

St Johns Catholic Primary School, Skelmersdale

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119586
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	327078
Inspection dates	2–3 April 2009
Reporting inspector	June Tracey

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)	200
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	Mrs Helen Flanagan
Headteacher	Mrs Angela Aspinwall-Livesey
Date of previous school inspection	23 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Flamstead Birch Green Skelmersdale Lancashire WN8 6PF

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	2–3 April 2009
Inspection number	327078

Telephone number
Fax number

01695 721323
01695 727589

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

St John's Catholic Primary School is an average size primary school serving an area of considerable economic and social disadvantage. It is attached to a Children's Centre and is an Extended Services school providing support for parents through family learning programmes, specialist support services, childcare/study support and holiday courses for children at Easter and in the summer. The proportion of pupils eligible to claim free school meals is high. The vast majority of pupils are White British; the number of pupils at the early stage of learning English is low. Children's skills on entry are very low compared with those of children of similar age. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high. An above average proportion of pupils joins and leaves the school at other than the usual times.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St John's is an outstanding school that operates exceptionally well in very challenging circumstances. It provides an exciting, high quality environment in which pupils thrive and parents have great confidence. Its Christian mission and all-embracing care for its pupils is evident to all. The key to its success is the uncompromising search for improvement driven by the inspirational leadership of the headteacher, strongly supported by the senior team and other staff. Pupils' personal development is excellent. The harmonious atmosphere in the school creates a sense of calm and well-being. Pupils say they enjoy school; their natural curiosity is harnessed well to motivate them and raise aspirations. The school's philosophy that only the best is good enough is exemplified in all that it provides. The school has the support of parents, summed up in the comment, 'A wonderful school'.

Children's skills on entry are very low, particularly in language and communication. They make very good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage in developing speaking and listening skills and in learning to concentrate and work cooperatively. Overall, pupils make good progress throughout the school. Some achieve very well because their progress is consistent year-on-year. For others, progress fluctuates due to difficulties beyond school, that impact on learning. Standards are broadly average in Year 2, attainment in mathematics being better than in reading and writing. By Year 6, standards are average in English, mathematics and science. They have risen since the previous inspection but there is still scope for further improvement in writing and mathematics. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve at a similar rate to other pupils. The proportion of high ability pupils is relatively small; their results generally exceed the levels expected for their age. Procedures for analysing progress are effective in identifying and rectifying underachievement. They trigger an urgent response, which, together with good teaching, underpins pupils' good achievement.

The curriculum is creative, challenging and enriching. Its impact is heightened by the innovative use of the uniquely designed building. Each class has its own outdoor learning space and a separate area indoors. Pupils fondly refer to this set-up as Inside-Out learning. Care, guidance and support for every pupil are outstanding. The school draws in whole families and provides a multitude of opportunities for them to raise their own skills through family learning programmes. A typical example is the Dads and Lads initiative. Strong extra-curricular and community links promote physical and social development and citizenship well. Pupils recognise the benefits of leading a healthy life style and readily demonstrate how they put that into practice.

The school has much to celebrate. Changes to systems, teaching styles and the management of pupils' learning in the past few years are moving the school on at a rapid pace towards even higher goals. The staff and governors are not daunted by challenge. They face it head on. Consequently, the school is in a strong position to sustain and escalate improvement still further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children have an excellent start to their education. Leadership and management are exceptionally strong. Children's skills on entry to the Nursery are very low. Poor language and personal skills prevent a substantial proportion of them from communicating effectively with each other and adults. Children's concentration spans are short and their listening skills are generally poor.

Rigorous assessment procedures quickly prioritise the most urgent needs. Strong emphasis on speaking and listening, in groups and individually, builds children's confidence and helps them to negotiate with each other and to make choices for themselves. In a short time, they settle happily in the secure, exciting world they discover. Children respect and care for the high quality, well maintained environment and resources. Adults devise activities sensitively, constantly challenging children to take the next step. Children make rapid gains in their personal, social and emotional development in the Nursery, paving the way for accelerated progress in language, writing and mathematical skills in the Reception Year. They achieve very well from their starting points in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Nevertheless, their skills at the start of Year 1 are generally below average, particularly in language activities. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those with problems linked to family circumstances, receive excellent personal support; overall, their progress is similar to that of other children. Children enjoy themselves and benefit from the innovative provision that fires their imagination, targets fluency in speech and culminates in good readiness for the next phase.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise further, attainment in writing and mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Overall, pupils achieve well to reach average standards in English, mathematics and science in Year 6, from very low starting points on entry. Progress is sometimes limited by many pupils joining and leaving the school other than at the normal times. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as other pupils, many reaching the levels expected for their age by Year 6.

At the start of Year 1, pupils have ground to make up in the development of reading, writing and numerical skills. The school's assessment records indicate that standards in Year 2 are average in mathematics and below average in reading and writing, indicating good progress from their starting points. By Year 6, pupils are meeting or exceeding the challenging targets set by the governors. Standards have improved since the previous inspection, especially in mathematics. Pupils' reading skills are at least average and better for many. Results in national tests in 2008, were broadly average, reflecting the ability range and good progress of the year group. Pupils use technology skills regularly and competently. The school is constantly seeking out and trialling initiatives to raise standards further, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is excellent. They enjoy learning. Their positive attitudes and excellent behaviour emanate from stimulating teaching and high quality provision and resources. Pupils' progress in understanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues is outstanding. Links with the church and extended communities, including some overseas, widen pupils' horizons well. Pupils say that they feel safe and secure in school and that there are adults they would approach if necessary. There were no racist incidents or exclusions last year.

