

St Austin's Catholic (VA) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124361
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	328118
Inspection dates	29–30 April 2009
Reporting inspector	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.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	185
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	Michael Neylon
Headteacher	Emily Keedwell
Date of previous school inspection	28 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Garden Street Stafford ST17 4BT
Telephone number	01785 356765
Fax number	01785 356769

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than most primary schools and provides for the Early Years Foundation Stage in the Reception class. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. Few pupils are from minority ethnic groups or speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average but is increasing. The number on roll is rising as more pupils are joining the Reception class and other year groups. A considerable proportion of those who join after the Reception Year have additional learning needs. There are a significant number of vacant teaching posts including those with additional leadership responsibilities. The very recently appointed deputy headteacher has still to take up her role.

The Hippos before- and after-school club is not managed by the governing body and is subject to a separate inspection report.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school. It has considerable strengths in the ways it looks after pupils and encourages their personal development. The current staffing position has left the headteacher with a very heavy load and she works with determination and vigour to ensure the school continues to develop in these challenging times. Her outstanding leadership has empowered staff and has created a real commitment to improvement. In addition, her excellent management skills, which include scrupulous monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning and thorough analysis of data, have ensured that she knows exactly where the school needs to improve. Although leadership and management are satisfactory overall, other leaders and managers value the way that their management skills are being developed.

Parents typically comment on 'the lovely family atmosphere' and say that the headteacher and all the staff are very approachable. The school certainly provides a very caring environment where pupils feel extremely safe and secure. The innovative headteacher is focusing on building a 'house of love' and within this nurturing environment pupils are able to blossom and grow into confident, mature individuals whose personal development is good and behaviour is outstanding. There is a real sense of belonging and pupils are proud to contribute to the school community, whether it be through the school council or the 'Green Gang'. Parents recognise that older children are learning to 'look out for the little ones'. Pupils say 'everyone cares for each other'. They recognise that the satisfactory curriculum is improving and that there are lots of new clubs.

Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Achievement in Key Stages 1 and 2 is satisfactory taking into account pupils' individual starting points and in 2008, pupils reached broadly average standards by the end of Year 6. Progress in reading, writing and mathematics has recently slowed from good to satisfactory in Key Stage 1 and this is associated with significant staff changes and the lack of permanent teachers. Progress in Key Stage 2 is satisfactory but inconsistent. Pupils make good progress in English but their progress in mathematics and science is only satisfactory. Progress in mathematics is improving, although the school recognises there is even more to be done. However, progress in science is not improving to the same extent.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall but there are pockets of good teaching, especially in Years 5 and 6. Although there is an increasing proportion of lively lessons which capture pupils' interests, there are a minority of lessons where the pace of learning is relatively slow. Teachers' expectations of standards are variable, including the volume of work produced and the standards of content and presentation. Although pastoral care is good, academic guidance is only satisfactory. Some marking tells pupils very clearly about how to improve their work but this is not consistent. Improved progress in mathematics illustrates the school's satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

When children join the Reception class, their skills are similar to other children of that age. They make good progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage and recently, many are reaching standards that are above national expectations by the time they join Year 1. However, girls tend to reach higher standards than boys, particularly in writing and calculation. Children

make particularly good progress in their personal development. They play very well together and their confidence grows. A wide range of interesting activities are provided both inside and out; these engage children well because they are carefully planned with their interests and needs in mind. However, boys tend to choose to use computers or to play with construction toys and they do not always engage with the tasks that would develop their writing skills. Adults are good at supporting children's learning and developing their vocabulary and thinking skills. The provision has developed well because of good leadership and management. The school has taken on board external advice, especially regarding checking children's progress. As a result, children's achievements are very carefully monitored and the information is used well to plan activities that usually provide a good level of challenge for individual children. Links with parents are improving and parents appreciate the way their children are looked after and nurtured. Welfare procedures meet requirements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Stabilise staffing and improve achievement in Key Stage 1.
- Improve achievement in mathematics and science in Key Stage 2.
- Ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently good, including making sure that lessons move along at a good pace, expectations are always high and that pupils are clear about how to improve their work.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Until recently, pupils made good progress in Key Stage 1 but staffing has changed and progress slowed to just satisfactory. Standards have slipped recently and in 2008 were close to the national average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2. Girls tend to reach higher standards than boys, reflecting their higher starting points. Progress in Key Stage 2, although satisfactory, is inconsistent, with notable variations between the rates of progress in different subjects in different classes. Pupils make good progress in English in Key Stage 2 as a consequence of the schools' strong focus on developing pupils' skills in writing. Although standards in English are above average by the end of Year 6, with an above average proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 5, standards in mathematics and science are average because fewer pupils reach the higher levels. The school is aware that pupils' progress in mathematics in Key Stage 2 was inadequate last year but improvements in the way mathematics is taught has boosted pupils' progress to satisfactory. However, the school knows that there is still more to be done. Progress in science has not accelerated at the same rate as progress in mathematics because pupils are not completing enough work. Pupils who transfer to the school make satisfactory progress from their individual starting points, which are sometimes below average. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make satisfactory progress, but their progress is better in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 1, reflecting the quality of support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is particularly strong and pupils are very respectful and tolerant as a result of the school's commitment to equality of opportunity. They clearly know the difference between right and wrong and often put Christian values into action. There is a sensitivity to those who are less fortunate than themselves which is reflected in extensive fund-raising. Although pupils have a secure understanding of their own culture, pupils' knowledge and understanding of other faiths and cultures is undeveloped. This is because pupils have limited opportunities to meet people from other backgrounds. Pupils work hard in lessons and even the youngest pupils try to support one another. Pupils and parents report that bullying is rare and the work of the school council in anti-bullying week has emphasised a message that conveys mutual respect, acceptance and understanding. This, together with pupils' confidence in the staff, helps to ensure that pupils feel exceptionally safe. Pupils' good enjoyment of school is reflected in their excellent behaviour and their good attendance. There is an enthusiasm for exercise and a good commitment to healthy eating. Pupils' increasing levels of confidence, good social skills and positive attitudes to learning, combined with good literacy skills, means they are well placed for future success.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Although teaching and learning are satisfactory overall there are pockets of good teaching. Relationships between teachers and pupils are consistently good and help pupils gain confidence. In some classes, teaching is lively and a good range of interesting activities engage pupils and promote good learning. However, pupils experience a minority of lessons where the pace of learning is slower. In these lessons, pupils' concentration can wane, especially for those who find learning difficult. Although they never misbehave, pupils do not always listen carefully enough during introductions. As a result, they are unable to get on quickly when they are expected to work independently. The match of work to pupils' needs is improving principally during group and independent work in mathematics lessons. However, teachers' questioning during introductions does not always address the needs of all pupils and a few teachers do not always effectively check pupils' understanding during lessons. Teachers' expectations are variable. In some classes, consistently high expectations support good progress but in a minority of classes, expectations of presentation, content and volume of work are variable.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is broad, balanced and provides adequately for promoting pupils' basic skills. It is particularly good at supporting pupils' personal development. Provision for information and communication technology has improved substantially since the previous inspection and good use is made of the new facilities. Pupils clearly recognise improvements to the mathematics curriculum and talk enthusiastically about how they are enjoying the extra challenge. Pupils are carrying out more investigations in science but they are not covering enough of the curriculum and this is adversely affecting the standards they reach. The school is aware that more links could be made between subjects in order to make learning more relevant to the

