

St Basil's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111390
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	337675
Inspection dates	28–29 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Jane Jones HMI

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	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	377
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr M Findlater
Headteacher	Mrs Win Douglas
Date of previous school inspection	13 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. They observed 13 lessons, a class conducting peer massage and a registration session – 14 teachers in all. Inspectors observed part of a dress rehearsal for the performance presented twice later in the day to parents and to members of the local community and governing body. Meetings were held with the headteacher, staff, three groups of pupils, the chair of governors, the School Improvement Partner and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at the school's assessment information, monitoring records and improvement plans, policies including those regarding safeguarding, minutes of meetings of the governing body, samples of pupils' work, and questionnaires from 87 parents and carers, a sample of 101 pupils, and 15 staff.

- how well all pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, learn in lessons and make progress over their time in the school
- pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning, life at school and to others
- the way the curriculum nurtures and stimulates pupils' academic and personal development
- the effectiveness with which leaders and managers at all levels (including governors) drive improvement.

Information about the school

The proportion of pupils at this large primary school who take up their eligibility for free school meals has risen considerably during the last three years to double the national average. There has also been a rise to above average in the proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, with a particular increase in children starting school with speech and language difficulties. A small but rising number of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. None is at an early stage of learning English. The school holds many awards including Artsmark Gold, Health for Kids, Sports Activemark, Silver Eco School, 'I Can' (a speech and language award) and 'Your Champions' (a local community award).

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

3

Main findings

St Basil's has many strengths which make a real difference to pupils' personal development and their understanding of the world in which they live. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pastoral care is good and pupils behave well, feel safe, know how to stay healthy and make a strong contribution to the local community. Parents and carers are very appreciative of the school, making comments such as, 'my daughter was very shy when she started St Basil's and is now very bubbly and confident', and, 'the staff always go the extra mile to give pupils a wide range of experiences'.

The youngest children get off to a good start. The good focus on themes to foster learning carries through into the curriculum for pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 where many subjects are taught through topics, supplemented by many exciting opportunities within the school and local community. The pupils enjoy this approach to learning but there is more for the school to do to ensure that they learn enough about each subject and that activities in topic lessons are well pitched to pupils' starting points, needs and abilities.

Teaching is satisfactory with some good practice. The best pays close attention to pupils' needs and ensure all are involved in a variety of activities, including discussions in pairs or groups as well as individual work. Weaknesses in the teaching include a lack of challenge for the most able and insufficient tailoring of materials or tasks for those with weaker skills or special educational needs. This links with teachers' use of assessment which has some shortcomings. Opportunities are missed to check all pupils' understanding. Chances are thus missed to ensure misconceptions and errors are dealt with quickly. Good examples of marking were seen in English but it was less helpful in other subjects.

Pupils attain broadly average standards by the end of Years 2 and 6 but the proportion reaching the higher levels is below average in mathematics and sometimes in science. Attainment in English at Key Stage 2 has been consistently above average and represents good progress, particularly for the 2009 cohort. Overall, however, learning and progress are satisfactory including for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils are attentive and many are keen to contribute to discussions. They gain new knowledge and skills satisfactorily but some find the work easy while others have difficulty with tasks, particularly within topics.

The headteacher and her team of committed staff, several of whom expressed their pride in working at the school, work hard to develop the whole child. Curricular developments have pupils' enjoyment and achievement at their heart. Where leadership

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and management have been less effective is in monitoring rigorously the quality of day-to-day learning across the curriculum, and as a result, some inconsistencies in learning have gone unnoticed. Reports to governors capture accurately many of the exciting things that happen but have reflected too favourable a self-evaluation of some important aspects – teaching, learning and progress. Governors have not challenged the school's view adequately. There is, nevertheless, satisfactory capacity to improve. Since the last inspection, very positive outcomes for pupils' personal development have been maintained and further strengthened in some areas. Pupils' progress in English rose to significantly above average in 2009, and their experience of solving problems in mathematics, identified as a weakness at the last inspection, is better developed now. Discussions with the headteacher and staff show they understand how to sharpen the school's current systems for planning, monitoring and evaluation so that improvement can be secured more rapidly.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment throughout the school, particularly in mathematics and science, ensuring more pupils reach Level 3 in Key Stage 1 and Level 5 in Key Stage 2.
- Raise the quality of teaching so that it is consistently at least good by:
 - Fine-tuning lesson planning so that activities better meet all pupils' needs and starting points
 - improving teachers' use of a range of assessment strategies in lessons so that all pupils are involved and suitably challenged, misconceptions and errors are identified and overcome, and teaching approaches are modified accordingly
 - building on the good practice in English to ensure marking in other subjects, and of topic work, helps pupils to know how to improve or take the next steps, checking that pupils follow up on teachers' advice and comments designed to prompt further thinking.
- In developing further the school's curricular aim of developing pupils' key skills, ensure that the themes, topics and projects studied give pupils breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding of different subjects, as well as helping them to make connections across the curriculum and with life beyond school.
- Improve the effectiveness with which leaders, managers and governors drive improvement by:
 - reviewing leadership roles and responsibilities, clarifying lines of accountability
 - sharpening the quality of improvement planning, ensuring success criteria are measurable and timelines are clear
 - establishing a regular pattern for monitoring and evaluation, using the outcomes to inform future actions, tackling weaknesses and sharing good practice
 - developing the governing body's role in providing robust and informed challenge to the school.

