

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111386
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	310587
Inspection dates	3–4 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Leszek Iwaskow 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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	219
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr S Dwyer
Headteacher	Miss Janina Chwastek
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2004
School address	Woodford Lane Winsford Cheshire CW7 2JS
Telephone number	01606 592973
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St Joseph's is a slightly larger than average Catholic primary school located on the edge of the town centre of Winsford. The school serves a diverse catchment area with pupils coming from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Most come from a White British background with a very small number from other ethnic backgrounds, including a small number of Traveller families. Numbers have declined slightly in recent years. There are relatively low numbers of pupils entitled to free school meals. The number with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than the national average whilst the number with statements of special educational need is slightly above the national average. Attainment on entry is slightly below the national average and there are significant numbers of pupils with language and communication difficulties. There is a slightly greater percentage of girls than boys within the school but there are pronounced gender imbalances in some classes. The school has its own Nursery and attained Healthy School status recently.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Joseph's is an improving school which has emerged from a period of uncertainty and is in a good position to face the challenges of the future. Concerns about the quality of provision and falling standards justified the local authority in identifying the school as one causing concern. The current headteacher was appointed with the brief of reversing the downward spiral, re-energising the workforce and improving outcomes for pupils, especially standards in literacy. The school received intensive support linked to a regime of rigorous monitoring. The downward trend has been reversed and overall effectiveness is now satisfactory. Nonetheless, the school still needs to develop several aspects of its work further, notably to ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of all pupils.

The school has focused most of its energy on improving provision in the core subjects, especially literacy. This meant concentrating resources and support in these areas but has also led to the relative neglect of other areas of the curriculum. Standards in core subjects are now much better and improving, and there is a greater air of confidence that the school is getting things right. There is also an acknowledgement that there is now a need to review what has been achieved, consolidate that which is working and consider how to move the school on towards becoming good.

A lot of thought is put into planning lessons and staff follow clear teaching routines. Pupils particularly enjoy those lessons where they can 'discover' for themselves and where they can satisfy their curiosity. They particularly enjoy the afternoons when they can break from the customary lessons in literacy and mathematics and try something different. Pupils throughout the school benefit from opportunities to work outside the normal classroom environment. For example, older pupils have happy memories of their residential visit to North Wales when they were able to bond in adversity while climbing the Welsh mountains or reflect peacefully during their day on retreat in the church at Betws-y-Coed. Most enjoy coming to school and feel safe in its caring and Catholic environment. They and their parents are positive and appreciative about the changes that have been made in recent years to improve the school. Pupils are less keen, however, on the attempt being made to change their eating habits and encourage them to lead more healthy lifestyles. The many unhealthy lunchboxes are testimony to this. The opportunity to participate in the life of the school means a lot to the children. For example, they value those opportunities when they are asked for their opinions, can initiate changes through the school council or act as 'Happy Helpers', supporting the younger pupils.

Although the school teaches the required range of subjects, the focus on the core has reduced the time to teach other areas of the curriculum. As a result, not all subjects are covered in sufficient depth. Frequent staffing changes have not helped, with subject leaders having insufficient opportunity to manage and develop their subjects. The school is aware of this and it intends to address these issues.

The headteacher, her management team and the governors have worked hard to address long standing weaknesses and tackle underperformance. The need to raise standards has led to a realisation that the culture and entrenched practice in the school needed challenging and changing. This has, to an extent, been achieved. There is now a firm basis on which to build and a culture in which learning can flourish. There is a realisation that a greater emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring that pupils not only achieve in lessons but also enjoy their learning.

The school is now looking forward to celebrating its achievements and building a brighter future.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the Foundation Stage is good. Children begin Nursery with standards slightly below those typical for their age. Most children make good progress in all areas of learning. This is because teaching is good, teamwork and support are effective and resources are used well. Teachers make home visits before a child starts Nursery and this helps develop positive relationships with parents. The relationship between teachers and children is also good. Routines are clear and, as a result, children feel safe and secure. They are happy to try new experiences and take on responsibilities. The enjoyment of the Nursery children was evident during a lesson when they were able to clamber over a bus driven onto the premises by a grandfather, as part of their work on transport. Reception children also enjoyed fun activities relating to their number work.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the curriculum is broad and balanced with appropriate time for all subjects to enable these to be taught in sufficient depth.
- Improve the range of teaching methodologies to engage pupils better in lessons and increase their enjoyment of learning.
- Develop the role of subject leaders to improve the quality of provision across all subjects.
- Utilise subject specific support to ensure that teachers are secure in teaching all subjects well, including the foundation subjects.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that achievement and standards are improving. Currently both are satisfactory, overall.

The school has placed a great deal of effort into raising attainment in the core subjects, especially English and mathematics. The decline in standards has been halted and there is a general upward trend so that last year standards, at the end of Year 6, were at the national average.

