

St Austin's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104643
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	324083
Inspection dates	19–20 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Clare Henderson

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)	480
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	Mr Mike McGuinness
Headteacher	Mr Noel O'Neill and Mr John Carney
Date of previous school inspection	21 September 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Riverbank Road Liverpool Merseyside L19 9DH
Telephone number	0151 427 1800
Fax number	0151 494 9804

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Austin's is a larger than average school. The majority of pupils come from relatively advantaged backgrounds, as seen in the below average proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. A lower than average percentage of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Almost all pupils speak English as their first language and a few are from minority ethnic groups. None of these pupils are at an early stage of learning English. Children come to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Reception class from a range of different local nursery settings. The school was the UK Spanish School of the Year 2006, and has won an award for European Languages; it has also achieved the BECTA ICT mark and Investors in People. There is a joint headship with two headteachers sharing the position.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Austin's is a good school. Instrumental in its success are good quality teaching, some outstanding curriculum provision and outstanding pastoral care. This is accompanied by good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning by pupils, together with a lived out vision that everyone is special and has gifts which are to be respected. Parents overwhelmingly agree in words such as: 'This is a loving, caring community' and 'My children have thrived and flourished here'.

Children get off to a good start in the EYFS. In Years 1 and 2, pupils attain above average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Progress continues at a good pace in Years 3 to 6 so that, in Year 6, national test standards in English, mathematics and science are well above the national average. This represents good achievement. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those from minority ethnic groups make similar progress as their peers as a result of the good support they receive from highly effective teaching assistants.

Pupils' personal well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. This is reflected in their above average attendance levels. Pupils have a good awareness of the need to lead a healthy lifestyle. They say they feel safe and know there is always someone to talk to if they have a problem. They greatly value opportunities to express their views, for example, as school councillors. The school involves pupils very well both in the school and wider community, through, for example, the two local parishes and its links with Spain.

The curriculum is good and it meets the interests and learning needs of most pupils effectively. However, exceptionally able pupils are not always provided with learning experiences that meet their personal interests and aptitudes sufficiently well. Within the curriculum, there are notable strengths such as the outstanding provision for and teaching of information communication and technology (ICT). Similarly, the teaching of Spanish is interwoven exceptionally well into all elements of school life. Successes in these areas are reflected in awards which the school has gained. Because pupils' basic skills are good, this prepares them well for their future lives.

Leadership and management are good. The headship team gives the school clear direction. Teamwork from all staff is very strong and subject leadership is good. This has helped the school make good progress since the last inspection. Effective partnerships with other schools and outside support agencies help the school with its work. Governors contribute well to this process. Their clear understanding of the school's work and their high levels of expertise are used well to provide effective guidance and challenge. Consequently, the school provides good value for money and has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children join the EYFS with skills that are broadly typical for their age. They work together well and show positive attitudes in all their activities because the excellent pastoral care provided helps them settle into their new surroundings happily. Children make good progress in all areas of learning. Consequently, by the end of their Reception year, most have achieved the learning goals expected. This is due to well planned provision in most classes, good teaching and welfare, and the good personal support they receive. Children enjoy the challenge of activities, whether teacher-led or those they choose for themselves within the classroom. They make rapid progress in their ICT skills because of the outstanding provision and teaching they receive. Daily sessions

