

St Columba's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104480
Local Authority	Knowsley
Inspection number	355588
Inspection dates	27–28 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Frank Carruthers

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	244
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Mary Russell
Headteacher	Mr Ronan Dunne
Date of previous school inspection	29 November 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Fourteen lessons or parts of lessons were observed involving 10 teachers. Meetings were held with pupils, governors, staff and two parents. Inspectors also spoke to parents and carers individually during the inspection. They observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' books, school assessments, planning and school policies including those concerning the safeguarding of pupils. Sixty seven questionnaires were returned by parents and carers and read, and 106 pupils' questionnaires were completed, read and analysed. In addition, 17 staff returned a questionnaire.

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

- Whether there are any discrepancies in the progress that different groups of pupils and year groups make.
- Whether the improvement in attendance last year can be maintained.
- What the impact of senior leaders and the governing body is on school performance.
- How effective safeguarding procedures are.

Information about the school

St Columba's is an average size primary school in a residential suburb on the edge of Liverpool. Almost all pupils are White British. Just over half of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals, which is high compared to the national average. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of a Nursery class that operates five mornings per week and a class of Reception-age children. The school runs a breakfast club and has a sports and arts building, called SPACE, which is also hired by organisations in the community. The school is a member of a network of local schools called The North Huyton Learning Collaborative. At the time of the inspection, some classes were taught in temporary rooms while building work on two new classrooms was being completed.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The school provides a good education for pupils, who achieve well over time as a result of good teaching. The care, guidance and support provided by staff are outstanding, leading to good outcomes, such as pupils' attitudes to school and their behaviour. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.

Pupils' learning in lessons is good and by the end of Year 6, attainment in English, mathematics and science is broadly average. Overall, pupils have progressed well from low levels of attainment on entry to the Nursery class. However, there are gaps in their basic skills. Many younger pupils have poor speech and language and their listening skills are limited. Basic skills of number also develop slowly. These difficulties hamper the rate of progress of pupils as they move through Key Stages 1 and 2 and mean older pupils are sometimes less confident voicing their ideas and opinions and reading aloud in class. Some have poor recall of basic number facts and multiplication tables, which slow their attempts at solving problems in mathematics.

Teaching is good and staff make effective use of assessment data to help them match work to the pupils' different levels of attainment. All staff, including teaching assistants, have good relationships with the pupils and contribute well to their learning. Good provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage means the children settle in and make a fine start to school. The curriculum for pupils in Years 1 to 6 is good and has some outstanding enrichment activities, especially project work, visitors and visits out of school, for example, to schools with pupils of other faiths and ethnicity.

The senior leadership team, very ably led by the headteacher, drives forward school improvement at a good pace. Since the last inspection, their actions, together with the teamwork of all staff, have led to a consolidation of the school's performance as well as significant improvements. These have been most evident in pupils' much improved attendance and the actions taken to address the key recommendations from the last inspection report. These factors indicate the school has good capacity to improve. Some aspects of leadership and management are outstanding. These are the partnerships with parents and carers, schools and other agencies to promote pupils' well-being and learning, and the effectiveness of steps taken to promote community cohesion. The governing body meets its responsibilities satisfactorily and supports the senior leadership team well. The impact and challenge of its work, however, are less well developed and the governing body relies too heavily on reports from the headteacher and senior staff.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the achievement of pupils further by a greater focus on developing key skills:

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

- in speaking and listening
- -- in number, especially mental mathematics.
- The governing body should improve the impact that it has on the school's performance by developing:
 - clear systems for seeking the views of parents and carers and pupils, and acting on them
 - links with the work of the school to improve their understanding of the curriculum and of pupils' learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils' achievement, enjoyment and learning in lessons are good. The attainment of the great majority of children on entry to the Nursery class is much lower than expected, especially in communication, language and literacy. During their time in school, pupils make good progress. In lessons, they pay attention well and are keen to answer questions, though very often they respond in short sentences or single words. Progress in mathematics is sometimes hampered by pupils' weaknesses in basic mental and calculation skills. Pupils' writing improves at a good rate, thanks to a school-wide focus in recent years. Consequently, current Year 6 pupils write in an assured manner. This was evident in the empathy they showed when writing a narrative from the viewpoint of an evacuee in the Second World War. There are no significant differences in the rate of progress made by boys and girls. More-able and talented pupils achieve well and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. They work well with teaching assistants, both in class and in groups withdrawn for extra support.

Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe, which is the result of a thorough programme of teaching. Pupils' behaviour is good and at times outstanding in lessons and around school. A few pupils display challenging behaviour and they receive very good support to overcome difficulties from all staff, including the learning mentor when appropriate. As a result, bullying is rare and exclusions are extremely uncommon. Pupils know about the factors which influence their diet and health. They are well known by residents in the local community for their polite and helpful manner. Attendance is in line with the national average for primary schools and punctuality is satisfactory. The highly popular breakfast club makes a very important contribution to helping pupils attend regularly, arrive on time and be well prepared for lessons. Pupils' social and moral development is clearly seen in the very positive relationships they have with one another and adults. They have a very good understanding of different cultures and religions as a result of the school's commitment to promoting community cohesion and to helping pupils to understand more about the diversity of modern society.

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.

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

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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	1

How effective is the provision?