pupils. There is an increasing number of clubs but these are often sports based. Visits and visitors are used effectively to enliven learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Good pastoral care contributes significantly to pupils' enjoyment of school and personal development. The school is a caring community where relationships between adults and pupils are very good. Pupils feel very secure and say that there is always someone to talk to if they have any problems. Measures that safeguard pupils, including child protection and health and safety procedures, meet requirements. Vulnerable pupils are well looked after and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive satisfactory support, which is enhanced by links with other agencies. Pupils who join the school after the Reception Year talk enthusiastically about the warm welcome they receive. Academic guidance and support are satisfactory. Teachers' marking varies in quality. In some classes, detailed marking tells pupils exactly how to improve their work but sometimes marking is mainly congratulatory, especially for the more able, leaving pupils unsure about how to secure improvements. Pupils have good knowledge of their learning targets but teachers rarely refer to these targets in their marking and there are missed opportunities to refer to targets in lessons. The checking of pupils' progress is becoming increasingly effective and pupils who are in danger of falling behind have access to an adequate range of intervention strategies.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

- The significant number of staff vacancies for both teachers and senior leaders has caused difficulties but improvements have still been secured. The outstanding leadership provided by the new headteacher has ensured that the morale of the hard working teachers has remained high and there is a shared determination to improve. Subject leaders are starting to acquire skills in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning but they still have some way to go, especially in developing their understanding of data. Although the school's contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory, it has laid the foundations for improvement through the hugely successful 'Who Do You Think You Are
- ' project which is helping pupils understand their place in both the local and world communities. Partnerships with the local Catholic community, including local Catholic schools, are very strong indeed and the school is starting to reach out to other groups. There have been changes in the governing body. Although governors remain extremely supportive, they are sometimes too reluctant to challenge the school as to its performance.

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?	3
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	3

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?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

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	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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**

1 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Austin's Catholic (VA) Primary School, Stafford, ST17 4BT

It was a delight and a privilege to visit your school. We really enjoyed talking to you all and listened very carefully to what you had to say. You go to a satisfactory school that is starting to improve. However, there is plenty to celebrate, like the way you are growing into such sensible young people and the way you are looked after so well.

- It is clear that you like coming to school and enjoy the company of your teachers and your friends. It was good to hear that the school council has been working hard along with your teachers to discourage bullying. It is one of the reasons that you feel extremely safe in school. I was very impressed by your outstanding behaviour. You have very good manners and make visitors very welcome indeed. I also really enjoyed looking at the work you did concerning 'Who Do You Think You Are
- ' Your teachers and parents worked very hard to make sure that you understood your place in the local community and how you fit in the world. You are learning to recognise and value everyone's similarities and differences. So, well done to everyone concerned!

Children in the Reception class get off to a good start. We know that a lot of parents have been upset about the changes of teachers in Key Stage 1 and your progress has slowed so we have asked the school to make sure you make faster progress. We noticed that pupils in Key Stage 2 make good progress in English but we have asked your teachers to make sure that pupils make equally good progress in mathematics and science. Teaching and learning are satisfactory but some lessons move along too slowly and teachers do not always demand enough of you. We have asked them to look at this and the way they help you to improve your work through their marking.

As your school is short of permanent staff your new headteacher works very hard indeed. She is helping your other teachers to develop their management skills.

Thank you again for being such good company.

I wish you well for the future

Susan Walsh

Lead inspector