

Alston Lane Catholic Primary School, Longridge

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119635
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	313366
Inspection date	11 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Jennie Platt

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	179
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Helen Hawkes
Headteacher	Mr Mark FitzGibbon
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2003
School address	Preston Road Longridge Preston Lancashire PR3 3BJ
Telephone number	01772 783661
Fax number	01772 784875

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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 with particular reference to writing and achievement in the Foundation Stage, teaching and learning, the care and guidance given to pupils looking especially at the tracking of pupils' academic progress, the curriculum and leadership and management focusing on monitoring and collaboration. Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, parental questionnaires, scrutiny of school documents including assessment information, the school's development plan and self-evaluation. Discussions were held with the headteacher, subject leaders, pupils, staff and the chair of the governing body. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average school although numbers are rising with the increase of residential building in the locality. This has increased the mobility in the school with pupils starting or leaving at different times of the year. A much lower than average proportion of pupils is eligible for free school meals. A very low number of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and all pupils have English as their first language. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average although the number with a statement of special educational need is average. Currently, the school is being managed by an acting headteacher with two days support from the new headteacher who is due to take up post next term.

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 with some outstanding features. This is certainly the case for pupils' pastoral care and aspects of their personal development. This is a very happy, close-knit community and a lovely place to be during the preparations for Christmas. The school rightly has a high reputation in the local community and this has led to parents from a distance travelling to the school to enable their children to receive a good education in a faith school. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good. Spirituality is particularly strong and underpins the daily routine of the school. The Christmas performance seen during the inspection demonstrated the pupils' confidence and enthusiasm for singing, as well as their commitment to sharing their skills with others. Pupils learn about their own culture, but are not really well informed about life in a multicultural society. Pupils clearly love school and attendance is better than the national average. Behaviour is excellent. The great majority of parents are extremely pleased with the education their children receive. One parent was thrilled with the school, commenting on the happy and welcoming atmosphere, the strong ethos of kindness shown to each other and the caring and supportive staff.

Achievement is good. Children start school with abilities that are slightly higher than that which is typical for their age. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 2 show standards have been consistently above average and often significantly higher especially in mathematics and reading because of the high proportion of pupils who reach beyond the level expected for their age. Writing is broadly average, but the higher attaining pupils are not always making enough progress. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 2 and standards are above average and higher in reading and science. Although in 2007 the results of national tests at the end of Year 6 were below those usually reached by the school, they remained just above the national average overall. Progress was good for the pupils who had been in this school for all of their education so far. Other pupils who started at different times made at least satisfactory progress based on their attainment at the time they entered school. Although standards in writing are average, it is the weakest subject and pupils lack confidence with the basic skills required to reach the higher level.

A major factor contributing to pupils' good achievement is the good quality of teaching and learning. This is especially the case for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who receive extra help from teachers and support assistants. Pupils with statements of special educational need often make better progress than others because their social skills and self-esteem flourish in this caring atmosphere. Throughout the school lessons are imaginative and interesting and pupils enjoy drama, partner work and discussions. Teachers capitalise on Christmas to extend writing skills in tasks that capture pupils' enthusiasm. Pupils learn about Scrooge, for example, by writing about his feelings. Relationships are good and pupils grow in confidence. In Year 6, pupils were eager to share their alliterative phrases. The teacher effectively extended pupils learning by encouraging them to appraise each other's works. This is done in a supportive way as pupils suggest, 'you could use more posh words'. Pace is usually brisk with time constraints set so pupils get down to their work well. Pupils said they enjoy using the information and communication technology (ICT) suite and would like more use of the laptop computers. During the inspection the interactive whiteboard and other ICT resources were used well to extend learning. Tasks are usually challenging except in writing where some grammar exercises are not followed up with opportunities for pupils to apply new skills to their own writing. Marking often includes useful comments that tell pupils how to improve.

The imaginative curriculum is effective in meeting the needs of most pupils. It provides very well for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but is at an early stage of supporting pupils who are identified as especially gifted or talented. It includes a well planned focus on developing pupils' personal, social and emotional needs. As a result, pupils mature into sensible and confident young adults well able to accept responsibility for their own actions. This is another important factor underpinning pupils' good progress and ensures pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their education. Pupils enjoy working with others and older pupils are keen to support the younger ones. This desire to help others is extended to the wider community through fund-raising activities. The curriculum gives good attention to pupils' physical well-being. Every day begins with a lively physical activity which gets the day off to a rousing start. Themed weeks, visits, visitors and a wide variety of clubs combine to make this an exciting place to learn.

Pastoral care is excellent. Safeguarding and child protection are in place and understood by all staff. Exemplary attention is given to teaching pupils how to keep safe and healthy. This has been rewarded in the achievement of the National Healthy Schools' Award. A very few parents expressed concern about bullying. The school has responded promptly with a new approach to teaching personal and social development. An anti-bullying week has also driven this message home to pupils who say they have no concerns about bullying. They talk about the buddy bench that is not used because everyone is friendly and included in games.

Leadership and management are good. The school is in a transition period of changes to the headship and deputy headship. Nevertheless, there has been no loss of direction. Early signs are the new staff are already working well as a team, evaluating what is working well and setting a clear agenda for future developments. Recent changes to the system to track pupils' academic progress are already helping teachers to spot and respond to underachievement earlier. New assessment information is also enabling the school to set challenging targets firmly based on pupils' current standards. The role of subject leader is well embedded in the school. They are clear about how to raise standards although less sure about how to measure the success of these actions. Governance is good. Decision making is collaborative and the school's self-evaluation is accurate. Effective plans are in place to lead the school forward and the school has good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children start school with a range of skills, but overall are just above what is typical for their age. They get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage and by the end of their Reception year, the majority are meeting and many are exceeding the levels expected for them. Children make good progress as a result of good teaching. Teachers and support staff combine effectively to put into action an excellent curriculum based firmly on learning through investigation and practical activity. Fun is at the heart of the Foundation Stage and children enjoy trying out new ideas. The room is organised creatively to encourage independent leaning as well as to stimulate children and celebrate their achievements. Facilities for outdoor learning are good although the space is small and restricts the use of wheeled toys. Staff provide exemplary care for the children and are extremely patient with those having learning difficulties. Management is good with a clear understanding of this age range. The action plan shows a good understanding about the improvement of provision, but is unclear how these will raise standards. Parents are eager to help especially with reading.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve progress in writing throughout the school.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to learn about life in a multicultural society.

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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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

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

12 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Alston Lane Catholic Primary School, Lancashire, PR3 3BJ

Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave me when I visited your school. I really appreciated your help when I was lost. I thoroughly enjoyed my day especially sharing your preparations for Christmas. I am sure some of these exciting events will just be a few of the wonderful memories you will all have of your time at Alston Lane School.

You attend a good school. You contribute to this by your excellent behaviour and the way you help each other. I was impressed by your energetic start to the day and it is good that you recognise the importance of keeping fit and healthy. Yours is a friendly school and you told me you feel safe because staff are caring and ready to help if needed. Teachers make lessons interesting and you respond well by listening attentively and working hard. Your classrooms were especially attractive at Christmas and I see staff display your work attractively as well as providing you with prompts to help you as you work. You and your parents told me that you appreciate the clubs that staff organise for you. You learn a lot about your own faith and culture and the school is going to extend this knowledge to prepare you more for living in a country that has a mixture of faiths and cultures.

You make good progress in your learning. Standards are good, but could be better in writing and the school is finding even more ways to improve this.

I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Jennie Platt

Lead inspector