Pupils are confident and respond well to teachers and other adults. They are thoughtful and considerate of others' needs, with older pupils supporting younger ones. Pupils have great respect for the school. They are consulted on developments such as the themes and design of

the outdoor learning areas. This gives them a sense of ownership. Their active involvement with local improvement initiatives is indicative of their passion to improve the environment in which they live.

Attendance is good. It has risen since the previous inspection. Pupils are keen not to miss out on anything through absence. They have an excellent knowledge of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, which is promoted well through topics such as: 'Is my body a temple?' Pupils have a good understanding of what constitutes risk to their own and others' safety. They develop good skills in managing relationships that are transferable to life within and beyond school. Good progress is made in developing the basic skills to support pupils' economic well-being in the future. Pupils' excellent attitudes are reflected in their growing maturity and independence. They listen to others' opinions and are prepared to modify their own in the light of justifiable argument.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Some outstanding lessons were observed in which pupils were challenged in open-ended activities that stretched their thinking and application of prior learning. The best lessons provided good opportunities for collaboration and independent work and were conducted at a brisk pace. These had an infectious buzz. Teachers plan learning activities thoroughly, matching them well to pupils' needs and abilities. The wide range of stimulating activities motivates and interests pupils.

All groups of pupils, including the gifted and talented and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are suitably challenged and respond well. Precise learning objectives that build on pupils' previous knowledge and inquisitiveness contribute to the good progress. Teaching assistants' support for pupils is outstanding. They are very knowledgeable about individual pupils' needs and are well trained to improve learning step-by-step. Consequently, pupils experience success and feel good about their learning. Careful monitoring of pupils' work through rigorous assessment ensures that pupils not making the expected progress are identified early and alternative strategies employed. These are successful, especially in Years 5 and 6. The marking of pupils' work is thorough, but sometimes insufficient time is allowed for pupils to discuss and respond fully to the written comments.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. It meets all statutory requirements and is relevant to pupils' interests. Practical activities and high quality visual presentations build up pupils' confidence and help to overcome the struggle that some have with the academic elements of the National Curriculum. The curriculum promotes the transfer of skills through cross-curricular themes and the development of exceptional analytical and evaluative skills. Provision for music is very good, exemplified by the brass band. The introduction of Spanish has proved popular and has introduced an international flavour to pupils' work. Pupils are involved in planning the 'creativity' sessions, a typical example being, Living in Skelmersdale in the 1800s and 1900s.

There is an effective work related dimension, as seen in the production of the 'Rudolf the Red-nosed Reindeer' CD and its packaging. Work with a professional artist significantly enhances

the school environment. Extra-curricular activities are many and varied and rates of participation are high. They include educational and residential visits that are valuable additions to pupils' cultural experiences.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Pupils see the school as a place of stability and security. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils, including those for child protection, are well established and fully meet requirements. The staff are vigilant and supervision is very good. Very good arrangements are in place to support children when they join the school and when they move to other schools. This creates good channels of communication between families and the school. The emphasis the school places on good attendance has led to a marked improvement this year. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is excellent. The school goes to great lengths to secure specialist support and resources where necessary. One parent said: 'My daughter has come on leaps and bounds since joining the school.' Teachers have a detailed picture of the learning and pastoral needs of every pupil. Challenging targets are set and very carefully tailored programmes of support are devised and implemented. As a result, pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher's leadership is visionary, entrepreneurial, far-reaching and proactive. The headteacher and leadership team spearhead initiatives. They delegate responsibilities successfully to involve staff in the many facets of school life. This holistic approach underpins pupils' growth in confidence and excellent personal development. Adults are persistent in seeking out alternative approaches to resolve problems. There is no sense of complacency. The school knows itself well and inspectors agree with its judgements. Performance is evaluated rigorously, which leads to timely implementation of strategies to support individual pupils. The school's inclusiveness is striking. Provision is equally accessible to pupils of all abilities and backgrounds. The promotion of community cohesion is excellent. The list of outreach events in which the school interacts with wider communities is endless. Pupils talk with conviction about the many outcomes, a typical example being their work with the Creative Partnership team to improve the environment around the school. Significant improvements have been made since the previous inspection, backed up by the governors' extensive knowledge of the school and effectiveness in holding it to account.

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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?	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?	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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	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	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?	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**

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John's Catholic Primary School, Skelmersdale, Lancashire, WN8 6PF

Thank you for your very warm welcome and for telling me so much about your school. You are clearly very proud of what you achieve and you will be pleased to hear that I think that your school is outstanding. This is because you are taking advantage of the many opportunities that are offered and translating them into good practice in your own lives.

I was impressed by your excellent behaviour and your thoughtfulness for each other. The good relationships that are generated between you and your teachers contribute to the happy atmosphere in school and to the quality of your learning. You are not afraid to answer questions in class and to have any mistakes used to create a better understanding of the topic for all pupils. This is good. Discussions with some of you during the inspection highlighted how you join in consultations with various groups, listening to a range of opinions before making suggestions. This is good preparation for the future when I hope you will want to contribute as citizens to what is going on in your local community. Looking after your own well-being is equally important, which is why the physical activity in your 'Wake up and Shake up' sessions is a valuable part of your learning.

The development of your reading, writing, numeracy and technology skills is crucial for your future. These are coming on well but we think that you can improve your writing and mathematics still further. The Big Write lessons are already making a difference. So are the extra groups that are arranged for short periods when teachers' assessment records show that you need a little extra help in English and mathematics. I was pleased to see you responding so positively in these sessions. Keep this up. Your work in practical and cultural activities is very good. The high quality of the art work about the school is testimony to your creative talents, as is the impressive sound of the brass band.

Thank you once again for your welcome and courtesy during the inspection. You have much to gain from and to give to your school. Do this with enthusiasm and commitment and you will go far.

With best wishes for the future

Yours faithfully

June Tracey

Lead inspector