

St Gabriel's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111339
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	378281
Inspection dates	26–27 March 2012
Lead inspector	Judith Straw

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	206
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kevin Fox
Headteacher	Ros Caulfield
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2007
School address	Well Lane Alsager Stoke-on-Trent ST7 2PG
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Introduction

Inspection team

Judith Straw
Maureen Coleman

Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 16 lessons led by seven of the school's teachers. Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff and pupils. Informal discussions were held with parents and carers bringing their children to school. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at development plans, records of pupils' progress and arrangements for safeguarding as well as other documentation. They scrutinised 105 questionnaires returned by parents and carers as well as those returned by pupils and staff.

Information about the school

The school is slightly smaller than average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below average. The school meets the current government floor standard.

The school holds a number of awards in recognition of the quality of its work. These include the Activemark, Healthy School status, Artsmark Gold award and the Inclusion Quality mark.

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	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key Findings

- St Gabriel's is an outstanding school. It has demonstrably gone from strength to strength since its last inspection, when it was judged to be good. The vast majority of parents and carers are very positive about the school and hold it in high regard.
- Pupils' attainment has been well above average both in mathematics and English for at least three years at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Pupils' work in other subjects such as science, music, geography, art and information and communication technology is also above average. The achievement of all pupils, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is excellent.
- Teaching is outstanding across the school and never less than good. The excellent curriculum puts a strong focus on the core skills but not at the expense of creativity, enrichment and enjoyment. The school prides itself on its work in sport, the creative arts and in fostering a love of learning.
- Pupils' behaviour is excellent both in lessons and around the school. Pupils are courteous, polite and caring of each other and visitors. The example set by adults in school and a stimulating curriculum result in pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Parents and carers are unanimous that their children are safe in this supportive and nurturing environment.
- The headteacher's and the deputy headteacher's excellent leadership of teaching and their drive and determination together with their vision to provide the best possible education for all pupils have been key factors in the school's quest for improvement. The management of performance is excellent. All the staff and members of the governing body share this vision and ambition so that the emphasis on improving pupil outcomes is at the forefront of all planning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

Currently there are no areas of weakness needing improvement in the work of this school.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Children enter the Reception class with skills and abilities broadly in line with what is expected for their age, but sometimes lower. They settle very quickly and flourish in the bright and lively environment where learning is made enjoyable both indoors and out. Achievement is excellent so that nearly all the children reach above national levels by the time they enter Year 1. Children are curious and interested in the world around them. For example, during the inspection, in a week devoted to the topic of snails, children were managing their own snail zoo, doing superb line drawings of snails, learning about habitat and biology, making snail mazes and spiral sculptures, creating obstacle courses, and the most excited group of all were carefully observing the snails' behaviour and studying their antennae.

By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' work is above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils particularly enjoy reading and the quality of their written work is excellent. In reading, every child reaches the minimum expected level for their age and nearly half of all children reach the higher Level 3. Pupils enjoy their learning in many different subjects, for example Year 1 pupils were composing their own songs, singing beautifully in tune and accompanying their teacher's guitar with gently played percussion instruments. Pupils work hard in lessons, behaviour is consistently excellent and because they know what to do to improve their work they continually strive to avoid careless mistakes and produce their best. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs receive additional support so that they are able to achieve as well as the other pupils, relative to their starting points. Whilst many parents and carers praised the school's provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, a very small minority expressed some concern about their progress. Inspectors investigated this fully looking at pupils' books, observing pupils at work and scrutinising records of support and the impact of that support. The evidence shows that all pupils with special educational needs and those who are disabled make equally strong progress as others and are very well supported.

Pupils concentrate very well in lessons across a range of subjects. Year 3 were developing important skills for history and geography by collating a vast amount of evidence that they had gathered about their local town. In a literacy lesson, Year 6 pupils were rapidly identifying the subtleties of language and the techniques used by writers to engage the reader quickly. Attainment in reading is well above average by the end of Key stage 2 with well over half of all pupils reaching the higher Level 5. Pupils read confidently and fluently and speak of their enjoyment of a wide range of books. As a result of their very positive attitudes to learning, progress is excellent across the school and attainment is significantly above average in English, mathematics and science. The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire are very pleased with the progress their children make.

Quality of teaching

Consistent strengths in mainly excellent teaching include very high expectations for learning and behaviour, excellent relationships and very thorough planning which is based on exactly what individual pupils need to do to make progress. Lessons are planned to take into account different learning styles. Almost all lessons proceed at a pace, which ensures pupils make rapid progress. The school puts great emphasis on high quality English so that all pupils have several different working books for poems, writing skills, handwriting, drafting and 'I am Writer' books and their best work goes into their Anthology books. The teaching of reading has been a consistent strength of the school since its last inspection. In mathematics the emphasis is on problem solving and investigation. There is a strong focus on teamwork and independent learning to which pupils respond with genuine enthusiasm.