Standards on entry into the Nursery are slightly below those typical for children of this age with some children having poorly developed communication skills. The majority make good progress from their starting points, although boys tend to perform less well than girls, reflecting poorer concentration spans in class. In order to raise standards, the school has concentrated on the development of communication, language and literacy skills. This, alongside more stable staffing, has improved provision, with even boys beginning to show improvement. Boys have benefited, in particular, from more active learning opportunities as well as a structured phonics programme. There are more pupils beginning to attain the higher grades.

At Key Stage 1, standards are below the national average mainly because of weaker performance in writing. A whole school focus on improving this and well targeted intervention strategies have led to improvements in Key Stage 2. Overall progress from Key Stage 1 to 2 is now

satisfactory. Although improved, English remains the weaker core subject. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make best progress at Key Stage 2.

Pupils make less progress in foundation subjects where pupils have a disjointed experience and there is insufficient time in many lessons to progressively develop skills and understanding.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development is satisfactory with some good features. Through the strong Catholic ethos that permeates the school, pupils' spiritual and moral development is good. The school has worked hard to improve the behaviour of pupils both inside and outside of classrooms. This has had a positive impact, in successfully reducing incidents of bullying, although there is still some disruptive behaviour in some classes. Pupils report that they now feel safe and more secure in this supportive environment. There are opportunities to learn about different cultures and during the time of the inspection the whole school was involved in a Fair Trade awareness programme. Such opportunities, however, are limited. The curriculum is insufficiently broad to enable pupils to better understand the multicultural society of Britain today. Most pupils enjoy school although some of the older pupils felt many lessons were routine and they wanted more opportunities to participate in practical subjects. As one pupil said, 'I would like to discover things.' Pupils learn about healthy eating in class but admit that they eat healthily only some of the time.

Attendance is satisfactory but the school is not pro-active enough in raising attendance figures further. The school council meet regularly and feel that the school takes note of their suggestions. They feel very positive about the responsibility they have and their impact within the school. Pupils learn to contribute to the community by raising money for various charities but otherwise have limited opportunities to gain from such positive experiences. The focus on numeracy and literacy, as well as the improvement in ICT, provides the pupils with the skills for their future working lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Although some good teaching was observed, the greater majority of lessons were satisfactory. This confirms the school's own judgement that teaching is satisfactory overall. Teachers show good expertise in teaching literacy and numeracy but are less secure in teaching the foundation subjects such as history, geography and design and technology, where there has been little support or training. The high turnover of staff in recent years has also impacted on learning in certain classes. Teachers' planning in core subjects is detailed and well structured. Regular monitoring has raised expectations and developed practice. Pupils are aware of teaching routines but crave more creativity and spontaneity in their lessons. Where tasks are not engaging, or where there is too much teacher talk with pupils expected to be passive listeners, boys in particular can lose interest and become disruptive. While pupils are expected to produce different amounts of work, and occasionally are provided with adult support, in a majority of lessons all pupils are expected to complete similar tasks. Consequently, learning lacks stimulation or challenge for the most able. Pupils identified that they particularly enjoy those lessons where they can work collaboratively and get practically involved. Most pupils want to learn and generally there are positive relationships in class. Regular use is made of new technology in an

attempt to make learning more visually attractive. Pupils' books are, on the whole, marked regularly and good use is made of helpful comments to clarify what pupils need to do to improve. The use of homework, however, is inconsistent with pupils often overloaded prior to their sitting external examinations. Improving classroom practice is an ongoing priority throughout the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The school considers the curriculum to be broad and balanced. Inspectors disagree and judge that it is inadequate because insufficient time is available to ensure in-depth teaching of the foundation subjects. The school has correctly identified the need to raise standards in English and mathematics and morning sessions are almost exclusively focused on teaching these subjects. This has left little time in the afternoon sessions to enable teachers to cover requirements in subjects such as music, history and geography. The introduction of a modern foreign language is welcomed. The last inspection judged the curriculum to be unsatisfactory, due mainly to topic planning not meeting the requirements of all pupils. The current four year rolling programme to teach the foundation subjects is not clearly organised or differentiated to ensure the progressive development of skills and understanding in several subjects. The personal, social and health education programme is delivered through other subjects, notably literacy. This scheme of work is satisfactory but plans to teach it discretely may place even greater pressure on an already overcrowded teaching programme. There is extensive over-reliance on nationally published schemes of work which have not been sufficiently adapted and developed to meet the needs and resources of the school. The school is aware of the need to review the teaching programme to ensure learners' needs and curriculum requirements are fully met especially in the mixed age classes. In the Foundation Stage, a thematic approach is used which covers requirements with an especial emphasis on literacy and numeracy. The provision for ICT across the school has improved since the last inspection. All subject areas have access to interactive whiteboards and projectors for teaching and pupils are given more regular opportunities to develop and use their ICT skills in lessons.

