

Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135246
Local Authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	329063
Inspection dates	2–3 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Paul Bamber

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)	407
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 M Pearson
Headteacher	Mrs Helen Trattles
Date of previous school inspection	20 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Capenhurst Lane Ellesmere Port Cheshire CH65 7AQ
Telephone number	0151 338 2230

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	2–3 July 2009
Inspection number	329063

Fax number

0151 356 8669

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This much larger than average sized school is the result of the amalgamation of previously separate infant and junior schools in 2007. Pupils come from a wide range of social backgrounds. A smaller than average proportion is from a minority ethnic background and of these very few speaks English as an additional language. The numbers of pupils entitled to a free school meal is lower than average. Proportions of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities or a statement of educational need are low.

The Early Years Foundation Stage provision consists of two Nursery classes, one morning and the other in the afternoon and two Reception classes. The school has awards in recognition of its promotion of pupils' healthy lifestyle and of their physical development and for its work on inclusion and provision for pupils with dyslexia.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school which provides its pupils with a good all-round education and promotes their excellent personal development and well-being through the provision of outstanding care, guidance and support. Throughout the school, pupils attain above average standards and achieve well academically because they are effectively taught and have an increasingly relevant and exciting curriculum. Underpinning these positive aspects are good leadership, management and governance.

Children enter the Nursery with skills that are below those typically expected for their age. Their good achievements in the Early Years Foundation Stage, in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 are due to effective teaching and careful tracking by senior leaders of their step-by-step progress as they move through the school.

Standards in reading, writing, mathematics and science are above average throughout the school. Leaders and managers promote equality of opportunity diligently and show a keen determination to eliminate discrimination; consequently, all groups of pupils achieve equally well and thoroughly enjoy learning. The school's promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. The focus for governors and senior leaders has to been to concentrate their efforts on ensuring that the merging of the two previously separate schools has been managed with the minimum of disruption to pupils and staff. It has succeeded in this very well, as the outcomes for pupils and the good relationships between staff illustrate. However, this has meant that the school's promotion of wider links with contrasting communities in the United Kingdom and internationally are not well established.

Pupils' behaviour is excellent and they have very positive attitudes to learning. Relationships are very strong and this contributes to lessons being conducted in a positive and productive atmosphere. Pupils seize opportunities to take on responsibilities around the school and have a strong moral conscience. Their spiritual, moral social and cultural development is outstanding overall. A whole-school celebration assembly exemplified the pupils' keen sense of spirituality and the mutual respect and fondness with which pupils regard each other. Older pupils enjoy looking after and guiding younger ones. All pupils are unfailingly polite and welcoming. The lessons to develop the pupils' personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE), ensures that they are able to articulate their feelings sensitively and confidently.

The curriculum increasingly excites and engages pupils, who very much appreciate that class work is often linked to learning outside the classroom and involves and requires them to link learning in different subjects. An excellent Year 6 lesson, for example, used a recent visit to the Liverpool Museum as a basis for role-play, writing and discussion about slavery in the United States. Pupils applied skills and knowledge acquired in literacy, history and PSHCE lessons to rehearse mini playlets to illustrate different standpoints on the topic.

The school ensures that pupils are extremely well cared for and supported and that they are well aware of the targets set for ensuring that they improve academically. Pupils are confident that they are safe in the school and even the youngest ones talk knowledgeably about which foods and drinks are beneficial or potentially harmful to their health. Effective procedures ensure that more vulnerable pupils' needs are well catered for. The good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensures that they make as good progress as all other pupils in the school.

The headteacher, ably supported by governors and the senior leadership team, promotes high expectations and makes it clear that a constant drive for improvement is the most important priority in the school. Governors have effectively supported the school's work and development, have a wealth of expertise and challenge the school's performance and provision rigorously. Subject leaders are enthusiastic and committed, but not always sufficiently focused on the impact of their work on pupils' achievements and standards.

The school knows itself well, albeit underestimating the quality of the care, support and guidance it provides. Overall, it uses this good self-evaluation well to plan appropriate improvements. Pupils' consistently good achievements, sustained above average standards and steady improvements in other aspects of the school's work over the last two years, indicate that the school has a good capacity to improve further and to continue to provide good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children achieve well in the Early Years Foundation Stage. On entry to the Nursery, their skills are overall below the level expected of children of their age; with personal, social and emotional development as the least strong areas of development. In Nursery and Reception they make excellent progress in this area as a result of the sensitive care they receive. So that by the time the children leave Reception their skills are slightly above the levels expected for their age. All welfare requirements are met. Arrangements for entry into Nursery and the strong links with parents throughout their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage ensure that children settle quickly and happily and continue to thrive. A particular strength is the way in which children are helped to develop their basic skills as a result of the focused teaching they receive in early reading, writing and number work. Less strong is the outdoor provision for the children and when they select their own activities. On these occasions, there is less focus on specific learning intention, and assessments are less sharp than in more formal settings.

The provision is well led and managed. Adults are effectively deployed to support and guide children. Staff know the children's needs and work well as a team. Children have very positive attitudes to learning, assume responsibility enthusiastically, help out within and outside of the classroom, take turns fairly and listen respectfully to each other. Staff are well led by the Early Years Foundation Stage manager and are committed to continually improving provision for the children.

