

St Ambrose Barlow Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106510
Local Authority	Wigan
Inspection number	324417
Inspection date	4 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Geoff Lawrence

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)	211
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 S Cooper
Headteacher	Mr B Dorgan
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Manchester Road Astley Tyldesley Manchester Lancashire

Age group	4–11
Inspection date	4 June 2009
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage; how involved pupils are in their own learning. Evidence was collected from the school's self-evaluation form, nationally published assessment data, the school's assessment records, relevant policies, observations of the school at work, including visits to lessons, and analysis of parents' questionnaires. Discussions were also held with staff, the chair of governors and pupils. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

This average-sized school serves an area with a range of private and social housing. As a church school, it serves a community more widespread than its immediate surroundings. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, as is the percentage of pupils eligible to receive free school meals. The school has undergone a significant number of staffing changes since the last inspection. It holds the following awards: Financial Management Standard in Schools, National Healthy School Status, Activemark 2008, Supergrounds 2008, School Sport Coordinator Gold Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

As soon as you walk through the door at St Ambrose Barlow, the warm ethos and peaceful atmosphere of this good school, which has outstanding features, is clearly evident. It is not yet outstanding overall, because, by the end of Key Stage 2, pupils' progress in science is no better than satisfactory. Nevertheless, progress in science is beginning to improve, because of the dedicated drive to raise standards. Everyone connected with the school, including pupils, parents and governors, is fully justified in feeling proud of its successes. The first-class support provided for pupils' excellent personal development, including their outstanding spiritual, moral and social development, helps to create mature and confident individuals, who take their responsibilities around school most seriously. The positive view of the school is endorsed not only by inspection findings, but also by the overwhelming majority of parents. 'Children thrive and are encouraged to reach their potential' and 'they make great progress in terms of self-esteem and confidence', are typical of parents' positive comments.

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are broadly typical for their age and leave the Reception class with skills that are above those expected. These above-average standards are maintained in reading, writing and mathematics throughout Key Stage 1. At the end of Year 6, standards in mathematics have been consistently well-above average over the last few years and since the last inspection standards in English have risen to match those in mathematics. This is due to the highly focused and successful actions taken by the school. Current standards in English and mathematics are still well-above average, but standards in science are not as high and pupils' progress in this subject is only satisfactory. This is why achievement overall is good and not outstanding. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve outstandingly well. This is due not only to specialist teaching, but also to the rigour shown in identifying how best to help them and the implementation of useful programmes to meet their needs.

Throughout their time at the school, pupils make excellent progress in developing their personal skills and attributes. This helps them to become articulate, well-mannered and mature young people, whose behaviour is impeccable in class and around the school. They engage enthusiastically in their lessons and work together exceptionally well. They feel safe and confident in school, because, in their words, 'this is a lovely school to grow up in' and 'you can always talk to the teachers about anything'. Pupils have a thorough understanding of healthy lifestyles. Their thriving vegetable garden is helping them to understand the importance of healthy eating and many take regular exercise through the good range of sporting activities on offer. They have a well-developed social conscience and fully understand their responsibilities to each other in school and in the wider community; they enjoy raising funds for numerous charities. Their attitudes to learning and their enjoyment of school are outstanding. These points are not lost on parents, who expressed views such as, 'not a day goes by that the children can't wait to go to school'. This is one reason why attendance is well-above average. The school works hard and very successfully to prepare pupils to take their place in a culturally diverse society. It ensures that pupils know about their local community and have a sense of the wider world. The introduction of Spanish into the curriculum and the fundraising activities to provide drinking water in Mozambique have contributed to pupils' good understanding and appreciation of other cultures. This is an important feature in a school with a low proportion of pupils from different ethnic backgrounds. The school's promotion of community cohesion is good. It is

responsive to the needs of the local community and successfully promotes tolerance, understanding and equality of opportunity.

