

St Aidan's Catholic Primary School, Wigan

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106463
Local Authority	Wigan
Inspection number	324404
Inspection dates	9–10 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Jon Lovgreen

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)	372
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 D Shirley
Headteacher	Mrs Christine Mason
Date of previous school inspection	16 January 2008
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Holmes House Avenue Winstanley Wigan Lancashire WN3 6EE
Telephone number	01942 223544
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

When inspected in January 2008, the school was given a notice to improve. Areas for improvement were: pupils' standards and progress in mathematics throughout the school; more challenging work in mathematics for older, more able pupils; and the need for teachers to have better knowledge of mathematics to help pupils overcome misunderstandings. It was subsequently visited in September 2008, when it was judged to be making good progress.

Description of the school

St Aidan's is a larger than average primary school. Most pupils are of White British heritage. Few of the pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds are at an early stage of learning to speak English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils eligible for a free school meal is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than average, but few have a statement of special educational needs. The school has gained a number of awards including those for Healthy Schools, Eco Status, Activemark, Artsmark and Investors in People. There is a childcare club on site, which is run by a private provider and did not form part of this inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

St Aidan's is a good school, which has made rapid strides in tackling issues from the previous inspection and in raising pupils' attainment generally. The result has been considerable improvement in pupils' progress, much better test results and higher standards.

Across the school pupils are achieving well and consistently reach above average standards. Evidence in school about standards at the end of Year 6 in 2008, and current work seen in lessons confirms this. Previous issues were largely to do with mathematics. This was not taught well enough, so that too few pupils achieved well or reached the standards of which they were capable. A quick acceptance of this by the school, alongside careful analysis of what needed to improve, gave teachers the clear agenda and crisp timescale for improvement to take place. Extensive support from the local authority, coupled with detailed work with a partner school on how to accelerate pupils' progress and track their learning, have led to rapid progress. Adopted strategies have not only tackled the issues in mathematics, but have also stimulated more thoughtful, lively and relevant teaching generally. However, some boys' writing is lagging behind. Their progress in writing is satisfactory but does not match the progress they make in other subjects. This is because in some lessons too little attention is given to the quality of extended writing.

A strength of the school is the excellent quality of care and support it gives to pupils, both as learners and as individuals. The result is mature and polite young people whose behaviour is exemplary and who have diligent attitudes to school. This creates the atmosphere of mutual respect within which teachers can plan more imaginative and demanding tasks. Good learning is the result of good teaching that contains appropriate challenge. Consequently, pupils of all abilities make good progress overall. Regular homework is set. Good marking enables pupils and teachers to agree targets for improvement. Accurate and much improved assessment helps both teachers and pupils understand what has been achieved and what needs to be concentrated on next.

The curriculum is good. Setting arrangements; cross-curricular topics that allow pupils to develop skills of research; specialist teaching and a very good range of extra-curricular activities all contribute to this. Although it is introduced through books and other sources, there are limited opportunities for pupils to have actual first-hand experience of the range of cultures, beliefs and faiths present in their country today. Partnerships with parents, other schools and the local community are outstanding. Pupils have a particularly strong understanding of their responsibility to others both in and beyond school. Parents are very supportive of the school and express considerable confidence in it.

The headteacher, ably supported by a committed team of senior managers, has provided a clear steer to school improvement. Expectations of what should be achieved have been raised and accountability made clear. The school sets challenging and increasingly ambitious targets for success: these were reviewed and met last year. Senior managers undertake regular and extensive review to evaluate the work of the school but middle managers are not sufficiently involved in this process. This means that the impact of some initiatives on the quality of work and pupils' progress in the classroom is not clear enough. The work of the governing body is good. Increased

visits and better information allow it to monitor the school's work and ask probing questions about its performance. Value for money is good.

