

St Stephen's RC Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106253
Local Authority	Tameside
Inspection number	331554
Inspection dates	7–8 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Jon Lovgreen

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	395
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr William Fallon
Headteacher	Mr Brendan Marley
Date of previous school inspection	6 June 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 19 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents, including relevant policies, school improvement plans, governing body minutes, analyses of pupils' attainment and samples of their work. They also analysed 88 questionnaires returned by parents and carers and the 164 questionnaires returned by pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- pupils' standards and progress in reading and writing in Key Stage 1, and mathematics and science in Key Stage 2
- the extent to which teaching has improved and marking is more consistent
- the use of tracking data to check pupils' progress
- the quality of information given to governors about the school's performance
- the rigour with which school managers check how well the school is doing.

Information about the school

This is a larger than average school taking pupils from a range of social and economic backgrounds. The vast majority of pupils are of White British origin and very few pupils speak English as an additional language. A below average proportion have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is average. Awards include Healthy Schools status, Activemark and the Eco-Schools Award. In June 2008 the school was given a notice to improve. Specific issues were teaching quality; pupils' standards, progress and knowledge of how to improve; and the rigour with which senior staff checked performance to improve it. A new headteacher took up post five weeks prior to the inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St Stephen's is a satisfactory and improving school. Standards have risen, pupils make satisfactory progress, and the quality of teaching and learning has improved. The provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is a relative strength of the school. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

In response to the last report, school leaders took stock of what needed to be improved. Strong and extensive support from the local authority saw effective extra training for teachers, and managers becoming more skilled and accurate in checking the school's performance and using data to monitor pupils' progress. The arrival of a new headteacher has further strengthened and clarified work in these areas. Staff share a common desire to make the school even more effective and they are increasingly clear about how to rise to that challenge. This gives the school good capacity to improve. Standards in end of key stage tests have risen in each of the last two years and all groups of pupils now make satisfactory progress. The gap in achievement between girls and boys has narrowed except in writing, where boys still lag behind.

Pupils enjoy lessons, behave well, and work with enthusiasm. Regular attendance and good punctuality testify to their very positive attitude to school. They are confident and welcoming, respecting each other and adults alike. They say they feel safe in school and are confident that any concerns they have will be dealt with. Good relationships see pupils cooperating well in group work, being responsible in physical activity, and respecting the school's 'Peace Garden' as a place for quiet talk, reading and thinking. Pupils value responsibilities, such as being peace mediators or taking part in Eco-Schools activities. This good contribution to the school community is not matched by learning about, or working with, other communities. This is because governors have not followed up plans to promote community cohesion. Governors have, however, improved the way in which they check how well the school is doing and take an appropriate role in helping to steer improvement.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. A growing proportion of lessons are good, but a residue of dull teaching remains. Lessons are well planned with good attention to providing tasks suited to differing abilities. Although work is generally matched to pupils' levels of ability, higher attaining pupils are not often given tasks that really stretch them. Marking is systematic and helpful. Visits and topic work are helping to bring learning alive, as are visiting experts to teach such things as music, and events like the planetarium coming to school. Good care, guidance and support are cornerstones of the school's work and parents and carers, and pupils, appreciate the effort the school puts in to make this so. As a result, 'happy' and 'welcoming' are the two most common words

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used by parents and carers to describe it. Parents and carers appreciate teachers' efforts to keep in touch with them, a typical comment being, 'Teachers are approachable and always have time to answer questions.' Reports, however, give a lot of detail but too little information on the standards the pupil attains, their progress and what they need to do to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve standards in writing, especially for boys, by raising expectations of the length of pupils' written work and by providing more opportunities to write for real purposes.
- Ensure that more lessons are stimulating by giving less lengthy explanation, being more imaginative in the tasks for pupils, and making sure that higher attaining pupils get work which extends and challenges them.
- Improve the quality of reports so that parents and carers and pupils have a clear understanding of the pupil's standards, progress and potential.
- Give pupils more opportunity to learn about, and work with, people from outside the school and local community.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

