

St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104242
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	324000
Inspection dates	5–6 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Rodney Braithwaite

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	186
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ralph Taylor
Headteacher	Anthony McCann
Date of previous school inspection	30 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Narrow Lane Brownhills Walsall WS8 6HX

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	5–6 March 2009
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

St Bernadette's is a small Catholic primary school, with Early Years Foundation Stage provision in a Nursery and Reception class. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, and a small number are from minority ethnic backgrounds. A small proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than average. There is a breakfast club and after-school club on site, both of which are managed independently.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School is a good school. The school is welcoming, very caring and helps its pupils to reach an outstanding level of personal development and well-being. Pupils are very happy in school, as recognised by parents, one of whom commented, 'My children just can't wait to go every day.' Judging by the high attendance level, many pupils share this feeling. Their behaviour is immaculate, they are polite and respectful to each other and adults, and they enjoy their learning activities and the many challenges and opportunities given to them. They have a long list of all that they enjoy in school, and are pleased with the extensive responsibilities they are given. An active school council proposes improvements, such as shelters for parents waiting for their children. There is a high level of care for pupils, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A significant number of parents commented on how well the school provides for the most vulnerable and needy pupils. As one parent said, 'Our family is very proud of St Bernadette's.' All pupils are treated equally and fairly in a strongly inclusive ethos. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion, especially in the local church community. The overwhelming sense of belonging and friendship are symptomatic of the outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the school.

Most pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress and achieve well. They enjoy a particularly good start to their education in the Nursery and Reception classes. Standards are above average in reading, mathematics and science when pupils leave the school. In writing, nearly all pupils reach at least average standards, but for some time the school has been frustrated by the smaller than expected number who reach above average levels. A number of stimulating strategies for improvement have been introduced this year, which are showing early signs of success; writing, especially by older pupils, is clearly becoming more accurate and imaginative. Better assessment and tracking of pupils' progress is helping improvement but the school knows that this must now become thoroughly embedded in all classes. The school has already proved that it has a good capacity to improve; for example, by the successful raising of standards in mathematics in the last three years. Standards and progress, especially in speaking and information and communication technology (ICT), are being enhanced by a good and developing curriculum, where several exciting new initiatives are being introduced. Extra-curricular clubs, especially in sport, and many enrichment opportunities, also give a strong stimulus to learning.

The inspection confirmed the opinion of many parents that the teachers are dedicated and treat each pupil as unique. Relationships with pupils are very good, and teaching is enhanced by good contributions from well-trained teaching assistants. School leaders monitor the effectiveness of teaching regularly, and offer good support and advice to improve practice. However, the high quality teaching seen in a few classes is not yet sufficiently reflected across the school as a whole. The headteacher is an effective leader, a very good teacher, and a good male role model for the pupils. He leads several highly motivated teams of managers who are rapidly expanding their responsibilities and share the same strong drive for improvement. The governors, led by an experienced and decisive chair, make a strong contribution to the management of the school. They know the school well, are prepared to challenge, and ensure that the school gives good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The wide range of ability on entry means that many children arrive with skill levels lower than expected for their age. Good teaching provides the children with a fine start to their education and they make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The early identification of their abilities and the full involvement of parents help the children to settle in quickly. Procedures to help children become familiar with their surroundings ensure that well-planned transitions are successful into both the Nursery and Reception. By the time they leave their Reception Year, many reach, and some exceed, their expected goals. The positive relationships that exist in the school ensure children are happy, enjoy their learning and quickly grow in independence and confidence. The personal development and well-being of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are outstanding. Assessment is a shared responsibility and all adults contribute to developing a comprehensive system which records and tracks the progress of each child. The children gain a good introduction to ICT and find this aspect particularly enjoyable. There are opportunities to learn through play both indoors and out. The outdoor play area has been improved and provides a stimulating resource. The leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are good, and leaders have an accurate view of its strengths and how to plan for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of teaching and learning across the school by a more robust monitoring of teaching skills and an increased sharing of existing good practice.
- Build upon recent improvements in assessment and the monitoring of pupils' progress to ensure that all pupils reach the standards in writing of which they are capable.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards throughout the school are above average in mathematics, reading and science and are satisfactory, and improving, in writing. These standards reflect the results of the most recent national tests in 2008, when the school was disappointed at the low number of pupils gaining above average levels in writing at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. The school has taken decisive and swift action for improvement, and sought support and advice in order to raise writing standards. This is proving to be successful, as there is substantial evidence of improved writing in nearly all classes, particularly in Years 5 and 6. The school has concentrated successfully in the last three years on raising standards in mathematics. Achievement and progress are good throughout the school for most pupils although there remain a small number who have not done as well as they could in writing. Much improved and more frequent assessment of pupil progress is contributing to better achievement, although this is not wholly consistent in all year groups. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good, and occasionally outstanding, progress because staff respond expertly to their needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

From the early morning sessions of 'brain gym' and activities such as the maths club, to their clubs at the end of the day, pupils show great enthusiasm and enjoyment of their school lives. Pupils from all years describe the school glowingly, as 'brilliant', 'perfect' and even 'spontaneous'.