This is a happy, tolerant and harmonious school. The shared desire to succeed, the significant progress already made and the raised targets for future performance all demonstrate the good capacity that the school has for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage at levels expected for their age and leave the Reception class with a good level of development. Their personal development and well-being are outstanding. Children settle readily because of the very good care they receive and the securely established routines. They soon learn to take some responsibility and show initiative. In Nursery they quickly and independently learn to pour their own drinks and to serve their own snacks; in Reception children 'sign in' when they arrive. Time is devoted to explaining to children the reasons for actions and listening to their ideas. As a result children not only work well together but also take considerable care of one another and of materials and equipment. One child, on finding a dirty cloth commented, 'It needs to go in the washing machine. I'll take it to the teacher.' Children are enthusiastic about their work. Planning is thorough but there are times when tasks are rushed when children would benefit from more time to investigate. Two boys were unable to complete the task of building a 'castle' and this halted the understanding of the concept of a door, which they had just begun to explore. The committed Early Years Foundation Stage manager is constantly evaluating how well things are working. As a result she has changed the approach to getting boys more interested in writing and this is having positive results. Parents are involved in assessment, using targets and observation sheets provided by the staff. Teachers are beginning to check data more thoroughly so that they have an exact understanding of the progress between Nursery and Reception and a clearer idea of which children are making better than expected progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that boys make consistently good progress with their writing skills.
- Enable middle managers to monitor and evaluate the impact of initiatives on classroom practice and pupils' standards.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards at the end of Years 2 and 6 have risen significantly since the last inspection. Underachievement in mathematics has been tackled successfully. Changes in teaching style and in the use of assessment have resulted in pupils making good progress. This was evident in 2008 when the school achieved its best results for several years. Despite having increased its targets, the school met them all and exceeded many. From their average starting points on entry, pupils did well. Over 90% of pupils met or exceeded the average expectation in the English, mathematics and science tests taken at the end of Year 6 and more pupils than expected gained the higher level. This is in marked contrast to 2007 results, when too few pupils did so. Similarly, pupils' standards are above the national average by the end of Year 2. Currently, pupils in Years 2 and 6 are on the way to meeting even more demanding targets, with more pupils expected to reach the higher levels in Year 6. Lesson observations show pupils achieving well, including the more able pupils. However, the progress boys make with writing is no better

than satisfactory. They are less confident about how to write at length with awareness of style and technique. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. Their needs are analysed, suitably interesting and demanding tasks provided, and they are taught skills step-by step.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is overall outstanding. In art, music, drama and English they explore their own responses to others' experiences with sensitivity. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have a good knowledge of different cultures through books and study, but less through first-hand experiences. Pupils are highly aware of the need to consider others and be cooperative. This results in mature social skills and the ability to understand their own and others' feelings. Behaviour and courtesy around the school and in classrooms are excellent. Love of school is apparent in pupils' faces and in their above average attendance. They relish work and happily switch from whole class to group tasks or from practical work to writing. They are alert to the need for safety, as seen in their good sense when using equipment, and their enthusiastic but disciplined approach to drama and dance. Bullying is not a concern for them and they are confident about dealing with any minor disagreements. Pupils understand healthy eating and are keen to take part in physical exercise. An active school council considers suggestions and makes recommendations. The Healthy Schools Team and Eco-squad make an outstanding contribution to the school by exploring issues such as energy and water usage and by developing an organic vegetable plot. Involvement in the local community is excellent and includes raising money for charities, joining in community 'clean-ups' and helping organisations which support the elderly. Improved numeracy skills, a strong ability to work and communicate with others and financial awareness give pupils a good grounding for life beyond school. Older pupils used spreadsheets to organise an art exhibition and ensure a profit from it. As one pupil reported: the skills, 'will take me through life when I am in an office'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils are making brisk progress in their learning because of good teaching, which interests and challenges them. Detailed planning, which caters effectively for the range of pupils' needs, enables teachers to deliver relevant and well organised lessons. New technology is very well integrated with lessons. Brisk question and answer sessions and high quality group discussion are impressive features of many classrooms. Pupils want to learn. They are very attentive so that teachers can explain the purpose behind a task. In less successful lessons whilst pupils work hard they are sometimes unclear about what is to be learned from the activities set. Marking is good, often linking with pupils' own evaluations of their work. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities gain confidence from more structured tasks, which make them think, and good quality support from classroom assistants. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and use this to suggest alternative ways of looking at things when pupils experience difficulty. Homework is a regular feature and is helping pupils learn effective study and research habits.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. Group work and some setting for mathematics and English in Years 5 and 6 help pupils of varying abilities to succeed. A strong emphasis is placed upon learning skills through a thematic approach which combines subjects. This provides pupils with first-hand, practical experiences, which they enjoy, such as learning about the Tudors by measuring and making costumes and portraits. However, opportunities for relevant writing are sometimes squeezed out. Good attention is paid to applying skills, for example, learning mathematical skills by conducting a stock audit. Mental calculation and talking ideas through to clarify them before written work, are strongly encouraged. Specialist music lessons and the recent introduction of French, further broaden the curriculum, as do a focus on art and performance. There is a good range of extra-curricular clubs and activities such as sports, dance, drama and adventurous outdoor activities, including a twice-yearly residential visit to the Lake District. Links with local high schools provide workshop style events, for example, designing and building a model car.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school fully meets current safeguarding requirements. There are crystal clear procedures for raising concerns about pupils. Health and safety procedures are reviewed regularly. Risk assessments are in place. Pupils feel very safe in school and know to whom to turn for help. Academic guidance has improved dramatically. It is now consistent and robust. Pupils know their standards and targets and are skilled in assessing their work and recording achievement and comments. This is clearly impacting on the learning that is taking place in most areas of the curriculum and also supports the personal development of pupils as they have to give reasons for their level of assessment. Although attendance is above average, the school is rigorous in checking absence. The lack of exclusions shows the school's commitment to care for all pupils and its success in supporting them. Procedures for identifying the needs of pupils who experience difficulty are thorough and follow-up is quick and effective. Specific targets, close communication with parents, and good judgement about when to refer to outside agencies, all play a part in the excellent quality of support offered. Pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress as a result.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher's calm, measured determination to raise the school's performance has been a major factor in the speed of its improvement. Strong support from an able senior management team has helped to focus on how this could be achieved. Extensive monitoring has given a clear picture of what works and what needs improvement. The raising attainment plan is good, providing a practical yet demanding agenda for increasing pupils' progress. While evaluation is good, the level of detail can make issues and priorities too blurred. Much work has gone into what constitutes an effective lesson. Regular lesson observations check on progress made on the issues for development highlighted on previous occasions. Middle managers are becoming involved in monitoring and evaluation but at present their role is too limited. As a result the impact of some initiatives is not clear enough and, although generally the school promotes

