

Kidderminster, St Ambrose Catholic Primary

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131400
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	328586
Inspection dates	9–10 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Jane Melbourne HMI

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)	207
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	Peter Hesketh
Headteacher	Marie Yates
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Leswell Street Kidderminster DY10 1RP
Telephone number	01562 823568
Fax number	01562 745376

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

In this smaller than average school, a high proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those of Polish, Philippino, Italian and Asian heritage. Many of these pupils join the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) having acquired very little English language. The attainment on entry is slightly below the national average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. There is an independently managed breakfast and after-school club on site. There is a neighbouring pre-school, also on the school site. The school achieved the Healthy Schools Award and the Active Sports Mark in both 2006 and 2007. The school has achieved the Bronze Award for Eco Schools and Investors in People Award both in 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Ambrose Catholic Primary School provides a satisfactory standard of education and care for its pupils. There have been some improvements since the last inspection, when the school was also judged to be satisfactory, but these have not resulted in a significant improvement in the school's performance overall. Key issues from the last report have begun to be tackled, but not consistently across the school. The school is not complacent. With the support of the local authority, staff continually seek ways to further improve, particularly in terms of raising the standards and achievement of each cohort. However, some classes have been significantly affected by disruption in staffing and these pupils have not made up the lost ground which has been caused by this. Therefore standards remain broadly average to below average and achievement remains only satisfactory. The school has correctly identified key issues for improvement, but has a far too wide-ranging list of priorities for action to enable them to be effective in those areas where change is really necessary and to make the most effective use of resources. Staff are currently working hard to eliminate the differences in boys' and girls' achievement and to raise standards in mathematics, which is the weakest subject area at the school. Through their more effective use of data, school leaders have recognised that reading is stronger than writing across the school, but initiatives to enhance pupils' writing skills are too recent to have made a significant impact.

The school works satisfactorily in partnership with others, but it is not doing enough to learn from good practice outside the school. The effectiveness of the EYFS is developing well. Strengths of the school remain in the personal development of pupils and in the pastoral guidance afforded to them. However, pupils are not receiving sufficient good quality academic guidance. There are too many inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and a currently satisfactory, albeit improving, curriculum. Staff are working particularly hard, alongside local authority advisors, to improve mathematics lessons, where sometimes the teaching is not clear enough and sometimes the more able pupils do not receive sufficient challenge. There are some good initiatives to raise the opportunities for pupils to solve mathematical problems through other areas of the curriculum and to use mathematics in practical ways. The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory because staff and governors, whilst dedicated, are too ambitious about issues which are not of absolute priority. However, one of the more recent successes is the improvement in the quality of partnership with parents and carers. Parents are now better informed about their child's targets and their progress, as well as receiving improved information about the learning taking place within school.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The provision for Reception children in the EYFS is satisfactory; some elements are good. The school is committed to its use of the outdoor area as an extension to the Reception classroom and to embrace opportunities for learning in the EYFS. Staff work closely with the neighbouring pre-school to ensure children's smooth transition to school. This, together with home visits by the Reception teacher, ensures that children settle well. Children are happy to come to school, confident to talk about what they are doing and enthusiastic about learning. They know whom to approach for help if needed. There is an appropriate focus on numeracy and communication, language and literacy, including familiarity with the sounds of letters. There is a good range of activities for children to choose from and many which encourage the children to become

independent learners. Children are keen to participate, particularly in the role-play and outdoor areas. They co-operate well with each other, working well in pairs and small groups. Most children reach the expected levels by the time they move into Year 1, showing satisfactory progress from their starting points. Observation and assessment methods ensure that children's progress is monitored carefully. Planning ensures that all six areas of the curriculum are covered and staff are clear about which of the early learning goals each child is working towards. Just occasionally, staff do not take sufficient account of children's diverse starting points when planning the activities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Strengthen the leadership and management of the school, including governance, to ensure that the school is appropriately focused on the most important issues for raising attainment and that it deploys its resources effectively.
- Improve standards of teaching and achievement, particularly in mathematics, ensuring that children understand what is taught, are always suitably challenged, and that they make sufficient progress in lessons and over time.
- Develop the effectiveness of academic guidance and the use of targets across the school in order to raise pupils' awareness of what they need to do to improve. 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

