

Blessed Mother Teresa's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124370
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314905
Inspection date	1 July 2008
Reporting inspector	John Eadie

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	141
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul McGarrigle
Headteacher	Jane Phillips
Date of previous school inspection	12 January 2004
School address	Somerset Road Highfields Stafford ST17 9UZ
Telephone number	01785 356405
Fax number	01785 356408

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Blessed Mother Teresa's is a smaller than average primary school. Almost half of the pupils come from a wide area, due to the school's Catholic foundation. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is higher than average. The number of pupils joining or leaving other than at the normal times is significantly higher than one would expect. A few of these join directly from other countries. There has been some instability in staffing in the last two years due to absence and staff leaving. There is a private nursery and before- and after-school provision on the school site. The school governors manage this provision.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school is providing a satisfactory education for its pupils. It has come through a difficult time, where staffing problems meant that many pupils were underachieving, and there is now an upward trend of improvement. Pupils' achievement is now satisfactory but standards are still below average by the time they leave.

One of the strengths of the school is pupils' good personal development. They are developing well into sensible and caring young people, who take their responsibilities in society seriously and behave well. They thoroughly enjoy school; a parent typically said, 'My child absolutely loves school.' Pupils are very well aware of how to lead healthy and safe lifestyles and most make healthy choices at lunchtime, for example. Their contribution to the school and wider community is good. For instance, younger pupils appreciate the friendship of older pupils who act as their 'buddies'.

Pupils' welfare and personal development is high on the agenda for the school. Parents appreciate this, saying such things as, 'This is a very happy school where the children are always the first priority' and 'This is a very loving and caring school, where the children demonstrate respect for each other'. There is an atmosphere of mutual respect amongst all who are part of the school community, and pupils who join in later years are quickly made to feel valued. Academic guidance and support is satisfactory. Careful checks are made on pupils' progress so that those who are in danger of falling behind can be given extra support. Pupils know their targets, but these targets are not often specific enough for them to know their next step in learning. Teachers' marking is not sufficiently precise to help pupils see these next steps and pupils rarely have an opportunity to respond to marking or advice.

Children make a sound start in Reception, as provision is satisfactory in this class. Strong links are developing with the relatively new adjacent Nursery, which help children to settle well. Pupils' progress through Years 1 to 6 is satisfactory, although it is better in some year groups, for example Years 2 and 5. However, insufficient numbers of pupils are working at higher levels. Although the proportion working at Level 5 in English in Year 6 has improved this year, too few are reaching this level in mathematics or science.

The quality of teaching has improved in the last year or so and is satisfactory overall. There is a purposeful atmosphere in lessons and pupils usually know what they are expected to learn, though this is not always sufficiently clear. Teachers do not often enough provide high levels of challenge for the more able. Teaching assistants provide skilful support, particularly in helping those with learning difficulties make the same progress as their classmates. Learning is made interesting, as there is a good curriculum which has been thought through and adapted well to meet pupils' needs.

The headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, provides clear direction for the school. Middle management is in a process of change and so monitoring is carried out by a small number of leaders. Bearing in mind the progress being made and taking into account the developing management structures, the school is satisfactorily placed to continue its forward momentum.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The Reception class is well organised and a happy place for these young children. For example, they enjoy singing while waiting to go to lunch. Adults are sensitive to their needs and the children feel safe and secure. Children make satisfactory progress, although this progress is very variable between areas of learning. For instance, they make good progress in the acquisition of phonic skills, as this has been a focus for the school. Progress in their physical development is barely satisfactory, mainly because the outside area is not furnished with a sufficient range of appropriate equipment or used effectively for developing learning in other areas of the curriculum.

Teaching is satisfactory overall, though better when groups are working with an adult. Progress in some of the formal aspects of learning, such as writing or calculating, is better as most activities are directed by an adult and concentrate on this style of learning. Activities which children can choose for themselves are limited and are not sufficiently focused to develop learning. Careful checks are made on children's learning and development and are recorded thoroughly. However, they are not analysed effectively to identify stronger and weaker areas of learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase pupils' rates of progress by ensuring that teachers give pupils clear advice on what they need to learn next to improve their work and provide regular opportunities for them to act on this advice.
- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that teachers consistently set high levels of challenge for all pupils, and particularly the more able in Years 3 to 6.
- Improve practice in the Foundation Stage so that these young children have more opportunities to choose focused activities for themselves and to develop a wider range of skills.

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

Children start in the Reception class with skills and knowledge below those expected. Their achievement is satisfactory; they make sound progress through the school and leave having reached standards that remain below average. There was a considerable fall in standards in the national tests for Year 6 in 2007, due to the disruption these pupils had suffered because of staffing changes. This fall has been largely redressed this year, particularly in English, which has been a focus for improvement. The major reason why standards are not higher is that too few pupils gain the higher Level 5 in the national tests in Year 6. This is particularly the case in mathematics and science. Standards are also adversely affected by the numbers of pupils who join the school in Years 3 to 6, a few having spent little time in this country.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good. Strong links with the parish and regular Masses in school contribute well to pupils' spiritual awareness. Their knowledge of cultures other than their own is limited. Although there are good links with a school in India, pupils are not very aware of the way of life in that culture. Similarly, there is insufficient awareness of the range of cultures represented in our own society. In other respects, pupils are developing well into mature young citizens. For instance, one of the benefits of the links with the school in India is a joint project on recycling, in which pupils are very involved.