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- 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**

Pupils join the Reception class with knowledge and skills that are below those expected for their age, particularly in communication, language and literacy. A year later, they have caught up, although their ability to link sounds and letters still lags behind other areas. Pupils make satisfactory progress through Key Stage 1 so that attainment at age seven is average overall but too few do well for their age. By the end of Key Stage 2, attainment is average, although with some variation from year to year and between subjects. As in Key Stage 1, there are fewer high attainers than average, particularly in mathematics, despite their potential to do well.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. They listen well to each other and their teachers and are keen to contribute orally. The pace of learning is sometimes slowed by tasks that are insufficiently demanding or by teachers talking for too long, limiting time for group or individual work. Some of the errors pupils make in mathematics expose insecure understanding of key concepts such as place value. The science covered within topics brings interest and relevance but work in pupils' books raises questions about the depth and breadth of their learning in science and the extent to which it matches different pupils' needs.

Pupils are proud of their school and make the most of numerous opportunities to participate in what it offers. Many relish responsibility, acting as school or eco-councillors, prefects, play leaders or in various other roles. Pupils care about each other and about people who live in different countries and circumstances. They raise money for various charities. Pupils are polite, welcoming and sensitive to others. Behaviour is good including in lessons where teaching is less effective. No pupil has been excluded during the last seven years. Pupils say they feel safe and that there is no bullying or racism but they are confident that staff would act effectively should any incident occur. Pupils enjoy sports and the school's teams have achieved many successes. They have an excellent understanding of how to live healthily and projects such as the business enterprise project give them a good grasp of skills so necessary for their future lives. Attendance is satisfactory and is improving steadily.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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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	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Relationships are a strength in all classes – between adults and pupils and in the way pupils collaborate with each other. Routines are well established. Teachers plan lessons thoughtfully with some interesting resources. They explain new ideas clearly but do not always use time well, for example by talking for too long or choosing activities that are repetitive or unchallenging. Although they often ask good questions, they tend to accept responses from a minority rather than use strategies such as 'talk partners' or mini-whiteboards to engage all pupils and to check their understanding. Inspection evidence points to a need to enhance teachers' knowledge of the important concepts within science and mathematics that underpin the most effective progression in each subject.

The development of a more creative curriculum has increased pupils' enjoyment of learning. Pupils speak enthusiastically and knowledgeably about the topics they are studying, for instance about South America, where they have discussed ethical issues such as eco-systems and the Brazilian rainforest. Their understanding of South American culture is reflected in work on art, music and dance, brought enjoyably together in the performance of Samba drumming. Year 3 pupils were keen to tell inspectors that all their costumes were made from recycled materials. A wide range of visits, visitors and extra-curricular clubs, for instance in sports, music, and information and communication technology, enrich the curriculum.

Pupils respond well to the school's strong nurturing and caring environment. The learning mentor provides valuable support for the pupils whose circumstances have made them most vulnerable and those facing difficulties or trauma outside school.

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Arrangements to support the youngest children in gaining a smooth start to schooling and for the oldest as they prepare for secondary education are effective and appreciated by parents.

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 school has focused effectively on developing further the curricular and wider opportunities provided for pupils and their families with the ambition of increasing pupils' enjoyment and achievement. Pupils leave the school as confident and caring young people. Where leaders and managers have been less successful has been on checking that its day-to-day work promotes good learning and progress across the curriculum. This lack of rigour in evaluation has been exacerbated by insufficient challenge from the governing body. Despite statistical measures and some reports from the School Improvement Partner indicating that pupils' progress was mainly satisfactory rather than good, governors failed to ask senior staff 'how do you know?' – a key element in their role in ensuring the school addresses weaknesses and improves. As a result, improvements have not had the impact they could. For example, in mathematics, although pupils meet a wider range of problems to solve and there is a clear agreed policy to teaching calculation, this has not led to the intended rise in standards.