Pupils enjoy it when they are provided with opportunities to participate in additional activities. They look forward to their residential experience and enjoy those special days when they visit Chester Zoo or the Museum of Science and Industry. These visits add colour and memorable experiences to their days at school. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 benefit from football and netball coaching after school. The older girls take pleasure in learning to street dance. Although there are fewer opportunities for younger children to participate in enrichment opportunities after school, line dancing and 'active kids' are well supported.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The school is developing a more positive relationship with parents through its 'open door' policy and continues to encourage them to actively support their child's education. Parental responses to questionnaires, though few, overwhelmingly praised the work of the headteacher in moving the school forward so positively. Some, however, mentioned that more communication between the school and parents was still needed. The monthly 'Parent Drop-In' sessions, the fortnightly newsletter and the fact that staff make themselves available for parents is appreciated.

The school has achieved a Healthy School award and encourages families to adopt a healthy eating lifestyle. However, packed lunches show that many pupils are still not yet leading healthy lifestyles. Older pupils support younger pupils with their 'Happy Helpers' scheme. Younger pupils appreciate this and say it makes them feel secure. Good provision is made to help in the transition from class to class and from Year 6 to secondary school. Policies on child protection are in place but teachers are still awaiting training in this area. The school meets the government requirements on safeguarding children. Procedures for first aid are secure. An equality policy has still to be developed in line with recent regulations.

Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is robust. Assessment procedures are in place in English and mathematics. Targets are set in these subjects and marking shows pupils what they must do to improve. This has not yet been extended to other subjects, nor are pupils sufficiently involved in assessing their own learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are currently satisfactory. The school has come through a difficult period of rapid change. A few years ago, it was faced with falling standards and an uncertain future. The appointment of the current headteacher coincided with a period of intensive support from the local authority and the diocese. There have also been many staff changes. The headteacher has a clear vision of the direction she wants the school to go. There is a strong emphasis in the school's development plan on raising standards in core subjects and improving the quality of provision in these lessons. There has certainly been progress made in this direction but much still needs to be done, especially in ensuring pupils engage with a broad and balanced curriculum. The headteacher's commitment to driving up standards is shared by a small senior leadership team who are actively engaged in a well developed system of internal monitoring and lesson observation, particularly of the core subjects. Many of the subject leaders are recently in post and as yet, apart from English, have had only limited opportunities to develop their areas of responsibility. Training has focused on the core, particularly literacy, with few opportunities for teachers to develop good practice in other areas. Systems to involve parents are improving throughout the school, especially in the Foundation Stage.

Governors were concerned about the decline of the school. They were fully supportive of the current headteacher as she restructured the school workforce and re-focused the attention of both teachers and pupils on improving standards. They are kept well informed about developments and are keen to ensure that the school continues to attract good quality staff. There is now a clear sense of purpose and desire to continue to improve provision. The school currently provides satisfactory value for money.

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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?	3
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?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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?	4
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	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Winsford, CW7 2JS

This letter is to tell you about our recent visit to your school to inspect how good it is. The inspectors particularly enjoyed meeting you and talking to you. We found what you told us about your school to be very important. You are very proud of your school and you appreciate the hard work that Miss Chwastek and all your teachers are putting into making your time in the school a rewarding and happy experience. Your pride shone through when you sang your hearts out during the assembly to celebrate Fair Trade fortnight. I managed to talk to some of your parents afterwards and they are very proud of you and thought your singing was great - shame Father Dwyer did not hear you, otherwise he would have you singing in church on Sunday.

You and your parents have noticed the changes that have taken place since Miss Chwastek became your headteacher. Your test results have improved over the last few years and many of you are doing really well in mathematics and science, although you could still do a little better in English. If you made that little extra effort in lessons and paid a little more attention, I am sure you could do so. You enjoy many of your lessons but at times find the routines in literacy and numeracy lessons a little tiring. You would like to have more lessons where you can get involved practically and especially like some of your afternoon sessions. Your teachers are aware of this and over the coming months they will be looking at how they can change some of your lessons to ensure you get more time to paint in art, make things in design and technology, find out about interesting people in history and discover new and exciting places in geography. They will also try to make your lessons even more interesting, but you must also play your part, especially some of the boys who at times shout out and waste time in some lessons.

You enjoy helping each other and many of the older ones among you have volunteered to work as 'Happy Helpers' to help the younger children to settle into school life. You like being asked for your opinions on the school council and make some good suggestions about how to improve the school. I did discover that you did not like school dinners since they became much healthier - but if you are going to stay healthy you must eat healthily. This means no chocolate bars and crisps in your packed lunches. I know they taste good but they don't help your waistline. Eating healthily will also help you become better footballers and netball players.

I have asked your school to put improvements in place as soon as possible. The school may also receive a monitoring visit by another Ofsted inspector in order to check that all is going well. I am sure you will give your teachers all the help and support they need to build on the strong foundations that are already there.