

St Martin's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111380
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	325367
Inspection date	5 February 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)	204
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 David Littlewood
Headteacher	Mr Phil Hallman BA
Date of previous school inspection	15 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	St Martin's Lane Murdishaw Runcorn Cheshire WA7 6HZ
Telephone number	01928 711207
Fax number	01928 710673

Age group	4–11
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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: the quality of English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) and how well they are developed in the curriculum; the quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage; and the quality of leadership and management. Evidence was collected from the observation of lessons, the scrutiny of pupils' work, records of their progress, and examination of other documentation including completed parents' questionnaires. Discussions were held with pupils, staff and representatives of the governing body. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

This school, average in size, is situated in an area of high social disadvantage. A higher than average proportion of pupils is eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school has identified a relatively high number who are vulnerable for social and emotional reasons. Almost all pupils are White British. None of the few pupils who belong to minority ethnic groups is at an early stage of learning to speak English. The school provides a breakfast club and a wide range of after school extra-curricular and community facilities which include an adult and tots group and a parent café with access to a credit union. The school has gained the Healthy Schools Award.

Most children come to the Reception class from the adjoining privately run Tiny Steps Nursery. The report of this setting's separate inspection is on the Ofsted website.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school which successfully lives out its belief that, 'everyone matters'. Parents overwhelmingly agree, stating for example, 'It's an exceptional school, one I am proud my child is associated with.' and that staff, 'care about individual children and their parents and are committed to ensuring their happiness'. Exceptionally caring and dedicated staff meticulously attend to the social and emotional needs of every child and their family. Consequently, all pupils are happy and eager to learn. Underpinning its success is inspirational leadership by the headteacher, complemented by the Deputy Headteacher and exceptional teamwork by all staff. Within this nurturing environment, all pupils flourish and make outstanding progress in their academic and personal development.

Achievement is outstanding. Most pupils start Year 1 with the skills expected for their age. The extremely strong emphasis placed on promoting children's personal and social needs in the Early Years Foundation Stage really pays off and pupils start Year 1 as independent, confident young learners eager to enjoy all the school has to offer. All staff pay close attention to the rigorous assessment of every pupil's progress, accompanied by a sustained focus on ensuring their spiritual, emotional and social needs are met. Any identified gaps in pupils' learning are swiftly addressed with programmes of work that meet their individual needs exceptionally well. As a result, all pupils make excellent progress as they move through the school. When they leave Year 6, standards are consistently and significantly well above average in English, mathematics and science and particularly so at the higher Level 5.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Teachers deliver their lessons with the learning style of each pupil in mind. For instance, in a Year 4 English lesson, the teacher used drama and humour very well to stimulate pupils' interests and imagination and bring their poetry lesson to life in a meaningful and memorable way. Pupils are eager to say how much such lessons help them to be more confident in speaking and listening. All pupils make rapid progress while thoroughly enjoying their learning in such lively and challenging lessons. Pupils' attitudes to school are excellent because they feel valued and know their contributions are respected and important to staff. Highly skilled support assistants enable pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and vulnerable pupils to make the same outstanding progress as their peers.

Pupils are excellent ambassadors for the school. Their personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Attendance is good and behaviour is impeccable. Pupils treat their classmates and others with dignity and respect. For instance, pupils who are playground buddies ensure that everyone is happy and safe at lunchtime, helping younger pupils to benefit to the full from the activities available. The school council does much to represent the views of pupils in all years and is proud to share what it has done to promote healthy and safe lifestyles and to develop enterprise skills. Community cohesion is central to all the pupils learn and do. They speak enthusiastically about how they have learnt about life in China through writing to their friends in their twin school. They are willing to share their talents with others, for example, by singing at a local day centre or, again, in expressing their views on how the local community can improve through their representation on the 'children's voice' forum. As a result, pupils develop into caring, mature young citizens, exceptionally well prepared for their future lives.