The quality of teaching and learning is good and lessons have an obvious focus, which teachers share with pupils. This means that pupils are very clear about what they have to do and what they are aiming to achieve. Teachers conduct lessons at a good pace and match the work well to individuals' needs, because they make good use of the extensive assessment information that is available about pupils' progress. Most pupils know and understand their learning targets and are involved in assessing their own work. Teachers mark work in a manner that helps the pupils to succeed, and there is some exemplary practice. This contributes to the outstanding care, guidance and support that pupils receive. The good-quality curriculum is enriched with a good range of out-of-school clubs and educational visits.

Leadership and management are of the highest quality. They are judged highly, because they have been so effective in many areas since the last inspection. As a result, there have been some notable improvements in care, guidance and support and the Early Years Foundation Stage. Moreover, standards have remained high throughout a period of considerable staffing changes, because of well-targeted professional development and support for newly qualified staff. The headteacher has been very successful in developing staff as leaders; they are highly motivated and play a key role in the school's good performance. Furthermore, the governing body holds the leadership rigorously to account. Partnerships with others have not only contributed significantly to pupils' personal development, but also to the excellent progress made by those with learning difficulties.

St Ambrose Barlow is a school that strives to provide a happy and secure environment, where procedures for safeguarding are in place and where children are challenged to achieve academically, but not at the expense of losing their identity as individuals. Based on recent improvements, the school provides outstanding value for money and has an outstanding capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good leadership has led to improvements in the Early Years Foundation Stage since the last inspection, so that the provision is now good. This enables children to make a good start to their education, settle well and they soon become happy, receptive learners. They enter Reception with the skills and knowledge that are expected for their age. They achieve well, especially in their personal and social development, so that by the end of the Reception class their attainment is above average. Daily sessions focusing on letters and sounds are helping to boost early reading and writing skills. The quality of teaching is good. The curriculum provides activities both indoors and in the well-resourced outdoor area, which are well-matched to the children's needs and it provides them with opportunities to learn independently. Children interact well with each other and enjoy the warm relationships with caring staff that ensure that welfare requirements are met and promoted well. The staff support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities well and, as a result, these children make the same good progress as other children. Careful observations of children's progress and systematic assessment procedures ensure that adults provide additional support promptly to those who need it. There are good links with external agencies to promote children's health, welfare and progress. Parents appreciate the good care provided for their children, however, their involvement in their children's learning and assessment is at an early stage of development. As a result, the school

is missing opportunities to supplement its own assessments by gaining valuable information from parents with regard to children's progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement in science to match those in English and mathematics.
- Extend opportunities for parents of children in the Reception class to participate more fully in the assessment of their children's development.

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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	1

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	1

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	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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**

Thank you so much for the marvellous and friendly welcome you gave the other inspector and me, when we inspected your school recently. As you and most of your parents told us, you go to a good school that has some outstanding features.

You develop into mature and sensible young people. I know that you and your families are very proud of your school. Your behaviour is excellent and you try hard in lessons. We noticed particularly how well-mannered and polite you are. You make good progress particularly, in mathematics and English, because you are taught and supported well. All the adults in school take extremely good care of you.

You told me your teachers find many ways to make learning fun. You know what a healthy lifestyle is and how to keep yourself and others safe. We were impressed with your vegetable garden and the fact the school cooks for you the vegetables that you have grown. Your headteacher and all the other staff work very hard indeed to make sure that you enjoy coming to school. They know just how to make your school go from strength to strength.

Those who are in charge of the school do their job well. Within all its good work, two things could help make your school even better. I have asked your headteacher and governors to make sure that you improve your standards in science by the time you reach the end of Year 6, so that they are as good as those you achieve in English and mathematics. I have also asked them to involve the parents of children in the Reception class more in assessing how well their children are doing at home as well as at school. This is because young children are growing very quickly and it will help the school to build up a more accurate picture of what they can and cannot do.

Thank you once again for your help. It was a pleasure to be in your school. I enjoyed my time with you and your teachers. I hope that you continue to work hard and enjoy school.