

# St Stephen's Catholic Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	111310
<b>Local Authority</b>	Warrington
<b>Inspection number</b>	325344
<b>Inspection date</b>	5 February 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Susan Walsh

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.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	199
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
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Fr Gordon Abbs
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Maria McGarry
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 April 2006
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Sandy Lane Orford Warrington Cheshire WA2 9HS

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<b>Age group</b>	4–11
<b>Inspection date</b>	5 February 2009
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**Telephone number**  
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage, boys' achievement in writing and the impact of the nurture group on pupils' social development. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation; national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records; observations of the school at work; discussions with pupils and representatives of senior staff and the governing body; a scrutiny of school documents and parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector 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 this report.

## Description of the school

The school is slightly smaller than most primary schools and provides for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in its Reception class. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage with few from minority ethnic groups. The small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language are mainly from Polish backgrounds. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is much higher than in most schools as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. An above average number of pupils join and leave the school at different points in the school year. The school has achieved Activemark 2007 and 2008, the National Healthy Schools Award and the Basic Skills Primary Quality Mark. It has also achieved the International Schools Intermediate Award and the Financial Managements Standards in Schools Award.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

St Stephen's Catholic Primary School is an outstanding school that successfully combines above average academic standards, a very caring environment and lots of fun! Pupils have a terrific time at school because of lively teaching combined with an outstanding curriculum that provides many interesting things to do. The majority of parents are very happy with the school and describe the way their children have come on 'in leaps and bounds'. Pupils are passionate about their school because they are valued as individuals and have a real voice in the school. They are empowered to make an exceptional contribution to both their school community and the wider community. For example, their involvement in the Healthy School's team ensures that all pupils have an excellent awareness of how to keep fit, healthy and safe.

Children join the Reception class with skills that are well below those typical for their age but by the time they reach the end of Year 6 pupils are reaching standards that are above average. Pupils make outstanding progress through both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 and by the end of Year 6 an above average proportion of pupils reach the nationally expected Level 4 in English, mathematics and science. Pupils make exceptional progress in mathematics and an above average proportion reach the higher Level 5. Achievement is excellent because of outstanding teaching and learning. Teachers have very high expectations of pupils, who rise magnificently to the challenge. Lessons move along at a remarkable pace and pupils hang off their seats just bursting to volunteer answers to teachers' probing questions. The strong emphasis on learning is working extremely well; consequently, pupils get ample opportunities to practise their skills. Pupils say, 'Teachers help us but they don't give us the answer. They help us find it for ourselves.' The recent focus on extending opportunities for writing has enthused pupils and improved achievement in writing, particularly for boys. Detailed marking, especially of writing, combined with the effective use of very specific academic targets, means that pupils know exactly what to do to improve their work.

There is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' basic skills but these skills are taught in a very interesting way through cross-curricular themes such as work on *Oliver Twist* and the work on the Second World War. Pupils are enthusiastic about the extensive opportunities for practical learning and investigation in mathematics and science. There are many exciting elements to the curriculum, including innovative artwork, extensive opportunities for making music, a wide range of well-attended after-school clubs and a much appreciated residential experience. Information and communication technology is used extremely well to support learning both at home and in school.

Outstanding care, guidance and support ensures that pupils feel very safe and secure. They are well cared for and this underpins their outstanding academic achievement and personal development. Current government safeguarding requirements are met. Attendance is satisfactory. Rigorous procedures for pursuing absence have led to significant improvements in attendance rates and fewer persistent absentees. The school caters for some vulnerable children but ensures that they are carefully nurtured so that they gradually start to overcome their difficulties and begin to blossom. Very effective work with external agencies helps to make sure that vulnerable pupils are very well supported. A pupil reflected the sentiments of many saying, 'I get a lot of support and that makes me feel happier.' As a result of an impressive range of support mechanisms, pupils at risk of underachieving and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make the same outstanding progress as other pupils. Many pupils join the school with underdeveloped social skills but staff ensure that, as they grow older, their personal

development becomes outstanding. A strong Catholic ethos is at the heart of the school's work and underpins pupils' outstanding spiritual moral, social and cultural development. As a result, pupils develop strong moral values and the ability to empathise with others and this is reflected in their good behaviour. A minority of pupils can exhibit difficult behaviour because of their complex emotional needs. However, this is managed very well by the school and it does not disrupt the learning of others. The nurture group successfully helps pupils to improve their social skills because adults actively model good behaviour and teach good manners while also keeping a firm focus on boosting pupils' academic achievement.