Almost all lessons observed were good, none were inadequate and several lessons had outstanding features. Key strengths of the teaching include the good management of pupils, the valuable contribution of additional adults in lessons and the very clear planning which takes clear account of the different levels of attainment in classes. On rare occasions, assessment of pupils' learning in lessons was not rigorous enough to confirm pupils' understanding or whether pupils were being challenged sufficiently. The tracking of pupils' progress is regular and robust and means that staff identify when a pupil is not on track to meet the challenging targets set. This leads to additional measures such as the setting up of effective focus groups taught by support staff and visiting specialists. The curriculum is well matched to the needs of pupils. In addition to the emphasis given to literacy and numeracy, an important priority is to provide pupils with a clear understanding of right and wrong, the responsibilities a citizen has in society and how to stay safe and lead a healthy lifestyle. Outside contributors, mainly through projects developed by a local network of schools, make a valuable contribution. A good range of after-school activities and successful visits and residential trips help to widen the experiences of pupils. Procedures to care, guide and support pupils, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the more vulnerable, are highly effective. The work of the learning and parent mentors has been essential in helping pupils and their families to overcome significant hardship and barriers to learning and to generate very positive relations with school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders and managers have made a significant impact on the school's performance by developing thorough systems to track pupils' achievement and attendance. These have helped staff identify where weaknesses in pupils' performance exist and to put in place actions and strategies to lift standards and raise attendance. They have used specialist advice and the support from the local authority has been particularly effective in this respect. Good financial management has also helped the school to fund staffing levels and projects that add much to the pupils' good outcomes in school. School development planning is good. In addition, senior leaders have created very valuable partnerships with parents and carers. Not only are parents and carers kept well informed about school life and the progress that their children make, but they are helped individually and through courses to have a role in the children's learning. Similarly, links with other schools and agencies, including the fire service, police and welfare agencies, have an excellent impact on helping pupils to develop positive attitudes to school and their local community. These activities also help the school tackle discrimination and racist attitudes and promote respect for others. By careful monitoring of the attainment and achievement of different groups of pupils, senior staff promote equal opportunity well. The school's promotion of community cohesion is outstanding, helping pupils to relate positively to others from different ethnic backgrounds. The SPACE building is a valued resource for the community. Comprehensive risk assessments and child protection measures make for robust safeguarding procedures. There is a good range of expertise among members of the governing body. Individuals, including the Chair of the Governing Body, bring valuable experience to their role, for example, as parents and carers or from a background in education or the legal profession. Their understanding of how the school and the curriculum it offers are performing, however, is more limited and they have few ways to check the views of parents, carers and pupils.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
	2

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	
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children are happy and eager to learn. They make satisfactory progress in the Nursery class and good progress in their personal, social and emotional development. The children make good progress in all areas of learning in the Reception class. By the start of the Reception Year, they have developed very good relationships with staff and have become well attuned to the ethos of school. They begin to show curiosity thanks to the good range of activities and opportunities for imaginative and investigative play. By the end of the Reception Year, children's attainment, however, is still below average, and the speech and language of some children are still very limited. The quality of teaching is good. There is a skilled team of adults in the two year groups. They are very aware of the welfare needs of the children and care for them well. Planning and assessment of how the children are progressing are good. Relationships with parents and carers are promoted especially well so that they can help with their children's learning at home. The role of the parent mentor has been especially successful in this respect. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader provides a very good role model in her skills of teaching and managing the children. She provides effective leadership for staff, who have a good knowledge and understanding of how children learn and develop. There is a very good range of resources indoors for the children to use. Plans to extend and reorganise the satisfactory outdoor area are in hand.

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

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

Views of parents and carers

In terms of the number of questionnaires returned, the response was fairly typical of most inspections of primary schools. Almost all the parents and carers who responded expressed highly positive views of the school. This was true of several parents and carers that the inspection team met. Parents and carers greatly value the work of the school in helping their children to achieve well and understand how to lead a safe and healthy life. They appreciate the work of the headteacher and all staff in helping their children to become well rounded young people. Inspection evidence upholds these opinions and confirm the highly successful partnerships the school has with parents and carers.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Columba'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 67 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 244 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	40	60	26	39	0	0	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	56	84	10	15	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	38	57	28	42	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	36	54	30	45	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	43	64	23	34	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	33	49	33	49	1	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	43	64	23	34	1	1	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)	31	46	33	49	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	41	61	25	37	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	42	63	23	34	2	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	37	55	28	42	1	1	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	40	60	26	39	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	51	76	15	22	1	1	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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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.



29 September 2010

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of St Columba's Catholic Primary School, Liverpool, L36 8BL

It was a great pleasure to inspect your school. You were all extremely friendly and helpful and we enjoyed finding out from you how you are getting on. On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to share with you what we found.

Your school is providing you with a good education. Some of the work of the school is outstanding, for example, the way in which the school works in the local community and how it helps your personal development through the excellent care, guidance and support it provides for you. Your behaviour in lessons is good and this means you learn well. You told us bullying is rare and if it happens, the staff deal with it promptly. You look out for one another well. You make good progress in lessons and, by the time you leave at the end of Year 6, most of you reach average standards in English, mathematics and science. This is because the teaching you receive is good and you work hard. You know your targets for learning well and enjoy the activities out of school and visits you make to places of interest. School leaders, such as your headteacher, do a good job. They are constantly finding ways to improve your progress and increase your enjoyment of learning.

Part of my job is to identify how the school can be even better. There are two improvements for staff and the governing body to make.

- The staff need to focus attention on helping you to speak and listen well in class and do better in mental maths. This is where you can help, for example, in learning your multiplication tables by heart. This will help you to achieve higher standards.
- The governing body should get to know more about what you learn in school and what you and your parents and carers think about school.

Please continue to work hard and enjoy school. I send you all my best wishes for the future, especially when the new classrooms are ready and you can all benefit from the extra space.

Yours sincerely,

Frank Carruthers

Lead Inspector

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