Achievement across all year groups and for all groups of learners is satisfactory. Pupils attain standards that are broadly average to below average for their age. Standards in English are generally in line with national expectations and are improving. Pupils achieve better in reading than writing across the school. Girls outperform boys by a large margin in reading, but data shows that the difference between boys and girls is narrowing. There is a significant improvement in pupils attaining higher levels in reading at Key Stage 1. Standards in mathematics are too low across both key stages. The school did not reach its target for the number of pupils gaining the expected levels in science. The school's use of data is improving and pupils who are falling behind are identified in a timely manner, enabling staff to plan appropriate intervention strategies to assist their progress. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those who are learning English as an additional language, are making good progress due to good quality support and intervention, so their achievement is broadly in line with other pupils. However, pupils' progress is only satisfactory overall and for some cohorts it has been poor over time due to significant disruption in staffing. School data reflects an improving picture of pupils' progress this term, although in mathematics, pupils' progress remains too low.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is a strength of this caring school. Pupils like school and want to attend. The youngest children and any new children settle into school quickly as a result of the very strong links with the neighbouring pre-school. Pupils are usually well behaved and staff make clear their expectations for this. Pupils take responsibility for their own actions and genuinely care about their school and their friends. Pupils work and play together well. They

feel safe and secure and know whom to turn to for help when required. They have a good understanding of the importance of keeping healthy and how to go about this. Pupils make a positive contribution to the school community and are active participants in the school council. Lessons are planned so that pupils learn to work together in pairs or small groups. In many classes, they help each other well, gaining skills which equip them appropriately for the workplace and their future. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have an excellent understanding of right and wrong. Their views are regularly consulted and taken seriously, as are those of their parents, who are also overwhelmingly positive about the school, including the recent structural and organisational changes. However, despite the school's best efforts, some parents are still taking their children on holiday during term-times, which has a detrimental effect on the school's attendance figures, which are below the national average, and upon some pupils' progress. Pupils are given a wide range of opportunities to understand Britain as a diverse society, with well-established links with other communities around the country.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The improved stability in staffing is helping to improve the quality of teaching and learning at the school. Some staff set pupils to the activities quickly, although in some classes pupils listen for too long. Where pupils are involved in assessing their own learning during and at the end of each lesson, this results in pupils' better understanding of their own progress and staff having appropriate knowledge about which aspects of a lesson require further consolidation. The inspection team confirmed the school's own view that teaching is satisfactory across the school. There are still insufficient good or outstanding lessons to raise standards and pupils' rates of progress overall. The teaching of mathematics is too variable in quality and the school is receiving local authority support to improve this. The school has recently introduced a new commercial scheme for mathematics, but it is too early to judge the impact of this. Staff are planning lessons thoroughly and they are becoming more effective in adapting plans to account for the range of learners' needs within each class, although some of the more able pupils are still not sufficiently challenged in lessons. The role of the teaching assistants is improving and provides a good support to teaching and aid to pupils' learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is an improving aspect of the school. Staff have recognised the need for pupils to utilise their basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) in other subject areas and therefore plan more effectively for opportunities for writing, solving mathematical problems and the use of technology in real situations and across the curriculum. Due to staffing changes at the school, and because existing staff have so many responsibilities, some areas of the curriculum are more effectively led and managed than others. Therefore, more recent curriculum improvements have not had a marked impact on contributing to raising standards across the school. Parents are becoming better informed about what their child is learning and through their involvement on outings and special 'Pupil Learning Days'. There are many encouraging initiatives planned which enthuse the pupils well, such as the development of the use of ICT, the care of the school chickens and the Year 6 links with another school in Liverpool. The school effectively manages to integrate the 'Every Child Matters'

