

English Martyrs' Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124368
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314903
Inspection date	13 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Graham Sims

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	71
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Julian Booth
Headteacher	Gillian Regan
Date of previous school inspection	24 March 2003
School address	Woodland Street Biddulph Stoke-on-Trent ST8 6LW
Telephone number	01782 512644
Fax number	01782 512644

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

English Martyrs' Catholic Primary School is much smaller than most primary schools. The school draws its pupils from a wide catchment area and almost all of the pupils are from White British backgrounds.

The school's substantive headteacher resigned at the end of the autumn term. An established headteacher was seconded from another school to run English Martyrs' for a term. This acting headteacher was in post at the time of the inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

English Martyrs' Catholic Primary School provides its pupils with a satisfactory standard of education. The astute, caring and well judged leadership of the acting headteacher has resulted in a number of improvements this term which have been recognised and appreciated by parents and have greatly improved staff morale. The local authority has also been proactive in providing a range of support through consultants and leading teachers to improve teaching, the leadership of subject coordinators and provision for children in the Foundation Stage. Although the quality of teaching, the curriculum, care, guidance and support, and leadership and management are all satisfactory, recent developments and the collaborative attitude of the staff indicate that there is capacity for further improvement.

Pupils start school with broadly average skills and leave at the end of Year 6 with above average standards in English, mathematics and science. Overall, therefore, pupils' achievement is good. However, this good achievement is largely a result of the very good progress made in Years 5 and 6. Progress in other years is uneven and the school's data indicate that progress in some year groups has been unsatisfactory. This uneven progress reflects the quality of teaching. In Years 5 and 6, there are high expectations, lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and pupils are worked hard. In the rest of the school, the teaching is good at times, but the work in pupils' books indicates that it is often not challenging, interesting or wide ranging enough. Whilst there is some good curricular enrichment through visits, clubs and the good input of two local secondary schools in physical education and the performing arts, the formal curriculum lacks both breadth and depth. Basic literacy and numeracy skills are not consolidated and developed through work undertaken in subjects such as history, geography and religious education. There is still not enough opportunity for pupils to develop their skills in information and communication technology (ICT), an issue that was identified in the previous inspection.

The pastoral care shown by the staff is a particular strength and has a positive impact on pupils' personal development. The great majority of pupils are well behaved, socially aware, polite and helpful. The small size of the school enables staff to know all of the pupils well. Good attention is given to meeting the needs of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Provision for personal, social and health education has improved since the last inspection and pupils have a good understanding of what they need to do to lead healthy lifestyles and adopt safe practices. Academic guidance is not as strong. Whilst some pieces of writing are helpfully marked in great detail, the day-to-day marking of pupils' work rarely provides pupils with helpful comments to tell them what they need to improve, and mistakes and persistent errors are often overlooked. Assessment systems are still not sufficiently embedded and not enough attention is given to assessment information when planning work for pupils to ensure it meets the needs of the differing groups and age groups within each class.

The school has been slow to deal with some of the issues highlighted in the previous inspection, although the acting headteacher has provided a new impetus for change and has involved other staff in implementing the school's priorities for improvement. The role of subject coordinator is still largely undeveloped, although staff are beginning to appreciate how a more rigorous programme of self-appraisal can improve their own skills and pupils' achievements. In recent months, governors have become more proactive in holding the school to account for the quality of education it provides and are moving forward purposefully with their most urgent priority, which is to appoint a full-time substantive headteacher at the earliest opportunity.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

For the last year and a half, children in the Reception Year have been taught in the same class as pupils in Years 1 and 2 rather than as a separate class, as was previously the case. The local authority has provided a significant amount of support and training to develop teachers' expertise and understanding of the Foundation Stage curriculum, and current provision for the school's youngest children is satisfactory.

From broadly average beginnings, children make satisfactory progress during their Reception Year and the great majority meet the expectations in most areas of learning by the time they start Year 1. Their attainment in knowledge and understanding of the world is weaker than that of other areas of learning. The regular contact with older pupils helps them to develop well socially, although the confines of having to work with other year groups within the same classroom for much of the day limits their opportunities for self-initiated activities.

Since the previous inspection, the school has developed a secure outdoor play area for children in the Foundation Stage, although there are plans to develop this area further to ensure it provides a more stimulating environment. Staff are developing their ability to assess children's attainment in each of the areas of learning, but some past assessments have been inaccurate, which has provided a misleading picture of children's progress during their Reception Year.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all of the teaching is characterised by high expectations, challenge, pace and activities which interest and motivate the pupils.
- Ensure that the day-to-day assessment of pupils' work provides pupils with clear guidance on what to improve and that assessment information is used effectively to plan work for the differing needs of pupils within each class.
- Ensure that all subjects of the curriculum are taught in sufficient depth and that they are used more effectively to consolidate and develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and, in particular, their ICT skills.
- Ensure that subject leaders are fully involved in monitoring and evaluating standards and quality of teaching and that they then lead developments in their areas of responsibility.

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: 2

During their time at the school, pupils achieve well, reaching above average standards in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6. Pupils' progress varies considerably. Most children finish the Reception Year adequately prepared for Year 1. Progress is broadly satisfactory in Years 1 to 4. Additional help for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enables them to make at least satisfactory progress, but more able pupils do not always do as well as they should. Pupils of all abilities make particularly good progress in Years 5 and 6.