Teachers use the rich and rewarding curriculum imaginatively to enhance learning in numerous ways, such as a recent project in which pupils worked with a local opera theatre to write, produce and perform their own piece of drama on the theme of the environment. They designed their own sets and costumes in a truly cross curricular project. Year 6 pupils have also recently taken part in an enterprise week in which they formed small businesses, designed, made and sold products and donated their profits to different charities. Displays of pupils' work are impressive giving a glimpse of the variety of topics covered from the reign of Henry VIII to learning about Olympic champions, Roman artefacts, work in the style of William Morris and some amazing model cats who actually walk.

Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are supported in class and in smaller groups by experienced and well qualified teaching assistants who help to develop pupils' confidence and promote their learning. The nurturing of pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable is a particular strength of the school.

Marking is excellent because it is closely linked to individual pupils' target tracking sheets so that pupils know exactly what they have achieved and what the next steps are. Teachers promote pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by helping them to be curious, independent learners and exposing them to music, the performing arts, sports and the culture and faiths of others. The vast majority of parents and carers were agreed that their children are very well taught and that the school meets their child's particular needs.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent and evidence indicates that this has been the case for some time. Pupils are friendly, welcoming and thoughtful. They are intensely proud of their school and members of the school council could identify nothing needing improvement. Pupils are adamant that there is no bullying of any kind because it would not be tolerated. There are no examples of cyber bullying or any other kind of bullying so that pupils are unanimous that they are safe and their parents and carers agree. Attendance has been consistently high over the last three years. Through the positive ethos of the school and the curriculum, as well as their own excellent attitudes to learning, pupils are very well prepared for the future not only academically but also as good citizens.

Leadership and management

Senior leaders hold high expectations, which have been successfully communicated to all who work in the school. The setting of challenging academic targets fittingly reflects their ambition. This is a school which never stands still, and all leaders are relentless in their quest for excellence. The school's capacity to further improve is excellent. School self-evaluation is rigorous and honest and is robustly supported by its sophisticated data collection and analysis. These arrangements have been responsible for ensuring that the school sustains its track record of high attainment and achievement.

The leadership of teaching and learning has resulted in excellent staff development so that weaknesses have been eliminated and teaching is typically outstanding. Senior leaders have a long track record of supporting, nurturing and developing staff potential to ensure that teachers have a wide range of opportunities to enhance their practice and develop leadership and management skills. This culture of support means that staff are confident that they can raise any issues and these will be dealt with sympathetically and effectively. The recently introduced system of individual target tracking cards for pupils has raised attainment further, particularly in mathematics, and this successful strategy is now being shared with other local schools.

The creative curriculum caters for the whole spectrum of individual needs and reflects the fervent commitment of the school to equal opportunities. Visitors, artists in residence, off site educational visits to theatres, galleries as well as residential trips for older pupils all provide pupils with outstanding opportunities to enjoy their learning. Leaders now have good plans to develop the environment for learning outdoors so that all classes will spend some time each week learning outside and the school will have a resource which can be shared with others, further developing an already outstanding curriculum. The impact of the curriculum on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is evident in their respectful behaviour, their awareness of the lives of others, and their wholehearted participation in fundraising activities to help people at home and abroad.

The school enjoys excellent relationships with parents and carers who are regularly kept informed about their children's achievements. Speaking for many, one parent wrote, 'I am proud to say my children go to St Gabriel's'. Another wrote that the school is, 'outstanding in all fields of education'. Members of the governing body are exceptionally knowledgeable about the school's work. They support and challenge the school in equal measure and rigorously ensure that safeguarding arrangements are secure. They ensure that any form of discrimination is not tolerated.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



28 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Gabriel's Catholic Primary School, Alsager, ST7 2PG

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited you in school recently. We would especially like to thank the pupils who talked to us and those who read to us. You were excellent ambassadors for your school. I very much enjoyed your singing in assembly and was interested in observing the school council meeting.

We have judged that your school is outstanding. Here are some of the things which helped us to make that decision:

- you are achieving better than pupils in many other schools
- you make excellent progress because you have excellent teaching
- your behaviour is excellent and you treat each other and visitors with courtesy and respect
- you say you feel safe in school and your parents and carers agree
- you have excellent attitudes to learning and enjoy problem solving, teamwork and investigating
- your school leaders do an excellent job and that is why the school is improving all the time and providing you with such an excellent education.

Part of our job is to look for ways in which schools can improve further. We did not find any areas which need improvement in your school. We wish you all happiness and success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Judith Straw
Lead inspector

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