From average skills on entry to the Nursery class, pupils make satisfactory progress during their time in the school. In the past, good gains in the Early Years Foundation Stage have not always been capitalised on in Key Stage 1 and achievement has been inconsistent in Key Stage 2. A major effort to remedy this saw assessments and test results rise dramatically in 2008 and improve again in 2009. Results were above the national average and the school's targets were met. The gap between how well boys and girls performed has narrowed significantly apart from in writing, where boys continue to do less well. For the first time in five years a few Year 2 pupils achieved the higher National Curriculum Level 3 in writing. Despite increases, more pupils were capable of achieving Level 5 in the end of Key Stage 2 tests in English. In contrast, they did well at this level in both mathematics and science. The attainment of pupils currently in the older classes in Key Stage 2 is average, and this represents good progress from their standards at the beginning of Year 3. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are fully involved in lessons and keep pace with the progress made by their peers. Teachers are careful to plan alternative tasks on the same topic and classroom assistants are skilled at giving pupils the confidence to talk about and try out their own ideas.

Pupils feel very safe in school because relationships are good and they feel confident to approach staff with worries and problems. They handle equipment responsibly and are alert to the need to minimise risks, for instance when using the internet. Behaviour is

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good because pupils enjoy lessons and know the importance of listening to, learning from, and considering others. The only blot on this picture is the excessive noise and litter in the canteen at lunchtime. Pupils understand the value of good diet and exercise although they do not fully appreciate that the lessons from annual 'Health Lifestyles' weeks apply to everyday life in and out of school. Working on the school council or as peace mediators (for which they get special training) are examples of how keen pupils are to help the school community. Their awareness of, and contribution to, the wider community is restricted. Most have a limited view of the events, beliefs and cultures which shape daily life in modern Britain and abroad. They are, however, self-aware and understand that, as one maturely put it, 'All people have rights.' Satisfactory attendance, good punctuality and a sound ability to use literacy and numeracy skills prepare them adequately for life beyond primary school. A good feature is their ability to make effective use of information and communication technology skills for study and research.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is improving, with half of the lessons observed during the

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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inspection being good. Of the remainder, too many were dull and predictable. Lessons are well planned and teachers have a better understanding of how to set tasks to suit the differing abilities in the class. Those set for the most able, however, too often fail to intrigue them or encourage them to go further. There is a good balance of whole-class and group activities, the latter making good use of pupils' willingness to work together and share ideas. Teachers manage classes well and effective routines mean that little time is lost. Some teachers give over-lengthy explanations which stifle enthusiasm, or rely on worksheets so that pupils work busily but without much spark or originality. Marking is consistent and helpful. Pupils know their targets and can explain what they need to concentrate on to make progress towards them. Classroom assistants make a significant contribution to pupils' learning and progress. This is the case both for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and for all pupils when working in the computer suite.

There have been changes to the curriculum as closer monitoring of school performance has highlighted issues. Science is now taught as a separate subject, rather than as part of a thematic approach, and results have improved significantly. Extra work on reading and phonics is bearing fruit. Visits, for instance to Bramall Hall and the Imperial War Museum, are putting history and the way people lived into a fresh context but the curriculum does not consider sufficiently topical issues and life in Britain today. After-school activities are limited: pupils have few opportunities to develop creative, artistic and musical talents. Provision for sport is satisfactory.

Staff work hard to ensure that caring for pupils' safety, welfare and happiness is a means to academic and personal progress. Transition arrangements into the Nursery, between classes and with secondary schools are effective. The result is a school where pupils are known, quickly settle in, and are fully involved in all that goes on. The number of smiles on faces and the polite confidence with which pupils approach adults are telling evidence of this. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and vulnerable pupils are identified early. Well-trained classroom assistants and close liaison with outside agencies ensure that these pupils are well supported.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The new academic year has seen school improvement given a fresh impetus. Buoyed by improvements in assessment and test results for the second year, staff have the resolve

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to secure further school improvement. Building on the secure foundations established over the past 12 months, the headteacher has set out a clear vision of where the school could be and exactly what needs to be done to get there. Senior leaders and curriculum managers feel empowered to get on with the job. Monitoring is well established, rigorous and accurate. A new tracking system is making teachers sharply aware of pupils' progress and the part they have in accelerating it. Expectations are higher and the last vestiges of complacency are being effectively challenged. The governing body has close oversight of the school but has had limited insight into its performance. In recent months governors have begun to get headline data to help them understand how the school is doing. They now take a keen and active part in holding it to account. Partly as a result of this focus, they have not done enough to make sure that community cohesion has kept pace with other matters. While much has been done to ensure good cohesion within the school community, links with local groups and people from other faiths and cultures have not been adequately planned for.