equality well, practical steps to improve boys' writing are at an early stage. Good local authority support and excellent links with other schools, particularly a partner school, have helped leaders to stimulate more effective learning and an expectation of higher standards. Good opportunities are provided that allow pupils to study local and global issues. Plans are in place to enable pupil's further, first-hand experience of the rich diversity of cultures which exist beyond their immediate community. The governing body has increased its level of involvement in school. More consideration of information about standards and achievement give governors a good understanding of school performance and the ability to explore where improvement is still needed.

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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?	1
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	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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?	1

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**

Inspection of St Aidan's Catholic Primary School, Wigan, WN3 6EE

We recently visited your school to see how well you are doing. Our main purpose was to see if things had improved in the year since the last inspection. We are pleased to be able to tell you that they have: your school is now a good one and therefore no longer requires a notice to improve.

Thank you for being so willing and able to talk to us about how you find life at school. We were very impressed with how polite and positive you are. Your excellent behaviour and willingness to try your best are real strengths. Most of you love school and greatly appreciate just how hard all the adults are working for you. As a result you respect them and work hard in return. Your ability to talk ideas through and work with each other in groups is excellent. The school goes to great lengths to look after you. You feel safe and know how to keep healthy (but please try and follow the school's advice about what makes a really healthy packed lunch!). Lessons are varied and interesting so that you make good progress in almost all activities. Some of you, mainly boys, need help to do better in writing. Importantly, you are all doing really well in mathematics. Teachers have put a lot of effort into learning how to help you do this. This has also helped them in planning more varied lessons and tasks for you in other subjects.

The headteacher, staff, and governors have put much effort into improving the school. We have asked them to concentrate on two things to help this continue.

- Help boys to make better progress with their writing.
- Make sure that teachers responsible for the different subjects check that new ideas the school introduces work well in the classroom and help you all to learn.

You can play your part by continuing to do your very best and following the advice teachers give you about how to improve your writing skills.