Relationships between pupils and with adults are excellent. Pupils have great confidence in all adults in the school, saying, 'We can talk to any teacher if we have a problem.' This helps them to feel very safe in school. A great strength of the school is pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is excellent. Pupils have outstanding attitudes to learning, and take much delight in celebrating their own achievements and those of others. This was seen in an assembly, attended by many parents, where pupils won prizes for their contributions to World Book Day. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are of a very high standard. They work and play very well together and try hard to do their best. Pupils, especially those on the school council, delight in their contributions to both the school and a number of charities, such as Guide Dogs for the Blind, and Missionaries Abroad. They enjoy many opportunities for extra-curricular activities, especially sport, including the use of the new cross-country trail. Pupils understand very well the need for a healthy lifestyle, and try hard to put this into practice. Their skills in basic subjects, good self-confidence, independence and responsible attitudes, ensure that they are well prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching is good overall, varying from satisfactory to outstanding. The best is distinguished by varied teaching methods, where teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to develop independence as well as teamwork. This helps pupils build their self-confidence and verbal fluency and benefit from work which is well planned for their needs. The skilled teaching assistants play a valuable role assisting pupils in class or when working with specific groups with particular learning needs. All classes are well managed, which is clearly shown in the excellent behaviour of pupils everywhere. Some teachers make sure that the more-able pupils and those with particular talents are challenged by activities that extend their thinking. On occasions, not enough is asked of pupils, and opportunities to question them about their learning are missed. Resources such as interactive whiteboards are used creatively to make lessons exciting and to engage pupils' interest. In a science lesson in Year 1, pupils were able to correctly identify a wide range of materials, classify their properties and experiment with those where shape could be changed. The pupils show enthusiasm when using computers which helps their learning and their writing. Improved systems for tracking pupils' progress are in place and teachers' planning indicates that better progress is now taking place in writing. In all lessons good relationships ensure that pupils are responsive and cooperate well with each other.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school is working successfully to provide a stimulating and varied curriculum. This has resulted in a redesigned, creative curriculum which places more emphasis on dance, drama, and design and technology, and includes a multicultural week. Priorities for this year are the provision of foreign language teaching and the introduction of the international curriculum. These initiatives are being driven by an enthusiastic management team of teachers covering all year groups. The school offers good enrichment opportunities through outside educational visits and its many visitors such as an environmental theatre group. The school strongly promotes the equality of all groups of pupils, and inclusion throughout the curriculum. The development of enterprise skills is helping pupils in Year 6 to improve their education for life. Good provision

is also made for a number of traditional Catholic celebrations throughout the year. Literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are being used increasingly to enhance the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school cares for, guides and supports its pupils very effectively, reflecting the shared values and ethos of the community. Rigorously implemented procedures are in place for safeguarding children. Teachers and teaching assistants provide valuable support to those pupils who need additional help with their work, and agencies of a wide range give excellent guidance to staff, so that academic and personal support is directed to maximum effect. The support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is particularly good. The school has good procedures for supporting looked-after children. Assessment information about pupils and its use in teachers' planning have both improved since the last inspection. Teachers' marking now gives helpful advice to pupils so that through it most know how they are doing and what they need to do to do better. Pupils' regular self-assessment is also helping their progress. Parents value the regular information they receive in the home/school liaison diaries. These give information about children's progress towards their targets, and how parents might help them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is led effectively by the headteacher who ensures that everyone, including pupils, has an effective voice in the management of the school. He has an accurate overview of all in the school, which helps leaders to share school priorities for improvement, and to promote high quality care. Parents are especially appreciative of his very positive interaction with pupils. He is supported by increasingly effective teams of leaders, and a talented assistant headteacher who has a number of important responsibilities. School managers are relishing their enhanced roles in developing new initiatives and strategies for improving standards and widening the curriculum. The governing body, led strongly by a new chair, knows the school very well, and challenges leaders consistently on the school's performance. It is also successful in ensuring the school gives good value for money. The school has met challenging but realistic targets for most pupils for several years, and is now 'raising the bar' through higher expectations; action taken to implement this is already helping improvement. School leaders are involved in the regular monitoring of teaching and learning and have identified a few areas for improvement. However, insufficiently robust action is being taken to ensure that this results quickly in better teaching and learning. This is reflected in the school's self-evaluation, which although good overall, does not yet analyse the impact of actions taken for improvement sharply enough.

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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?	1
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?	1
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
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 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?	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

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

9 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School, Walsall, WS8 6HX

We very much enjoyed our recent visit to your school. You all made us very welcome, and we were very impressed by your politeness, excellent behaviour and very good attendance and by how much you enjoyed school. The way in which you go about your own personal development is outstanding. I especially enjoyed my chat with the school council, and our discussion about spontaneous combustion! We were also pleased that your parents like the school, your headteacher and the teachers so much. They think that you are all very well cared for, and that you are learning and achieving well. We agree with them.

You go to a good school and reach good standards in most of your work by the time you leave. Your standard of writing is not quite so good, and we are pleased that your teachers have found new ways to help you improve it. It was good to hear from some of you older ones that you are now enjoying your writing much more. Try to keep that up, and practise as often as you can, even at home.

Your school is well led and managed by some very keen teachers, teaching assistants, governors and the headteacher, who all want you to do as well as possible. It was nice to hear how pleased you were with the new cross-country track.

We have suggested that the school could get even better, with your help, by:

- supporting your teachers in making your learning as good as it can be in all classes
- helping you all to improve your writing and reach the standards we think you can.

Good luck to everyone.

Yours faithfully

Rod Braithwaite

Lead inspector