Pupils enjoy and are proud of their school. They behave well, and those who sometimes find it difficult to conform are supported well, often with the extra help of outside agencies. Raising money for charity is often managed by the pupils and older pupils have opportunities to be involved in enterprise projects. Pupils know how to stay safe and, for example, they can cope with potential dangers and use the internet safely. However, their development of literacy and numeracy skills, which is only satisfactory, hinders their preparation for their future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching has improved in the last couple of years. More rigorous monitoring has ensured that teachers are now much more accountable for the progress of the pupils in their class. Although teachers usually share with pupils what they are expected to learn, these objectives are sometimes insufficiently precise. Pupils are not always asked to evaluate how successful their learning has been. Teachers organise their classes well and rooms are bright and stimulating learning environments. Good relationships exist between pupils and adults and between the pupils themselves. This increases the effectiveness of discussions between pupils, which are an integral part of learning in many lessons.

Although teachers are good at improving the progress of pupils of average and lower ability, there is generally insufficient challenge provided for the more able, and this is why few pupils gain the higher levels in the national tests. There are also times when lessons move at a fairly relaxed pace, without a sense of urgency or drive. For instance, pupils sometimes spend too long sitting listening when they could be more usefully employed working at a task.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Considerable thought has been put into ensuring that the curriculum has been adapted to meet the needs of the pupils. For instance, a number of initiatives have been put in place to help those who might be underachieving. The success of these is monitored so that they can be adapted or repeated as necessary. Focus weeks enable a cross-curricular approach, and topics such as recycling increase pupils' motivation and enjoyment. Good use is made of specialist teaching in music, and the support of the local high school for drama and dance. There are too few opportunities planned for pupils to engage in problem-solving and investigative approaches in mathematics and science. A particular improvement has been in the good use of information and communication technology to support learning in other subjects. Provision for pupils with

learning difficulties is carefully managed to ensure that these pupils receive appropriate support. The curriculum is enhanced well with a good range of activities, trips and visitors.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The pastoral support provided for pupils is a strength of the school. Pupils say that they feel safe and secure. This is shown in the very limited instances of racial problems or bullying. Safeguarding and arrangements to keep the pupils safe are rigorous and all staff know the pupils and their needs well. Academic support and guidance, whilst satisfactory, are in an early stage of development. Good systems exist for keeping track of pupils' progress. However, these have only recently been used effectively to raise teachers' accountability for the progress of pupils in their class. Teachers have begun to set targets for pupils but these are not sufficiently precise to help pupils know what they need to learn next.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

After the difficulties of the last two years, there is a renewed determination to raise standards and improve pupils' achievement. This is being led well by the headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher. From September, a newly-appointed member of staff is to join the leadership team and there will, necessarily, be a reallocation of responsibilities. Much of the monitoring has therefore been carried out by the headteacher and deputy headteacher and they have managed this effectively. There is good practice in regular self-evaluation meetings, involving governors and all staff. However, the self-evaluation process is concerned more with provision than with the outcomes for pupils. Governors are very supportive and ensure that they have a clear picture of pupils' progress. However, their involvement in first-hand monitoring is limited.

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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?	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?	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	2
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?	2
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

2 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Blessed Mother Teresa's Catholic Primary School, Stafford ST17 9UZ

Thank you so much for welcoming Mrs Haywood and me so warmly when we visited your school recently. We very much enjoyed talking with you and are sorry that we did not meet any of the Years 5 and 6 pupils. We do hope you enjoyed your residential trip. Many of you told us how proud you are of your school and we are glad to say that it is improving and is giving you a satisfactory education.

These are the main things we found about your school.

- You are developing well into caring and responsible young people.
- You behave well and take on lots of jobs in the school, such as being 'buddies'.
- All adults look after you really well and you feel safe and secure.
- The school has planned an interesting curriculum for you, particularly when you are taught by specialists for music, drama and dance and when you enjoy trips and meet visitors.
- You are making satisfactory progress and reaching below average standards by the time you leave. This is because teaching is satisfactory.
- Your headteacher and other teachers have clear plans to continue to improve the school.

We have suggested that the school should improve the following things.

- The targets set for you to help you to improve your work are not always sufficiently clear and you are not often given opportunities to improve your work when teachers give you advice when they speak to you or mark your work.
- Some of you who find your work easy should be given more work that really challenges you to do well.
- The youngest children in the Reception class do not have enough opportunities to choose activities for themselves.

We know you will do all you can to help your headteacher and teachers continue to improve your school. Keep working hard!

With best wishes

John D Eadie Lead inspector