What the school should do to improve further

- For subject coordinators to focus more specifically, when they plan changes to provision, on improving pupils' achievements and standards and to check that these improvements have occurred.
- Improve the school's promotion of community cohesion by establishing links with contrasting communities in the United Kingdom and globally.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils enter Year 1 with skills that are slightly above those typically expected. They make good progress in Years 1 and 2 and reach above average standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they enter Year 3. They continue to achieve well in Years 3 to 6. The 2008 national test results, indications from the provisional 2009 results and evidence from lessons and pupils'

work show that standards are well above average in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6. The school's keen focus on promoting pupils' speaking skills has resulted in them having a rich vocabulary and this has helped to improve their writing skills. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the tiny proportion who speak English as an additional language and those from minority ethnic backgrounds, all make good progress in relation to their individual starting points.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils are confident and enthusiastic learners. They love being at school and enthuse about the exciting things they do every day. They know about personal safety and how to make sensible choices regarding healthy lifestyles. They develop independence and responsibility and work together cooperatively in a range of ways. They make a positive contribution to the school and the wider community and this helps to prepare them for the future. Older pupils seize opportunities to nurture the younger ones. They take their roles as play leaders and 'max' agents very seriously and with pride. Behaviour is excellent. Pupils are helped to respect themselves and others. Spiritual, moral and social development is excellent. Cultural development enables pupils to develop a sound awareness of the richness and diversity of world faiths and cultures. The school council plays an ever increasing role in school life, including organising more play equipment for classrooms for indoor playtimes. Attendance is above the national average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils learn quickly because the quality of teaching is good overall. A key strength in teaching is the friendly relationships that are evident in all lessons. This gives pupils the confidence to tackle new tasks and to ask for help when they need it. Interesting work is well matched to meet pupils' needs. Across the school, teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) effectively to make learning exciting. A strong emphasis on well-planned lessons, from the Nursery to Year 6, enables pupils to make good progress. For example, writing, food technology and history skills were developed in an exciting lesson where Year 1 pupils made preparations for a Victorian picnic. Teachers make clear to pupils what they will learn in a lesson, which gives added purpose to the work, and then later to check on pupils' learning. They explain new ideas in a lively way that makes pupils keen to learn. Occasionally, however, teachers spend too long talking to the whole class and the pupils' attention begins to wane. The knowledgeable classroom assistants work very well to support vulnerable pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, ensuring that their needs are fully met. Teachers mark pupils' work conscientiously. They provide pupils with thoughtful advice about how to improve their work further. Pupils have many opportunities to assess their own and their classmates' work and have a good understanding of their own targets. This benefits their understanding and hastens progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils are well served by a relevant and increasingly exciting curriculum which is effectively taught and enables them to achieve well. Statutory requirements are met. Pupils enjoy learning both in and out of the classroom. The programme to promote their personal, social, health and citizenship education successfully contributes to their excellent spiritual, moral and social development. The school has worked successfully overall to ensure the curriculum is based more on pupils' own experiences. It has increasingly used visits out of school and visitors to school as the basis for learning in the classroom. The wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer attracts pupils in large numbers and provides them with good opportunities to further develop physically and aesthetically. The curriculum promotes pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills well and prepares them effectively for the next steps in their education. Although the school has adapted its curriculum to better meet the needs of all pupils in a primary school, senior leaders and governors acknowledge that there is still more to do to be sure that skills and knowledge are built on a step-by-step basis throughout the school. The needs of pupils with special gifts or talents, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or those who join the school speaking little or no English are served well by the carefully planned curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care is outstanding. The vast majority of parents are appreciative of the support their children receive and hold the school in high regard. Teachers know pupils very well and the quality of relationships is very strong. Pupils confirm this by their comments that they feel valued, safe and very well cared for. Arrangements to safeguard pupils fully meet current government requirements. Health and safety and welfare arrangements are very good. There is good support and guidance for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Good systems are in place to identify pupils' individual needs and to set them appropriate targets for learning. Strong links with a range of organisations are used very effectively to support pupils who experience difficulties. The school has good procedures for assessing pupils' progress. This information is used well to identify pupils who may be falling behind, and to provide extra support. Across the school, the collection and use of assessment information ensures all staff have a clear picture of pupils' progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leaders, managers and governors, ably led by an astute headteacher, have ensured that pupils and staff have come through the process of amalgamation happily and performing well. The bringing together of the two school communities has been of paramount importance. There is a shared determination that the school will continue to improve and that pupils and staff will work in a nurturing, but challenging environment. Through excellent partnerships with the church, with parents and with other external agencies and institutions, the school has made sure that the aims of the school are very well met.

Senior leaders check on the school's work diligently, evaluating the quality of teaching and learning regularly and closely analysing test results and pupils' progress to identify areas that need improvement. Actions based on these accurate evaluations and analyses have resulted,

for example, in pupils' better performance in writing and more accurate problem solving in mathematics. However, subject leaders do not sufficiently identify the specific improvements in pupils' standards and achievement that they expect, or evaluate the success of their actions. Inclusion is at the heart of all the school does and parents endorse its success in this with comments such as, 'children's well-being and happiness is extremely important in this school'. Governance is good overall. The school is active in engaging with the church community but less well developed are the schools links with more distant and global 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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
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?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
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?	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	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?	1

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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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**

I would like to thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave to the team when we inspected your school recently. You told us how much you enjoy school and it was obvious from the lessons we saw and from talking with you that this is so. You are given a good education and some of the school's work is excellent.

Some of the things that I was especially impressed with were:

- that you do well with your work right through the school
- you behave really sensibly, you get on very nicely with each other and work hard in lessons
- you are taught well
- the school makes sure that you are extremely well cared for and feel very safe
- you learn how to be healthy and responsible
- your parents are very pleased with the school
- more and more of you are having exciting things to do in class
- the school is well run.

Part of my job is to point out things that will help the school become even better. There are two, in particular, that I have asked your headteacher to make sure are done. They are:

- when teachers in charge of subjects plan improvements, they need to keep in mind exactly what you need to do to improve your work and then check closely that your work has improved
- for the school to help you understand more about how people in other communities live, both in this country and abroad.

Many thanks again to you for your help with the inspection. You can play your part in helping your school become even better by carrying on coming to school every day and working really hard in all you do.