



St Bernard's Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111355
Local Authority Cheshire
Inspection number 288936
Inspection dates 21–22 February 2007
Reporting inspector Graham Martin

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Sherbourne Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Ellesmere Port
Age range of pupils	4–11		Merseyside CH65 5EW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0151 3552047
Number on roll (school)	203	Fax number	0151 3553821
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Bernadette Letissier
		Headteacher	Mrs A Kelly
Date of previous school inspection	10 February 2003		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 21–22 February 2007	Inspection number 288936
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized primary school and almost all pupils are from a White British background. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average but growing. Most pupils are admitted from Catholic families although nearly a quarter is non-Catholic. Nearly all have attended pre-school provision before being admitted to the Reception class. The school is in an area that suffers high levels of unemployment. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is above average, as is the proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school received the Activemark Gold Award in 2005 and an Excellent Standards in Sports Award in 2006. Formerly involved with an Education Action Zone partnership, the school has sustained its links with other schools through an Excellence in Partnership network and a Behaviour Improvement Partnership.

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 with some outstanding features in its work. The strength of its ethos and the principles that underpin its work enable the school to give pupils a quality of care, guidance and support that is exceptionally high. The good relationships that result lead to pupils' outstanding personal development. A strong sense of well-being enables pupils to quickly become confident learners, secure in the knowledge that their interests are valued. As a result, they make rapid progress and reach above average standards in the essential skills of reading and mathematics. However, there is a noticeable gap between the standards of reading and writing that the school is working hard to close. Also, the attainment of higher ability Year 6 pupils in science tests does not reflect their capabilities. Pupils' enjoyment of learning is outstanding because teaching is good and the activities provided by a good curriculum meet their interests. This enjoyment is seen in the attendance of pupils which, though similar to the national average, is good in the context of the school. Exceptional partnerships with support agencies and high quality intervention by teachers and teaching assistants ensure that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well and thrive on their success. One parent was delighted at how quickly her child had caught up with her reading when the family moved into the area and transferred schools.

The Foundation Stage provides a good start for children, many of whom begin school with learning skills below those expected for their age. Although few children attain the early goals for learning by the end of the Reception year, the enjoyable opportunities provided in the Reception class establish good learning habits that stand the children in good stead for the future. The rapid pace of learning, particularly in personal and social skills, enables the children to develop the good attitudes they need to be effective learners. This approach is sustained throughout the school, enabling all pupils to thrive on their successes in differing fields of learning. This is why behaviour throughout the school is outstanding: the principles on which good attitudes are founded are consistently applied from the very beginning and throughout the school.

Good leadership by the headteacher gives the school a strong sense of purpose and direction. She is well supported by a hard working leadership team, whose roles have a good impact on the work of the school. All staff have a clear understanding of how their defined roles and responsibilities benefit the whole school and all its pupils. This good teamwork, and the carefully thought out appointment of a number of recently qualified teachers, are seen as great successes by governors and parents, adding value to the good skills and experience of established staff. 'It is a pleasure to be a governor of this school.' said one governor, a reflection not only on the welcoming atmosphere of the school but also on the good teamwork within the governing body, who fulfil their duties well. This school provides good value for money and has good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Narrow the gap between the good standards in reading and the satisfactory standards in writing.

