

St John's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124353
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314900
Inspection date	5 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Don Mason

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	96
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	16
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dot Willis
Headteacher	Rose Brookes
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	School Lane Great Haywood Stafford ST18 0SL
Telephone number	01889 808190
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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

All the pupils in this small school are from a White British background. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below average, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although there is significant variation between year groups. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision is for children in Reception. The school has received the Active Mark and Arts Mark Silver 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. Its warm, friendly atmosphere ensures that pupils enjoy coming to school and feel safe and secure. Pupils thrive because of the high levels of care they receive. Their good personal development is reflected in their above average attendance and the pride they display when talking about their school. Whilst their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, their knowledge of the cultural diversity of modern Britain is less well developed.

Children enter the school with levels of attainment that are a little above those expected nationally, and make a commendable start to their education in the EYFS. Teachers in Years 1 to 6 successfully build on this good start, with the result that standards at the end of Year 6 are above average overall and well above average in English. This represents good achievement. It is partly a consequence of the thorough way in which pupils' progress is checked. Challenging targets are set for pupils of all abilities and those in danger of not meeting them are provided with extra support. A relatively large team of well-qualified, experienced teaching assistants successfully contributes to this effort. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early and make as much progress as their peers because of the good support they receive. The rigorous checking of progress is one characteristic of the good teaching that enables pupils to achieve well. However, pupils have insufficient opportunities to extend their skills by working together in groups, making decisions and showing initiative. This is particularly the case for more able pupils. The academic guidance provided has improved significantly in the last year. Pupils receive good feedback on their achievements and good advice about what they have to do to improve further, especially in English. The good curriculum is enriched well by a wide range of sporting activities, visits and visitors. Through the school council, the pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the local community, taking on duties in school and fund raising activities, but the school rightly recognises that it has not yet done enough to give pupils, particularly the more able, more responsibility in, and more knowledge of, the wider world.

It is a tribute to the strong leadership of the headteacher that high academic standards have been maintained in recent years despite significant staffing disruption. This has been achieved by providing pupils with good extra support and using the particular talents of teachers creatively. Although the school enjoys the wholehearted support of the majority of its parents, a significant number express serious concerns over a variety of issues including staffing matters and leadership and management. Whilst accepting that parental worries over staffing issues are understandable and inevitable, inspectors found no evidence to support the strong views expressed. Nevertheless, the school has not yet done enough to allay these concerns by making parents and carers more aware of the good education their children are receiving. The continuing high standards, the improved achievement of more able pupils and the enthusiasm of the staff team provide evidence of the school's good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The children respond well to the infectious enthusiasm of the class teacher and the teaching assistants. They clearly enjoy their time at school. Close links with parents help to ensure that they settle quickly and achieve well. The children are confident when taking turns and helping each other. They are encouraged to be creative and independent. They particularly enjoy