The school uses various monitoring systems such as lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work, tracking of pupils' progress, and reviews of curriculum areas. These are supplemented by staff meetings and training. However, they, too, often lack rigour and outcomes are not sufficiently insightful to promote rapid improvement. This contributes to generous self-evaluation in some areas. There is a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities; for instance, the curricular teams work closely together on developing themes and topics but no one has a clear view of how well progression is secured in each subject. An area where monitoring is working well is the use of the new system for tracking pupils' progress in English and mathematics. This has helped staff to identify those who are not making the progress they should and to tailor interventions appropriately. Targets are suitably ambitious and performance of different groups is analysed adequately. The school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination satisfactorily. Safeguarding procedures are effective with good partnership working and engagement with parents and carers on a day-to-day basis, through celebrations and supportive activities such as numeracy workshops and a

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course on the care and education of children.

The school is aware of the religious, ethnic and socio-economic context within which it works. Its curriculum, extra-curricular activities and wider work, such as links with schools in Zambia and Peru, contribute much to community cohesion. The school has not formalised this into plans to enable evaluation of impact.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
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

The learning environment in the Reception classes is bright and welcoming. Staff plan carefully to meet children's needs, aiding good learning and progress. They make the most of resources to provide a good balance of child-initiated and adult-led activities, making accurate observations and assessments for each child. The outdoor area is less well resourced, but plans to improve it are in hand. Leadership and management are good. Staff are reflective and have acted effectively to tackle weaknesses, for instance in introducing a phonics programme (linking letters and sounds) to improve children's literacy skills. Children play and learn together well, sharing resources and helping one another with spellings, for instance. Activities based on the story of the 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar' led to discussion about what to feed the caterpillar, with children showing good understanding of healthy eating, and more able children being able to write independently about the life cycle of a butterfly.

Safeguarding procedures are robust with suitable risk assessments in place. There are good relationships with parents and carers who play a positive part in helping their children to settle into Reception and in contributing to the very good 'learning journey'

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records. There is scope to increase efforts to liaise with the many settings from which pupils come to the school in order to improve the quality of information about children's needs.

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

The questionnaires of parents and carers were almost universally positive about all that the school does. Several parents and carers wrote comments praising and thanking the school, for example, 'I cannot thank all the staff enough for all their hard work and commitment. My child is safe and happy – as well as learning. What more could a parent ask for?' Others mentioned how well the school had helped their children settle into the school from nursery, or partway through Key Stage 2 having experienced earlier difficulties in education, and in moving confidently on into secondary school.

Inspectors agree with much of what parents and carers said and recognise the effectiveness with which the school develops the whole child but judge that the academic progress that pupils make could be better than satisfactory.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Basil's Catholic 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 87 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 377 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	63	72	23	26	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	69	79	17	20	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	51	59	34	39	2	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	57	66	30	34	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	60	69	27	31	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	55	63	29	33	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	57	66	29	33	0	0	0	0
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)	60	69	24	28	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	56	64	28	32	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	49	56	35	40	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	46	53	34	39	2	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	53	61	34	39	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	65	75	22	25	0	0	0	0

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



30 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Basil's Catholic Primary School, Widnes, WA8 4SZ

Thank you for your friendly welcome when the inspectors and I came to your school. We enjoyed visiting your lessons, seeing your work and talking to you about all of the things you do and learn about at St Basil's. We can see you are proud of your school – you were a credit to yourselves, the staff and your families!

These are some of the things that we found out about your school.

- You enjoy learning, especially when you are doing topic work. You know a lot about the Brazilian rainforest, for instance.
- You enjoy a great range of extra activities – the Samba performance was fabulous, and you develop some good business sense. You must have been excited to win the 'health for kids' award last year – and to collect it from the Prime Minister in 10 Downing Street.
- The staff care well for you, and you are caring about others, whether on the playground or in lessons, and you try to support those who are less fortunate through raising funds for charity. You show a good understanding of other people's lives and cultures.

We found that some things are not as good as they could be and so we have asked the governors and staff to do the following things:

- help you reach the highest levels you can, particularly in mathematics and science
- improve lessons, including by teachers checking how well you are learning, and challenging you to think just the right amount – not too easy or too hard
- carry on with those interesting topics but make sure that they cover all of the things that you need to learn at primary school
- help the senior staff and governors to be cleverer about spotting what could make the school even better and then doing it.

Perhaps you can think of ways that you can help with this?

Yours sincerely

Jane Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

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