Over the last few years, national test results at the end of Year 2 have fallen and were lower in 2007 than at the time of the previous inspection. In reading and writing, results were just above the national average. In mathematics, they were broadly average. Results at the end of

Year 6 have improved markedly. In 2007, they were well above the national average in English and mathematics and above average in science.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The pupils are polite, confident and cooperative. They eat healthily and enjoy participation in physical activities. They behave well in lessons and around the school and show good consideration for others, which helps to make the school a safe and welcoming place for all. They enjoy school, contributing well to class and group discussions and working hard in lessons. Older pupils are diligent in carrying out a range of duties and are particularly helpful towards the younger pupils, for example, looking after them at lunchtimes or when walking to and from the church. They also contribute well to the wider community, especially through their involvement with the church, but also through their consideration for those who are less fortunate than themselves. Their good social skills and above average academic skills prepare them well for their future education and the later world of work, although they do not have a great deal of opportunity to develop their independent learning skills or to exercise their initiative.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of the teaching has varied significantly, but observations undertaken by the acting headteacher and local authority indicate improvement over the last few months. At its best, as seen consistently in Years 5 and 6 and occasionally in other years, the teaching is challenging and motivates pupils to learn. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and pupils are involved well through a good variety of whole-class teaching, good collaborative working in small groups and individual activity. Where teaching materials are stimulating, as, for example, in a lesson in which pupils were given a well selected variety of poems to discuss and then read aloud, the pupils forge ahead in their learning. Pupils' books indicate, however, that not all of the work they are asked to do is as challenging or interesting. Some of the work does not move pupils on in their learning, and more able pupils mark time by carrying out tasks in which they are already proficient, rather than learning how to develop new skills. Too many of the tasks are too prescriptive and do not allow pupils enough opportunity to exercise independent choice or to use their own initiative.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Whilst the school teaches all of the subjects required by the National Curriculum, not enough thought has been given to how different subjects relate to each other or how basic skills of literacy and numeracy can be developed and consolidated through all subjects. For example, pupils undertake many written tasks in religious education, but these are rarely used to develop or reinforce points which have been taught in English lessons. There is still insufficient opportunity for pupils to develop and use ICT skills in a range of contexts, and there is little evidence of work in geography or design and technology. In contrast, the school provides a good variety of extra-curricular enrichment. Pupils enjoy visits to places of interest, including a biennial residential visit for older pupils, and a varying range of well supported after-school

clubs. They appreciate the occasional themed weeks which are organised in collaboration with other schools. Fruitful partnerships with two local secondary schools provide good learning opportunities which reflect the specialisms of these schools in physical education and the performing arts.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Within this small school, staff know the pupils very well and provide a good standard of personal support and pastoral care which contributes significantly to the predominantly happy, friendly and caring atmosphere within the school. The Christian ethos of the school is much in evidence and gives rise to good relationships between pupils and staff and amongst the pupils. Good care and attention is given to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, particularly through the help of some of the support staff. Arrangements to safeguard and protect pupils meet requirements. Academic guidance is satisfactory, but has areas for improvement. Occasional written assignments are marked in great detail, providing pupils with a very clear indication of what they have done well. Other work is marked regularly, but teachers' comments rarely help pupils to understand how they can improve their work. Grammatical and spelling mistakes remain largely uncorrected, with the result that they become ingrained. Pupils are now given targets, but these are not always personalised or reinforced through the marking of pupils' work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Parents, staff, governors and pupils comment most appreciatively on the quiet, unassuming but firm leadership of the acting headteacher since she arrived in January. She has provided the school with a very clear sense of direction. This has impacted positively on staff morale. Her astute analysis of the school's strengths and areas for development has led to a range of improvements. Through the work of visiting consultants and leading teachers, the ongoing support of the local authority has also played an important role over the last year in improving the quality of teaching and developing staff's understanding of the role of subject leader. Whilst this role is still largely undeveloped, staff have been encouraged by their first steps at self-evaluation through observing the teaching of others and analysing the quality and range of pupils' work. Governors have developed a closer working relationship with the staff and have supported the actions taken by the acting headteacher and the local authority to improve the quality of education provided.

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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	3

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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well 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	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?	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?	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

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

My colleague and I would like to thank you for making us feel welcome when we visited your school recently. The school certainly has some good features but, overall, it is providing you with a satisfactory education. These are our main findings.

- For the last few years, pupils have made very good progress in Years 5 and 6 and this has enabled them to reach higher standards than in most schools. Progress in other years has not been as rapid.
- You behave well and you are polite, friendly and considerate of others. This helps to make the school a welcoming and safe place for you to learn in.
- You know what you need to eat and do to keep yourselves healthy, and you know how to keep yourselves safe.
- There is some good teaching, but lessons and activities are not always interesting or challenging enough, particularly for the more able ones amongst you.
- The school provides some good activities outside normal lessons, but does not give enough time to teaching subjects such as geography or ICT.
- The staff take good care of you, but do not provide enough guidance for you when marking your work.
- The acting headteacher has helped the school to improve while you have been without a permanent headteacher.

In order to help the school improve, we have asked the staff to do the following.

- Ensure that all of your lessons challenge all of you to learn new things in an interesting and lively way.
- Provide you with a broader curriculum and help you to develop your literacy, numeracy and ICT skills through all of the subjects you are taught.
- Provide you with a clear indication of what you need to do to improve when they mark your work.
- Ensure that each teacher has the opportunity to find out what is happening and lead developments in the subjects for which they are responsible.

You can help your school to improve by continuing to participate actively in your lessons and by developing a real interest in learning. We wish each one of you every success and happiness in your future education.

14 March 2008



Dear Children

Inspection of English Martyrs' Catholic Primary School, Biddulph, ST8 6LW

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Yours sincerely

Mr Graham Sims
Lead inspector