working in the 'Fairy Tale Castle' where they dress up as knights or princesses and act out the stories they have been told. They are equally content when working on self-chosen activities or with an adult, in groups. The classroom is bright, stimulating and well organised. The outdoor space is limited and less stimulating. Good use of the surrounding area, walks and visits to the local area compensate for this. The EYFS team is well led and knowledgeable about the children's abilities and needs. There is a safe and exciting learning environment where all children progress well. The 'All About Me' profiles filled in by parents and carers are well used to make each child feel special. They also help staff to plan learning opportunities that are relevant to the children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give pupils, particularly the more able, increased opportunities to extend their skills by working together in groups, making decisions and showing initiative.
- Seek ways to develop the pupils' understanding of the cultural diversity of modern Britain and the world beyond their close-knit local community.
- Endeavour to allay the concerns of a minority of parents by enabling them to see more of the good education that their children are receiving.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards in recent years have been above average overall, demonstrating the good progress made by the pupils. However, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher National Curriculum levels in mathematics has not been as high as in English. This situation has been remedied. Last year, a high percentage of pupils attained the higher levels in mathematics, science and English. This improvement in mathematics has been achieved by ensuring that the expectations of more able pupils were raised and that they were given more challenging work. In addition, all pupils have benefited from the good work undertaken to improve problem-solving and mental arithmetic skills. Pupils' attainment in writing is well above average and continues to improve because of the successful efforts of staff to motivate the pupils, prepare them well for each writing activity and provide them with good advice about how to improve their work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils display positive attitudes to learning and are generally well behaved. They say that new behaviour guidelines are helping them to develop greater self-discipline and that any problems that do arise are quickly dealt with by staff. They have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and healthy and take part enthusiastically in physical education lessons and after-school clubs. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to enhance pupils' physical and personal development at play and lunchtimes. Pupils' spiritual and moral development is particularly strong. They have a well-defined sense of right and wrong, resulting partly from their close links with the Catholic Church. Activities such as the fund raising link with a school in Malawi contribute to the pupils' satisfactory cultural development. However, their understanding of cultural diversity in Britain and the wider world is relatively underdeveloped. Pupils attain good standards in the basic skills and information and communication technology (ICT). These abilities, together with their speaking and listening skills and their high levels of self-confidence, will serve them well in their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well because they are well taught. Teachers do not speak to the whole class for too long and so pupils remain interested and have sufficient time to work on activities, which are well planned to meet their needs. Teachers know their subjects well and plan their lessons effectively. The purposes of lessons are made clear and pupils are making good progress in developing the skills required to reflect on what they have achieved and what they need to do next. Pupils enjoy their lessons and say that their teachers go to great efforts to make the lessons interesting and fun. A strength of the school is the quality of the team of teaching assistants, who provide well-planned support for pupils. As well as working with less able pupils, they sometimes work with the more able to ensure that they, too, reach their challenging targets. The quality of teaching seen during the inspection varied from satisfactory to good with outstanding features. Teachers are working hard to ensure that more lessons are taught as well as the best ones.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The attractive displays around the school are testimony to the breadth and good quality of the work undertaken by the pupils. The curriculum is planned well to meet the needs of pupils in the mixed-age classes. It makes a good contribution to the development of their skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT, and their clear understanding of the requirements of healthy living. Writing is well developed across the curriculum, including in religious education, leading to particularly good progress in this subject. Teachers are becoming increasingly successful in providing activities that make links between subjects, thereby enhancing pupils' interest and motivation. However, most lessons are highly teacher-directed and pupils have limited opportunities to work together in groups, make decisions or develop leadership skills. The curriculum is enriched by a variety of initiatives including a beautiful mural, created by the pupils with the support of an artist from the Potteries. The good range of after-school clubs includes a Years 1 and 2 drama club, with a professional actor, which was paid for by the headteacher's successful bid for lottery funding.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This is an inclusive school, committed to meeting the needs of individual pupils. It provides high quality care, thereby promoting good personal development. Policies to ensure pupils' safety are securely in place. The school works well with local schools and other agencies to promote the pupils' learning and personal development. Pupils have targets in English, mathematics and science. Teachers frequently refer to them when talking to the pupils and encourage them to make their own assessment of how well they are doing. The best marking is thorough, related to the purpose of the lesson, and provides pupils with advice on their next steps in learning. These procedures are developing well, particularly in the Years 3 and 4 class, but they are too new, as yet, to have had a full impact on pupils' learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The good achievement of the pupils and the ability to cope with the particular challenge of running a small school, whilst undertaking a significant teaching commitment, are indications of the strong leadership of the headteacher. She has high expectations of staff and pupils. In return for a high level of commitment, staff receive good support and professional development opportunities. Relatively inexperienced teachers have developed good leadership skills in their areas of responsibility. Staff have a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have high aspirations for its future success and clear ideas about how to bring about further improvement. The quality of teaching and learning is regularly checked and staff have benefitted from the constructive advice they have received from the headteacher and other colleagues. Governors provide effective support and appropriate challenge for the headteacher.

Unavoidable staffing changes have been managed successfully. However, since staffing matters are confidential, information given to parents has been limited. The headteacher and governors have not done enough to allay the concerns of a significant number of parents by celebrating the successes of the school more effectively with them.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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**

6 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John's Catholic Primary School, Stafford, ST18 0SL

My colleague and I really enjoyed our visit to your school. Thank you for being so friendly and helpful. We particularly enjoyed visiting your classrooms, seeing the work you were doing and talking to you about your school. We found that your school provides you with a good education.

Things we found out about your school.

- You make good progress in your work and standards at the end of Year 6 are above average.
- You are beginning to make even more progress in writing and in mathematics because of the improvements the teachers have made.
- You behave very well in class and enjoy your lessons.
- You get on very well with the adults in school and they take very good care of you.
- The headteacher and the teachers check how well you are doing very carefully and provide you with good support if you need it.
- The adults in school are working well together to make the school even better than it is now.

What we have asked your school to do now.

- Give you more opportunities to work in groups, make decisions and develop leadership skills.
- Help you to learn more about people, their beliefs and the way they live in the world beyond your local area.
- Tell and show your parents and carers more about the good things that are happening in school.

You can help your teachers by continuing to work hard and care for each other, and trying always to behave as well outside the classroom as you do when you are with your teacher.

We would like to wish you all the very best of luck for the future.

Yours sincerely

Don Mason

Lead inspector