range of providers and services promote pupils' good physical and mental health. Many cultures and faiths are embraced in order to broaden pupils' horizons. Until very recently, the science curriculum in Key Stage 2 has been rather narrow, focusing predominantly on teaching facts rather than on pupils investigating and hypothesising. The art curriculum does not focus sufficiently on systematically developing pupils' skills. The range of after school clubs and the way pupils' special talents are nurtured are additional strengths.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are looked after well and they and their parents know that they are safe and happy. The school takes appropriate steps to ensure that pupils are safeguarded and protected and that they are secure when in the school's care. The arrangements to support more vulnerable pupils are good. This means that Travellers' children and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or emotional disorders are supported in such a way that they can achieve well and play a full part in school life. The systems to ensure good behaviour work well; behaviour has

improved considerably since the last inspection. The procedures to ensure good attendance are less successful, although they are wide-ranging and rigorously applied. The systems to assess pupils' attainment and to track their progress are rigorous and effective in promoting good achievement in English and mathematics, but they are less evident or underdeveloped in other subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior leaders work well as a team to promote pupils' good achievement and effective personal development. There is a successful balance between the rigorous pursuit of higher standards and better achievement and a sensitivity to the individual needs of pupils, staff and parents. Senior leaders continuously pursue improvements, planning systematically, evaluating the quality of provision rigorously and always seeking ways to enhance teachers' and managers' skills through advice and training. Good improvements in pupils' achievements and standards in mathematics and more recently in writing have resulted. The management of the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for other vulnerable pupils is good, which enables those pupils to progress well. Middle managers are hardworking and enthusiastic but, in subjects other than English, mathematics, science and ICT, insufficient focus is given to how their work impacts on improving pupils' learning and achievements. Many close partnerships with the Church, other schools, including the nearby Nursery, and outside agencies enhance well pupils' learning, their personal and social development and the quality of the care and support they receive. The governors are supportive, have well organised committees and contribute to the school's self-evaluation. They are, however, too reliant on the headteacher's interpretation of the school's performance to be thoroughly effective critical friends.

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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	3
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?	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	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	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	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?	No

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

I very much enjoyed my recent visit to your school. I met and talked with lots of you in and around the school and was most impressed with how polite you were, how interested you were in what I thought of your school and the warm welcome you gave me. The school council and those I spoke to at lunchtime and in the playground were very keen to tell me what a good school you thought St Clare's was. I agree, it is a good school.

You have friendly and good teachers and an interesting range of things to learn in class and outside lessons. Your responses in the Junior assembly showed me how caring and sensitive you are. Most of you behave well and I know that one or two of you who sometimes mess about in lessons will try hard to stop. Those adults who run the school have a good understanding of what needs to be done to make St Clare's even better, but I have asked them to do two particular things to help with this.

- To make sure that children in Years 3 to 6 do as well in science as they do in English and mathematics.
- For the school to persuade fewer parents to take you on holiday during term time and even more of you who are absent quite a lot, to come to school much more often.

You can help by encouraging all your friends to come to school every day and to behave really well in lessons.