- Improve learning in science for those pupils capable of attaining the higher levels at the end of Year 6.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are above average and pupils achieve well. The majority of children enter the school with skills lower than those of most four year olds, especially in language and number. The degree of careful attention that is devoted to planning learning to meet the needs of the children means that they make good progress in all areas of learning. However, few go on to achieve the goals expected by age five. Good progress continues in Years 1 and 2 so that, by the age of seven, pupils reach standards close to the average found nationally. In Years 3 to 6 emphasis on the basic skills of reading, writing and number ensures good achievement for all pupils so that, by the end of Year 6, they reach above average standards in English and mathematics, as seen in national test results. However, standards in writing, while satisfactory, are not yet as good as those in reading. The school has identified what it needs to do to address this and has good strategies in place to bring about improvement. Standards in science are also satisfactory overall but not enough pupils who are capable then go on to reach the higher Level 5 in the national tests. The progress of pupils currently in Year 6, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, shows that they are on course to achieve the school's realistic but challenging targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of pupils are outstanding. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptional. The school's strong caring, moral ethos is reflected in the ways that pupils respect and understand the feelings of others. Their behaviour is outstanding. Attendance is around the national average, with good systems to check absences so that any problems can be tackled effectively. Overwhelmingly, parents value the school's work to promote their children's personal development. Pupils say that they like the use of the 'worry boxes' in their classrooms when they have a problem to unburden. They say that they thoroughly enjoy school and the learning opportunities it provides. Pupils take good responsibility for others too, through the school council, becoming much valued peer mentors or play leaders and selling toast at snack time. Although pupils in Year 6 say they do not want to leave, they feel that their school gives them good opportunities to prepare for high school and beyond. They feel safe and value the school's work to help them understand the need for rules, recognise risks and appreciate healthy eating, although some pupils still bring unhealthy snacks to school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good because teachers have high expectations and pupils respond well to the challenges set for them. Throughout the school, children develop well as independent learners: teachers demonstrate clearly how pupils should use their learning skills and they provide the resources needed to enable good achievement. Pupils use good guidance from their teacher's comments to help them improve their work. Teachers establish, and pupils follow, orderly routines so that they can move between activities without fuss. Good planning ensures that the work set fits pupils' learning needs well, although in science lessons there could be more challenge for higher ability pupils. Teachers and teaching assistants know their pupils well and work closely together to support them in all aspects of their learning. As a result pupils make good progress in lessons and thrive on their success. Homework is used well to promote good achievement. Pupils agree that the homework given is useful and helps them to progress in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has a good curriculum that meets the needs of pupils well. The range of learning activities provided for children in the Foundation Stage is very stimulating, providing lots of opportunities to develop personal and social skills, communication and language. The health, safety and social development of pupils are well supported through sport, exercise and the use of visitors and school trips to enrich the learning opportunities. The achievement of nationally recognised sports awards is testament to the school's high quality provision in this area. Pupils like the lunchtime and after school clubs and they are well attended. Good community partnerships increase opportunities for pupils, including sports competitions and art festivals. Visitors and theme days bring added enrichment to the good provision for literacy and numeracy. Information and communication technology is used well to enhance pupils' learning, an improvement since the last inspection. The introduction of French has been welcomed by pupils, some of whom sang the days of the week song in French with great enthusiasm.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of personal, social and emotional care given to pupils is outstanding, strongly reflecting the school's aims and values. The school's commitment to high quality care is demonstrated in how well each pupil is known to staff. Consequently, all are treated with respect as individuals, while at the same time learning their responsibility of care for each other. Support for effective learning is very evident in the good use of assessment and target setting, which underpins pupils' good

achievement. The guidance and support given to vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding, adding great value to their learning. Pupils feel safe, secure and confident and they have a deep respect and trust for their teachers. A parent was thrilled at how well she and her children had been welcomed as newcomers to the school and this sentiment, repeated often by parents, is reflected in every aspect of the school's work. Procedures for child protection, for safeguarding pupils and for assessing risks are in place and national guidelines for the safe recruitment of staff and volunteers are followed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership is good and the school is well managed. The headteacher shares her aspirations well with the whole school community. As a result, the school works well towards achieving its mission to celebrate the full potential of each individual. Outstanding partnerships with other schools and outside agencies help it to achieve this mission. Parents value the school's clear commitment to their children's needs that helps them to enjoy learning and achieve well. The school seeks parents' and pupils' views and values their ideas about what aspects of its work could be improved. It acts well on their suggestions and pupils were pleased that their ideas for providing more playtime equipment were taken seriously. The school has been modest in some aspects of its self-evaluation, judging some aspects of its work as good, when some areas are outstanding. However, along with the leadership team, the headteacher has a clear knowledge of the school's needs, has identified the correct priorities for improvement and sets in place good action to achieve them, giving the school good capacity to improve. She develops the skills of staff well, ensuring that all know the part they must play in improving the school and in checking its effectiveness. Governors contribute well to this process. Their clear understanding of the school's work and their support for the headteacher's high aspirations enables them to give the school good guidance and challenge.

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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

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 disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the 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

¹ Grade 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.

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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

You all welcomed us very well when Mrs Cathie and I recently spent two days inspecting the work of St Bernard's Catholic Primary School. We enjoyed our visit very much. We saw how well behaved you are and how much you enjoy learning. Thank you for all the discussions we had that helped us to find out how well your school works. You told us that you think you have a good school. I am sure that you will be pleased to know that we agree with you!

- We especially liked the way that your school cares for you and helps you to do your best.
- You show good understanding of the way people should act respectfully towards each other.
- Your excellent behaviour and the way that you take part with interest in the school's activities help you to be good learners. This enables you to make good progress, well done!

There are just two things that we would like your school do better:

- you told us how much you enjoy doing well in reading and mathematics. We have asked your teachers to make sure that you do just as well in your writing
- we also think that, with the right help in every class, more of you could reach the higher levels in science when you do your national tests at the end of Year 6.

We would like to send you our best wishes for the future. Please carry on trying your best and enjoying learning.