

St James' Catholic Primary School, Skelmersdale

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119588
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	327079
Inspection date	10 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Lynne Read

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)	174
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 John Sanders
Headteacher	Mrs Pauline Irvine
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Ashurst Road Ashurst Skelmersdale Lancashire WN8 6TN

Age group	3–11
Inspection date	10 November 2008
Inspection number	327079

Telephone number
Fax number

01695 728989
01695 728989

Age group	3-11
Inspection date	10 November 2008
Inspection number	327079

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and both key stages, especially in reading and writing; pupil's attitudes and behaviour; the breadth of the curriculum in meeting all pupils' needs; enrichment activities; health and safety and safeguarding procedures; the quality and impact of leadership and management, especially in raising achievement in the Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1.

Evidence was gathered from: observations, assessment data, records and documents, parents' replies to the questionnaires and discussions with staff, 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, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report

Description of the school

This average sized primary school is situated in the Ashurst area of Skelmersdale in Lancashire. It serves a mixed area; there is social advantage in around half of the households but also significant pockets of disadvantage. The proportion of pupils claiming free school meals and numbers of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are below average. Most pupils are of White British backgrounds with around 10% coming from different minority ethnic groups. A few pupils are learning English as an additional language. The Reception class has been extended to include a purpose built nursery. The resulting new EYFS unit was opened just over a year ago.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St James' Catholic Primary is a good school and provides good value for money. Parents have very positive views of the school. Comments received include praise for the 'wonderful ethos' and the teachers who, they say, make their children's work 'interesting and enjoyable'. Links with the church, the community and other schools are good and result in many benefits for pupils' learning and their personal development. Pupils say they especially enjoy the Spanish, Japanese, science and design and technology lessons led by visiting teachers from the secondary school.

Standards are above average by Year 6 and achievement is good throughout the EYFS and Key Stages 1 and 2. Records show that in past years, pupils' level of development has been typical for their age on entry to Year 1. Standards in the teacher assessments for Year 2 are above average for 2008 and there have been good improvements in reading and writing. Completed work and assessments for the current Year 2 pupils show that the good progress is sustained. Pupils' knowledge of sounds and letters to help them read and spell new words is less well developed. In Key Stage 2, progress is significantly above average and has been so over the last three years. The school generally exceeds its challenging targets in English and mathematics and a good proportion of pupils attain the higher level in science. These factors ensure that pupils have a good start for their secondary education. Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities do well from their starting points. Those who are learning English as an additional language have good support and often make rapid progress.

Teaching is good. The information from regular assessments is well used to provide good support and challenge. In most cases, work is carefully matched to pupils' needs and dispositions and this is an important factor underpinning the good progress of both boys and girls. However, the daily sessions for sounds and letters in Years 1 and 2 are not planned according to ability and are not as effective. Pupils have excellent attitudes, strive hard and persevere. Marking is good and teachers provide advice for pupils to help them to improve. Teaching assistants also provide very useful feedback and help. In the older classes, pupils have challenging goals to aim for and this good practice is now being developed across the school. Increasingly, pupils are encouraged to evaluate their own progress and consider the next steps. This is especially effective in writing where pupils use the 'marking ladders' to best advantage. Parents are encouraged to be involved in their children's education. A recent mathematics workshop was well received and plans for similar child-parent collaborations are under way.

The good curriculum provides an 'all round' education by balancing learning across the creative, physical, practical and personal skills, as well as the academic. Music has a high profile throughout school. All pupils begin to play a musical instrument during Key Stage 2 and they enjoy frequent opportunities for singing. They have good opportunities to read and write when studying other subjects. The good positioning of computer banks around the open-plan accommodation means that pupils have constant access to information and communication technology to enhance their learning. Special teaching programmes are successful in supporting those pupils who are not making expected progress. Gifted and talented pupils have good challenges in the basic skills and additional experiences, such as the recent workshop for art. The school has identified the need to develop a strand of more challenging work across all subjects to stretch abilities and talents further. An interesting range of themed days and weeks, alongside visits and expert visitors, enhance the curriculum and help to make learning fun. Pupils appreciate the interesting selection of out-of-school activities. They are especially

