

St Marys and St Benedicts Roman Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119704
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	313399
Inspection dates	5–6 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Andrew Scott

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	223
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Richard Vallely
Headteacher	Mrs Steph Smith
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2005
School address	Brownedge Lane Bamber Bridge Preston Lancashire PR5 6TA
Telephone number	01772 336650
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This urban school caters for pupils from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals tends to be average, although it rose in 2007. Conversely, the percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities fell to below average; it is usually above average. Almost all pupils come from White British backgrounds.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. It has particular strengths, notably the excellent quality of care and good support and guidance that result in good personal development of pupils. Leadership and management are also good. The headteacher has spearheaded distinct improvements since the last inspection. Senior staff now play a full part in the school's development, rigorous systems to track pupils' progress have been introduced and links with parents are better. Parents certainly have a good opinion of the school and particularly appreciate that their children enjoy their time there. 'There is a great community spirit,' wrote one parent, echoing others.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and reflects the quality of most teaching. Children start with skills and abilities that are broadly average and, by the end of Years 2 and 6, standards are still mostly average. However, effective self-evaluation is having a positive impact on teaching, although improvements have been slower than anticipated, because of staffing disruption during the past year. Now that things are more settled, the school's actions are beginning to bite. Weaknesses in writing have been resolved. Standards are now average and improving in Year 2. Similarly, investigative skills in science have improved. Overall, standards are on target to be slightly better than national levels this year. The achievement of pupils in the present Year 6 is good, because of good teaching in Key Stage 2, especially in Years 5 and 6.

Pupils' personal development is good; their contribution to the school and wider community is excellent. Pupils are friendly, courteous and well behaved around school and in lessons; they only show signs of restlessness when lessons do not motivate them. They are usually eager to learn, although they do not routinely work at a swift pace unless encouraged. They increasingly lead healthy lifestyles through suitable diet and exercise. The work of the school council is exemplary and underlines the value that the school places on civic and social responsibility. A recent, extended project involving all pupils in developing their own businesses was outstanding and really improved pupils' awareness of the outside world. Such opportunities, together with other skills, mean that pupils are well prepared for life ahead.

Provision, through teaching and the curriculum, is satisfactory. All classrooms have a positive atmosphere; pupils are clear about what they need to learn and there is a suitable focus on literacy and numeracy skills, although opportunities are missed to make learning more interesting through creating links across different subjects. In the better lessons there is a brisk pace to learning, the subject matter is interesting and teachers have higher expectations of pupils. Not all teachers though, make systematic use of the good assessment and tracking systems to plan work that meets the individual needs of all pupils. The school currently provides satisfactory value for money but demonstrates a good capacity to improve. Its cohesion, its clear sense of direction and the impact of recent initiatives show that, with stability, it is increasingly successful.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children receive a warm and friendly introduction to school and close attention is given to their care and welfare. As a result, parents are very pleased and their children settle happily and enjoy school. Most enter school with skills that are typical for their age and make satisfactory progress to reach the levels expected of five-year-olds. Teaching and learning are satisfactory with strengths in relationships and the provision of varied activities. Consequently, children

are busy learners who behave well. The curriculum is satisfactory, clearly based on learning through first hand experiences. For example, children enjoyed discovering which vehicles move when pushed and which need pulling. Sometimes activities are too formal for this age, as in the recording of their investigations. The large space available, including the outdoor area, is not fully exploited to cater for all of the areas of learning and to allow children to work independently.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure greater consistency, challenge and pace in teaching.
- Develop links between subjects to make learning more purposeful and creative.

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

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Standards are average throughout the school, as they have been in recent years. From average starting points, pupils' progress is satisfactory through Years 1 and 2. This year, standards are on target to rise slightly by the end of Year 2. This is because, although still broadly average in reading and mathematics, a successful whole-school emphasis on writing is leading to improved standards.

This emphasis has also been influential in Key Stage 2. Writing standards dipped in 2007 and caused English results to be below average. This year, writing has considerably improved. Standards have strengthened this year in all main subjects and are now average overall. This means that pupils in Year 6 will have made good progress since Year 2 when their standards were below average. The school's hard work to overcome any differences between groups of pupils is proving increasingly successful. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who do not have English as their first language make good progress because of good identification of their needs and the quality of personal support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Behaviour is good; pupils enjoy school and are proud of it. The majority attend well; overall attendance has improved and is currently satisfactory. Pupils are polite, very caring and supportive of each other. Spirituality is clear in the celebration of their own faith and recognition that people have different beliefs. Pupils have a love of the natural world and are eagerly awaiting the results of their labours in the vegetable plots.