agenda into the curriculum, so there is something for everyone. A very wide range of off-site visits and visitors to the school provide interest. There is also a good range of extra-curricular clubs to stimulate pupils' needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pastoral care is a particularly strong feature of this friendly school. Vulnerable pupils are supported sensitively. Children receive a satisfactory start in the EYFS thanks to very strong links with the neighbouring pre-school. Staff informally evaluate lessons but do not consistently give good quality advice to pupils about what is good about their work and how they can improve. There is a marking policy in place, but not all staff use this to guide their current practice. Therefore, academic guidance is only satisfactory. Expectations for the presentation of work are not consistently clear, nor are they high enough. In some classes, pupils are becoming better at checking their own work and enjoy making some thoughtful suggestions to their fellow classmates about how they might improve theirs. Targets for learning are being more widely shared with pupils and their parents, although they are referred to more regularly in some lessons than others. The needs of pupils who require extra support are met well through a combination of individual support within class and in targeted intervention groups. Child protection procedures are understood by all staff and meet requirements. Pupils feel safe and know whom to turn to in case of difficulty.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Many new initiatives have been introduced since the last inspection, but some have only been introduced relatively recently, due to the school's far-ranging priorities over a period which has included significant staff disruption. Therefore, the impact of changes has yet to be fully realised. School leaders have drawn well on local authority support, although some of the staff who have received input are no longer at the school. Despite significant professional development for school staff, the quality of mathematics teaching is not consistent across the school, nor good enough to make up for the lost ground suffered by some pupils. The role of the subject coordinators is improving with the generally more effective use of data and the setting of appropriately challenging targets. However, staff have too many priorities and therefore do not always remain appropriately focused on the main issues which will have the major impact on achieving these targets. Some work has begun on addressing the points for improvement from the last inspection, but they have not all been tackled effectively. The school's self-evaluation is mostly accurate, although it does not have an accurate view of its effectiveness in all areas. Governors are not effectively involved in this process. However, they do discharge their responsibilities satisfactorily and are part of the cycle of monitoring the effectiveness of the school, which is helpful in raising their awareness of the quality of provision within the school. All are committed to promoting equality of opportunity for all pupils, including those with particular needs and those who join the school at different times of the school year. Staff and governors are aware of the discrepancy between boys' and girls' achievement, which they are trying to eliminate through teaching methods, the organisation of the curriculum and the use of resources. The school is particularly successful in contributing to community cohesion. It utilises the diversity within the school community well, allows pupils to make a major

contribution to the school community and has forged a good range of external links with other communities.

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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3
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?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
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?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	3
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

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	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	2
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	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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	3

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?	2
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**

11 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Ambrose Catholic Primary School, Kidderminster DY10 1RP

Thank you for being so helpful when Mr Reynolds and I recently inspected your school. I was impressed with your new classrooms and the outdoor area for the Reception class. I am please you like using the super new library. It is good that so many of your parents and carers support you by attending the special events at the school, such as your nativity plays and maths learning days. Your 'Super Learning Weeks', where you often work all together, sound like great fun too.

What I like most about your school.

- The caring family atmosphere.
- You adopt healthy lifestyles by drinking lots of water throughout the day, eat healthy nutritional meals and take part in many different sports.
- Your confident use of ICT.
- Your mostly good behaviour in lessons.
- The close links with other parishioners and the local community, including the neighbouring pre-school.
- The progress made by those of you who find learning more difficult or come to the school not being able to speak much English.

I have asked the headteacher, your teachers and the school governors to do the following:

- only focus on the most important things for the school, to make sure that you all reach higher standards in the end of year tests
- improve the quality of lessons, particularly in mathematics, ensuring that you understand what you are taught, are always given hard enough work, and that you make enough progress in lessons, and during your time at school
- develop the guidance that you are given, for example in the marking of your work, and make better use of your targets, so that you know how to improve your work.

You can help by telling your teacher if you find something too easy or too difficult, following the advice in their comments in your books and keep trying to achieve your targets. Remember to write things neatly and work hard at your presentation.

I wish you all well for the future.

Yours sincerely Jane Melbourne Her Majesty's Inspector