enthusiastic about the sports club and opportunities to compete in team games against other schools.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good and supported very well by the school's religious foundation and the good programme of personal education. Their behaviour is outstanding. Older pupils demonstrate very good self-discipline and have a strong work ethic. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding and they have a good awareness of cultural diversity. Attendance is satisfactory. The majority of pupils attend regularly and are punctual, reflecting their enjoyment of school. However, in spite of concerted efforts by staff and the introduction of a popular breakfast club, there are high absence rates among a few families. Good attention is given to care, guidance and support for personal development and safeguarding procedures meet requirements. Therefore, pupils feel very secure and say that there is no bullying. Their views are taken into account through good lines of communication and the developing 'pupil parliament'. Pupils fully understand the principles of healthy living; for example they have requested the introduction of 'cooking for kids' sessions so they can learn how to make healthy meals. There is a strong community spirit in school with pupils helping others and taking on responsibilities. For example, with the good support of welfare staff, pupils act as 'playleaders' and ensure that playtimes are happy occasions.

Leadership and management are good. Detailed records track pupils' progress closely and provide a reliable source for checking the performance of the school. A focused school improvement plan highlights priorities based on thorough, accurate evaluations of the school's work by senior and subject managers for English and mathematics. Management systems in the other subjects are being developed in a similar way. The headteacher provides good and enthusiastic leadership. She has the confidence and respect of staff, governors and parents and is instrumental in driving the school forward. The school provides a stimulating and well maintained environment for learning. Administration is very effective and there are high quality displays of pupils' work. These factors reflect the shared sense of pride among all adults at the school and their commitment to providing the best for the pupils. Governors have a good overview of standards and achievement, and bring a good range of expertise and experience to enhance management. They take a critical role in monitoring the school's work. Governance is good and all statutory requirements are met. Good improvements have been made since the last inspection, especially in the EYFS and Key Stage 1 which have resulted in improved progress. The school has good capacity to maintain its strengths and improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The EYFS is managed well and provides children with a good start to their education. When they enter the Nursery, children have a widely varying range of knowledge and experiences. Overall, their level of development is typical for children of their age, but there are some with significant difficulties in communication and language skills. Children quickly grow in confidence and progress well in all aspects of their learning, especially in speaking and listening. Their attitudes to learning and their behaviour are excellent.

Teaching is good. Assessment of children's progress is carried out on a regular basis and work is tailored to their needs. Adults provide a safe, stimulating learning environment and the good curriculum is increasingly focused on promoting learning through interesting, practical activities. However, at times, there is too much emphasis on teacher-directed tasks, especially for the older children. This means that time for investigating, exploring and developing independent learning skills is restricted to some extent. Nevertheless, the current Reception group have the

added experience from their time in the Nursery, and their development is more advanced than in previous years. They are on track to exceed average standards in several areas of learning by the time they reach Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' knowledge and understanding of sounds and letters so they are more confident in reading and spelling new words.
- Develop independent learning skills further for the older children in the EYFS.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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?	2
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?	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	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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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?	2

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**

10 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St James' Catholic Primary School, Skelmersdale, Lancashire.

WN8 6TN

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave me and my colleague when we visited your school. We thoroughly enjoyed our day. We appreciated all the help you gave us and the interesting conversations we had. In return, I would like to tell you what we found out.

St James' Catholic Primary is a good school. Your behaviour is excellent, you put great effort into your work, and you are very friendly people. You get on extremely well together and take very good care of each other. You are a credit to your school and families. You make your views known through your pupil parliament. I think your ideas to introduce 'cooking for kids' are very interesting and you should soon be developing your own healthy meals! You do a good job in raising money for charities and are developing into thoughtful citizens.

You say that you feel safe and happy; one person described it as a 'really caring school'. You told me how much you enjoy special events, trips and clubs so you must be very busy people. You told me that bullying is not an issue at school and I know that you learn a lot about health and safety in your lessons. I haven't space to list all the favourite things about school that we discussed but I know that sport, history and music were high on the list. I very much enjoyed your singing, especially your performance of 'The Rivers of Babylon', which was beautiful.

You are keen to learn and are making super progress. Well done! I saw the Year 6 pupils working on some very challenging mathematical problems and using inverse operations. I was impressed. Those of you in Key Stage 1 have improved your reading and writing and now, I think, you could do even better. I have asked your teachers to improve your skills with sounds and letters to help you read and write new words. That should help you to enjoy even more stories and make up some of your own. Those of you in the Nursery and Reception are learning lots of new things. You like to explore and practise your new skills so I have asked your teachers to provide more of those interesting 'free choice' activities.

Thank you once again for the interesting conversations we had and for letting us share your day. There is a great deal about your school of which you and the staff should be very proud. Please accept my best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Lynne Read

Lead inspector