Links with parents and carers are satisfactory. Information meetings for parents and carers, and questionnaires to gauge their views have merit. Parents and carers report increased confidence that concerns are being responded to. However, they do not find school reports helpful enough. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are in place and meet requirements. The success of the school's work to equalise opportunity can be seen in improved results, support for pupils' needs, and the degree of harmony within the school community.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

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Children's skills on entry to the Nursery vary but are broadly in line with national expectations. They make good progress because of good teaching and the wide range of opportunities teachers give them to explore and investigate. Outdoor provision is much improved so that children get a better balance of activities. As a result of the strong focus on personal development, language, and social skills, most children are working at skill levels above those expected when they leave Reception. They learn to be interested and independent, proud of their own achievements and appreciative of what other children can offer. Teachers give them chances to shine. Children were mesmerised when a classmate sang a song from the musical 'Annie', and they clapped and hugged another for making a good model of a giraffe.

Excellent behaviour comes from the strong relationship that staff build with the children. This starts with home visits before children start school and these help them to settle quickly and well. Families are kept fully involved by contact books and weekly newsletters, which keep them up to date with what is going on and how they can support their children's learning at home.

Leadership and management are good, leading to a well-organised and stimulating environment. Staff have an accurate picture of the progress children are making because of regular and carefully recorded assessments. However, they have only recently begun to analyse this information to check what is working well and where changes might be needed.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are more than satisfied with what the school does for their children, commenting on how much their children enjoy school and how happy they are in it. They are highly appreciative of the steps taken to ensure that children feel safe and secure, and the general level of care provided. Parents and carers feel that the school could give them better information about the children's progress and inspectors agree with this. Reports are too descriptive and do not give a clear enough picture of the standards and progress of each child. A few parents and carers are concerned that their children are not making enough progress; inspectors judge pupils' progress now to be at least satisfactory. A very large majority of parents and carers say that the school is effectively led and managed. Their comments show an increased confidence that their suggestions and concerns will be quickly responded to.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Stephen's RC Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 88 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 395 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	96	56	64	37	6	4	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	116	67	50	29	4	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	68	40	80	47	20	12	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	66	39	72	42	24	14	6	4
The teaching is good at this school	72	42	72	42	21	12	4	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	78	45	62	36	30	17	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	74	43	76	44	18	10	2	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	64	39	78	47	12	7	4	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	64	38	76	45	20	12	6	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	70	41	76	44	18	11	4	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	56	33	82	48	22	13	6	4
The school is led and managed effectively	66	39	74	44	20	12	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	84	49	68	39	16	9	4	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Stephen's RC Primary School, Manchester, M43 7NA

As you know, three of us recently came to inspect your school. It was a pleasure to be with you. Thank you for your warm welcome, your polite interest in what we were doing, and your willingness to talk to us. You were a credit to your school and families.

When inspectors visited just over a year ago they judged that the school needed to improve. You will be delighted to know that we think it has. You are making better progress now because teaching has improved, although some lessons are still too dull. Teachers are marking your work regularly and giving you helpful tips on how to make it better. You are happy in school and respect the hard work put in by all the adults working with you. As a result, you behave well and want to learn. You are careful and sensible in how you move around school and play outside but some of you make too much noise in the canteen at lunchtime and don't always tidy up after yourselves.

You are excited by the chances you are getting for more trips and activities because these add to the fun of learning. However, the boys need to be helped to improve their writing skills. Also, some of you are given work which is too easy and doesn't encourage you to aim higher.

The people managing St Stephen's have made a big difference to things in recent months and they are keen to make sure that things continue to improve. We think that they have the plans and ideas for this to happen. You can help by continuing to work hard and concentrating on the advice teachers give you.

To make sure that the school continues to improve we have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to do the following:

- help boys to learn and use better writing skills
- make lessons more interesting, especially for those who find the work easy
- make the reports which go home more useful
- give you the chance to learn more about, and work with, people from beyond your school and the local community.

Best wishes for your future success and happiness.

Yours faithfully

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