The outstanding, innovative curriculum encourages pupils to be imaginative in their work and gives them maximum opportunity to reach the highest standards in all subjects. For instance, stunning art work complements Year 6 pupils' work in English as they studied the poem, 'The Lady of Shallot'. Equally inspirational is the high quality of pupils' written work, for example, 'luscious curls draped over her boney white shoulders as long fingers disentangled it'. Excellent use is made of ICT as reinforcement for new learning and as a tool for pupils' personal research in subjects such as history and geography. Pupils' achievement in the arts, sports and music is equally impressive. Art and display work throughout the school is of an exceptionally high quality. Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities and annual residential trips for all pupils in Years 3 to 6. These do much to raise confidence, self-belief and general well-being among pupils.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Making sure that all pupils and their families are nurtured in the excellent caring and supportive environment is never off the school's agenda. The exceptional pastoral care team, in providing a, 'team around the child', ensures every pupil and their family receive support immediately it is needed. Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and supervision is of high quality at all times. The quality of marking, which helps pupils reach and surpass the very challenging targets set for them, is outstanding. Pupils comment on this and say they find this support extremely helpful in guiding them how to improve their work.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The school has been successful, not only in maintaining and extending its outstanding status from the last inspection, but in sustaining and ensuring that every pupil and their family's unique needs are met. All staff have a strong leadership role, working in curriculum teams to use their individual expertise and interests for the benefit of pupils' learning. The school provides excellent opportunities for family learning so that parents can support their children in school. It is truly a community of learning. For example, a large proportion of the staff initially joined the school as helpers and has taken advantage of the excellent training opportunities provided to become highly committed and effective staff members. Excellent partnerships with the parish, universities and health services are used very effectively to enhance the provision for all pupils. Partnerships with other schools are equally strong although the school recognise the benefits for others and themselves in sharing their outstanding pastoral care practice more widely. Governance is excellent. The high expectations in the school are shared by the governing body who believe that, 'Only the very best is good enough for the children in St Martins.' Consequently, the value for money it offers and its capacity for future improvement are outstanding.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The Early Years Foundation Stage is led and managed exceptionally well. Children join Reception with overall skills below those typical for their age. Their speaking, listening and writing skills are particularly weak. Because of the excellent care adults pay to each child's individual needs, they all settle quickly and make rapid progress. Highly skilled adults provide stimulating learning opportunities to extend children's speaking, listening and problem-solving skills. For instance, staff capitalised on the snowy weather to extend children's curiosity, enjoyment and knowledge of the world. Within this experience, children gleefully explored the feel, shape and changes to snow, examining it under the microscope and linking this experience to previous learning, when they had similarly examined spiders! The school's well thought out plans to use the outdoor areas on a continuous basis, are well underway and set to ensure that the use of

outdoor spaces matches the excellent use of those indoors. Children's personal development and well-being are outstanding. Excellent links with parents ensure they are fully involved in their child's learning. Staff keep accurate individual records of progress. These are used effectively between Reception and Year 1 to identify any areas of learning where children may need additional help. As a result, by the time they transfer to Year 1, children's skills, in all areas of learning, have improved enormously and a significant proportion of them are achieving the early learning goals expected at their age. Given their starting points, this represents outstanding progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Share the exemplary work of the pastoral care team with a wider community of schools.

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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?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
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?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
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

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	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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	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

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?	1
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**

Inspection of St Martin's Catholic Primary School, Runcorn, WA7 6HZ

It was a pleasure to inspect your school. You were all exceptionally friendly and helpful and my colleague and I enjoyed finding out from you how much you enjoy learning. You told us that you think your school is excellent. We are sure that you will be pleased to know that we agree with you: you do have an outstanding school.

You are right to be proud of your school. Children in Reception get an excellent start and have so many opportunities to learn with each other through play. You had such fun playing in the snow and looking at the shape of snowflakes under the microscope! You all continue to make outstanding progress in all other years and, by the time you leave at the end of Year 6, you reach well above average standards in all your subjects. This is because the teaching you receive is outstanding and you work very hard.

Your behaviour is excellent and you look after each other so well. Members of the school council work hard to find out what you think. As a result, this has made your school even better. You particularly like the wide range of extra-curricular events and take a full part in arts, sports and music activities.

All the adults who work in school take very good care of you. They make sure that everyone feels safe and secure. They also give you and your families a lot of advice about how you can enjoy and succeed whilst at school. Your headteacher and all your teachers do this so well that we have suggested they share what they do, with other schools, in order to help them to be outstanding too!

Please continue to work hard and keep helping your teachers to make sure St Martin's stays an outstanding place in which to learn.