Pupils' understanding of keeping safe and healthy is good. Through role play and practical activities, they are well informed about the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Their involvement in the school and wider community is excellent. Play leaders are trained to help younger pupils play together and this leads to energetic but safe playtimes. The school council is excellent and has a real voice in the school. It responds decisively to pupils' concerns, for example, in the proposed fencing to make playing football safer. Pupils are well prepared for the future. The innovative project called 'The Works' provided a wonderful experience for pupils to learn

about the world of work. 'It really helped everyone to get a full understanding of life after school,' said one pupil.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory with several strengths, mostly in Years 5 and 6. Teachers plan carefully and make learning objectives clear to pupils. This is most effective when pupils have a check list of items that are needed to make their work good and has contributed to improved standards in writing. Teachers are involving pupils more in assessing their own learning and often ask at the end of the lesson who feels they have learned something new. Similarly, when marking pupils' work teachers often identify how pupils can improve. This good practice is not yet consistent throughout school. Comments are not always followed up, so diluting their effectiveness.

Pupils say they enjoy work particularly when activities are varied, as in the best lessons. For example, Year 6 pupils enjoyed their role play as athletes and rapidly learned about the differences between the ancient and modern Olympic Games. However, the pace of learning is not always fast enough for pupils of different abilities, because teachers do not always make effective use of the assessment information now available to guide their planning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school's curriculum is satisfactory with some strengths. There is a suitable emphasis on basic skills, especially in literacy and numeracy. The school rightly recognised that the quality of pupils' writing was not good enough and their programme to correct it has been successful. Good enrichment, through such excellent activities as 'The Works', provide clear benefit to pupils. Older pupils, for instance, learned about compound interest and developed presentational skills. Such stimulating activities though, are not sufficiently planned for normal lessons and there are not enough links across different subjects to make learning more purposeful.

There is good provision for personal and social education, through organised lessons as well as everyday contact and assemblies. Detailed learning plans and targeted support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensure good provision for these pupils. There are also good opportunities in the curriculum for pupils with particular skills and talents.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The pastoral care for pupils is excellent. Pupils are very confident that help is available when it is needed and appreciate being able to identify concerns in the suggestion box. At weekly meetings, staff share their knowledge of all of the pupils so that the vulnerable and those needing extra support receive the help they require. Very close links with parents and external agencies ensure staff are well informed to offer the most suitable advice. All required checks, systems and procedures are in place to safeguard the pupils' well-being. The school has done well to improve the level of attendance.

The tracking of pupils' academic progress is good. Systems are becoming more embedded and the half yearly assessments are used well to spot underachievement and to provide additional

help where appropriate. This has tightened previous systems where pupils could go for a year before support was put in place. Teachers now have a wealth of information about their pupils and are mostly using this well to set pupils targets for improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led and managed. The vitality, dedication and drive of the headteacher have been crucial in moving the school forward in recent years. Parents' appreciation of the changes was neatly summed up by one who said of the school, 'once tired, now shining'. The headteacher has successfully empowered her senior colleagues to lead their areas of responsibility and subjects and, together, they are an effective team for school improvement. Their work, though, was inevitably hampered by the staff absences last year.

Self-evaluation is good because of regular monitoring of all its activities and analyses of key data. The school has a good picture of its strengths and weaknesses, although it does not always link provision to pupils' progress tightly enough. The school's plans for improvement are comprehensive and have the right priorities, although it is too wide-ranging and not streamlined enough. Governance is satisfactory; governors are supportive and work hard for the school but are still developing their role. The chair of governors is especially valued by the school as a knowledgeable and critical friend.

Progress has been secured since the last inspection by a range of initiatives and improvements. Efficient systems of care and tracking pupils' progress have been introduced, the writing focus and curricular initiative have paid dividends and links with parents have been considerably strengthened.

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

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	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	1
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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	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

9 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's and St Benedict's Roman Catholic Primary School, Lancashire, PR5 6TA

I am writing to thank you for the part you played in the recent inspection of your school. Mrs Platt and I thoroughly enjoyed our visit. We were grateful for all your help in helping to get to know your school. It was plain to see how much you enjoy it. It was a pity we were not able to meet all of Year 6 but at least we were able to contact those of you in the school council.

We think that your school gives you a satisfactory education with some good features. We think your development as young people is good, as you are polite, kind, friendly and well behaved. You enjoy learning, although you don't always try your hardest when lessons are not too exciting. You know how to be safe and healthy. Your school council work is excellent, as was your participation in 'The Works', which sounded great. As one of you said, this kind of activity will help you greatly when you are older. We would like the school do more such interesting activities in lessons in order to improve your standards and all-round skills.

The standards of your work are average at present. Most of you make satisfactory progress but those of you in Year 6 have made good progress from when you were in Year 2 because of good teaching that has challenged you. You do not all learn quite so well because you do not always have work that is just right for your abilities, and the pace of learning is not always fast enough. We have asked the school to improve this and we are sure that you will respond well to any new challenges.

The headteacher and all the staff have done a good job in improving your school. New things, such as the new assessment and the work on writing, are now paying dividends. We feel that your school has a bright future and we wish you well in your lives ahead.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Scott

Lead inspector