The school's dedication to the local community is excellent and is demonstrated by the way it has reached out to the Polish population and ensured that Polish pupils, and others who are new to the school, are welcomed and supported. This reflects the school's strong commitment to equal opportunities. Community cohesion is promoted well. While the school has very good links with local schools that extend pupils' opportunities for taking part in sport and provide challenging activities for gifted and talented pupils, there are satisfactory rather than good opportunities for pupils to meet others from different backgrounds from themselves. Links with the worldwide community are developing well and the school has established links with a partner school in San Jose.

All this has been achieved because of outstanding leadership and management, particularly the exceptional leadership of the headteacher. Her high expectations and caring approach have established a 'can do' culture which is warmly embraced by pupils and staff. Other senior leaders and a very efficient governing body who offer effective challenge ably support the headteacher and ensure that resources are used to best effect. The checking of pupils' progress is thorough in Key Stage 1 and 2 but the school is aware that there is more to be done in the Early Years Foundation Stage to ensure that assessments are accurate and used consistently to inform the planning of work for individual children. The school's accurate view of its work has been based on high quality monitoring of teaching and learning and the precise analysis of data. The challenging targets it has set have resulted in standards rising year on year. Improvement since the last inspection is very evident. This demonstrates the school's outstanding capacity for further improvement. It provides exceptional value for money.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 2**

Good provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage means that children enjoy school, grow in confidence and make good progress during their time in the Reception classes. Children are well cared for in a calm atmosphere where everyone gets on well together. They are able to choose from a good range of interesting activities and effective use is made of the outdoor space. For example, during the inspection children were outside enjoying the snow and digging in the soil looking for mini beasts. Adults work hard to encourage children to develop their speech, vocabulary and thinking skills. There is a particularly good emphasis on developing children's writing. Through their role play at the vet's surgery children were able to act as receptionists and were keen to write down messages about their pets. This activity captured their interest because learning was made very relevant to them. Good leadership and management have led to the school meeting current welfare requirements. The school is aware that the information about children's progress that is passed on to Year 1 may not be absolutely accurate. While the checking of this is improving with the development of some delightful records of children's learning journeys, the information available is not always used effectively to plan activities that challenge individual children.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure that assessments in the Early Years Foundation Stage are accurate and are used consistently to inform the planning of work for individual children.

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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?	1
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?	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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**

It was a delight and a privilege to inspect your school. We really enjoyed talking to you all and listened very carefully to what you had to say. No wonder you are all so proud of your school – it's outstanding! It's clear that you have a brilliant time because of all the exciting things you have to do. The residential visit to Wales sounded terrific and to was good to hear that a lot of you conquered your fears of heights, including your headteacher!

It was good to hear that you know lots about keeping healthy and safe. The Healthy Schools team are doing a fantastic job of making sure that everyone knows how to keep fit and healthy. My team inspector learnt a lot from your super presentation. We were very impressed by your good behaviour. You have good manners and make visitors very welcome indeed. You told us that your teachers look after you well and that they always try to help you. We know that children get off to a good start in the Reception class, but we have asked teachers to make sure that the assessments of children's progress in Reception are accurate and that this information is used to plan work for individual children.

Your teachers work very hard indeed to make sure your school just gets better and better. Your lessons are interesting and lots of fun but your teachers also make sure you work hard too. That is why the quality of teaching and your learning is outstanding and you make such super progress. In fact by the end of Year 6 you are reaching standards that are above those reached by many other children. I really enjoyed reading your writing, especially about Oliver Twist because you used such interesting words it made me understand the feelings of the characters.

Managers at your school are doing a very good job. They have made your school one of the very best.

I wish you well for the future.