focusing on letters and sounds help to boost their early reading and writing skills well. However, because the outside area is not used on a continuous basis, opportunities to enable children to develop their learning, in all aspects, are missed. There are good links with parents who appreciate the welcoming ethos and good information about their children's progress. The EYFS is well led. Effective teamwork between teachers and skilled teaching assistants is a key factor in the good progress of all, including vulnerable children and those with additional needs.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the opportunities for outdoor play to improve children's learning and development in the EYFS.
- Provide learning experiences within the curriculum that meet the personal interests and aptitudes of exceptionally able pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Good progress from the EYFS continues in Years 1 and 2 so that, by the age of seven, pupils reach standards which are above average in reading, mathematics and writing. In Years 3 to 6, emphasis on the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics ensures good achievement for all pupils. Consequently, by the end of Year 6, they reach well above average standards in English, mathematics and science and, particularly so, in 2008, at the higher levels in science and mathematics. However, standards in writing for the more able, in both Years 2 and 6 were not as high as those in the 2007 national tests. The school swiftly identified what it needed to do to address this dip. The impact of the strategies introduced is paying off. The quality of writing and mathematics seen in lessons and in pupils' work shows these more able pupils are making good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school and say, for instance, 'English is fun'. They are given good opportunities for reflection and discussion around feelings and emotions. Consequently, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Pupils say they enjoy being part of the school community and, as members of the school council, are proud of the changes that they have begun to instigate. For example, the redesigning of the school toilets is one example of pupils' influence. They say they feel proud to go into the local community as part of the orchestra and choir. Pupils say that they enjoyed singing in the retirement home and knew the retired people liked it from their 'smiling faces'. Pupils are proud of their fundraising and the help this gives to those less fortunate, for instance in sending shoe boxes to Slovakia. Pupils' good health is nurtured through advice about nutrition and physical exercise. They have a good knowledge of personal safety, for example a Year 1 pupil said, 'If I saw a stranger I would tell a teacher'. The good basic skills that pupils acquire, together with a sense of teamwork, are laying secure foundations for them to do well at secondary school and become economically active in later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good because in most lessons teachers have high expectations and pupils respond well to the challenges set for them. In the best lessons, pupils are fully engaged and their achievement is good. Frequent opportunities for extended writing are impacting effectively on the good progress noted in other subjects. Pupils are motivated to learn and class teachers capitalise on this by consistently taking a keen interest in what pupils write and say. Although the planning of lessons caters for different levels of ability, there are occasions, in a minority of lessons, when challenge for the exceptionally able is not high enough. During these lessons, questions are pitched at low level recall rather than challenging thinking at a higher level. Similarly, when the pace of learning slows, teaching is less effective and pupils do not progress at the same good rate. In all classes, pupils use helpful guidance from their teacher's comments to help them improve their work. Teachers and teaching assistants know their pupils well and work closely together to support them in all aspects of their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Planning and coverage of English, mathematics and science are good and have resulted in pupils making good progress in acquiring these skills. However, the school recognises the need to increase opportunities for independent learning through providing the exceptionally able pupils with a wider range of curriculum experiences to extend their interests and aptitudes. In spite of this, there are some outstanding features to the curriculum, for example, the provision of Spanish. This is not only effective in high quality lessons but in the enrichment, cultural and personal development opportunities it provides for all pupils. A further outstanding aspect is frequent access to and development of ICT skills which consolidate pupils' good levels of ICT competence. Pupils benefit from opportunities to develop their musical skills by learning to play an instrument or sing in the school choir. These are popular and well supported but not similarly matched by sufficient opportunities for pupils to extend their sporting interests and talents.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good overall. However, the pastoral care pupils receive is outstanding. The school's commitment to quality care is demonstrated in how well each pupil is known to staff. Consequently, all are treated with respect as individuals while, at the same time, learning their responsibility of care for each other. The guidance and support given to those identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or from minority ethnic groups is good, adding value to their learning. Good assessment procedures are in place but need to be fine tuned to support progress of individual pupils and, in particular, those identified as exceptionally able. Pupils are guided well through their marked work in how to improve further. Partnership with parents is good. For example, a parent was pleased at how well she and her children had been welcomed as newcomers to the school and this sentiment, repeated often by parents, is reflected in the outstanding pastoral aspect of the school's work. Transition between year groups, when children start school or begin high school is good. Procedures for

safeguarding pupils and for assessing risks meet current requirements and national guidelines for the safe recruitment of staff and volunteers are followed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership is good and the school is well managed. The headship team have a clear vision of what they want the school to achieve. They have identified the correct priorities for improvement and set in place good action to achieve them. All staff share this work and make a strong contribution to the smooth running of the school. The involvement of subject leaders in checking the quality of provision within their areas of responsibility is well developed. They methodically track the progress of pupils in their areas of responsibility and are involved in checking the quality of provision and its subsequent impact on pupils' achievement. This assessment information could be used more effectively by all staff to identify where exceptionally able pupils can be provided with learning experiences that will meet their personal interests and aptitudes more closely. The leadership team has a clear knowledge of the school's needs. They promote equal opportunities and an appreciation of diversity well and have developed good community cohesion within the school. However, whilst local and international links are well developed, pupils are not so converse with cultural diversity issues arising from life in a multicultural Britain. Governors give good support and challenge to the school and fulfill their statutory duties well.

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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	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**

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you all for the warm welcome you gave us when we came to inspect your school. We particularly enjoyed listening to you sing at your choir practice. Thank you to all of you who chatted to us. I know how proud you are to belong to St Austin's. That is because you go to a good school.

These are some of the good things we found out.

- You are very polite and friendly and are happy to come to school every day.
- You say you feel safe in school, and your headteachers, teachers, teaching assistants and all the other helpers look after you extremely well. Because of this, your mums, dads and families really appreciate everything your school does for you.
- Your behaviour is good and you get on really well with your teachers and your friends and eagerly help others through fundraising events.
- In every year group from Reception to Year 6, you all make good progress in your work.
- We could see you really enjoy, and are very successful in, all the exciting ICT work you do.
- Similarly, you are very good at speaking Spanish and learning about life in Spain.

There are some things that can help your school to be even better, so I have asked your headteachers to:

- make sure that the children in the Reception classes have more opportunities to use the outdoor area to help them with their learning
- make sure that all of you, especially the exceptionally able pupils, are set the sort of work that will challenge you to achieve your very best.

You too can help to make your school even better by always doing your very best. Thank you once again for being so kind and friendly. I really enjoyed seeing you at work and play.