

INSPECTION REPORT

ST CLARE'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Handsworth, Birmingham

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103476

Headteacher: Mrs C A Fowler

Reporting inspector: Mrs Judith Hicks
2063

Dates of inspection: 11th – 12th November 2002

Inspection number: 246302

Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Infant and junior, with nursery class

School category: Voluntary Aided

Age range of pupils: 3 – 11 years

Gender of pupils: Girls and boys

School address: Robert Road
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Birmingham
West Midlands

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Rt. Rev. Monsignor J T Fallon

Date of previous inspection: January 1998

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Clare's is a large Catholic primary school in Handsworth, a disadvantaged area of inner-city Birmingham. There are currently 370 pupils on roll, including 36 part-timers in the nursery. Around 40 per cent are entitled to receive free school meals, which is above average. Pupils are drawn from a wide range of ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. The predominant ethnic groups are black British of Caribbean origin and Asian British of Indian origin, but pupils also have families originating in Pakistan, Africa, Vietnam, Ireland and the UK. Some are of dual heritage. More than 100 of the pupils speak English as an additional language, a very high proportion. Attainment on entry is well below average overall, but numbers with special educational needs are slightly below the national average and no child has a statement of special educational needs at present. Pupil mobility is above average at around 15 per cent. There has been a significant turnover of teachers in the recent past and, as in other schools, St Clare's has experienced some difficulty in recruiting suitable teaching and non-teaching staff.

St Clare's won a DfEE Award for Excellence in summer 2000 and has 'Beacon' status in recognition of the progress made by pupils in difficult social and economic circumstances.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an effective school with a very strong Catholic ethos. The pupils' behaviour is good and attitudes to work are very good; with sound teaching, steady progress is made. In some year groups, especially in the nursery and in some junior classes, teaching is good and achievement rises. Standards are well below the national average at age seven and below average at eleven. However, boys perform well throughout the school and the older pupils do well in comparison with similar schools. The headteacher is providing good leadership and management is generally competent. The school offers satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- There is very good provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school is highly successful in promoting good behaviour, attitudes and relationships.
- Teaching is consistently good in some classes.

What could be improved

- Standards, especially in reading comprehension and writing. (*Writing is a national area for development that has already been identified by the school as a priority.*)
- Some aspects of teaching.
- Planning for school development.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in January 1998. Since then a new headteacher and deputy head have been appointed and there has been a substantial turnover of well over half the teaching staff and a number of support staff. A great deal of time and energy has recently been absorbed in appointing and inducting new teachers as well as in tackling problems with the site and buildings. As a result the school has not moved forward as much as would be expected in more normal circumstances. With other priorities, the single issue from the last inspection, which was concerned with pupils' research skills and independent learning, has been only partly addressed. National test results have not improved in line with the trend in other schools. However, the very good climate for learning and high standard of behaviour reported at the time of the last inspection have been well sustained.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 6 based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
English	C	D	E	B
Mathematics	B	D	D	A
Science	B	A	D	B

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Many children start school with attainment that is well below average for the age group. The most recent national tests, taken in summer 2002, showed that standards at the age of eleven were below average in mathematics and science, and well below average in English. However, pupils did well compared with similar schools and very well in mathematics. As in previous years, boys achieved much better overall results than girls at eleven, even out-performing them slightly in English. This is very different from the national picture. The position was not as positive at the age of seven, with test results in 2002 well below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. This broadly matched the standard achieved in similar schools in writing and mathematics, but reading results were weaker than would be expected. The standards of work seen in both Year 6 and Year 2 during the inspection were broadly consistent with last summer's test results. Test scores for both seven and eleven year olds have tended to decline in recent years, against the national trend.

From a low starting point, the children make steady overall progress in the nursery and reception classes, with good achievement in their personal and social development and in some important skills such as pencil control. Current progress in the infant classes is satisfactory, but the teaching is not good enough to lift standards by the end of Year 2. Few of the more capable pupils are stretched enough to reach a higher level in national tests, and lower attainers lack the extra support they need to give them a boost. Teaching is stronger in the juniors, with good progress made in some classes and year groups. The pupils undertake interesting investigative work in science, for example in Year 5. Presentation is generally good, with handwriting often of a high standard. Mathematics is almost invariably well set out and there are some very well executed diagrams in science books. By eleven most pupils read fluently and accurately, but average and below average pupils do not readily grasp the meaning of the text. The ability to use reference books, including dictionaries, is a general weakness. The pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning contribute significantly to the progress they make.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. The pupils are interested in their work and try hard to succeed. When given the opportunity, older pupils participate enthusiastically in 'club night', sport and out-of-school activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good overall. With very few exceptions, the pupils are considerate and well mannered. They behave particularly well in assembly.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. The pupils develop personal confidence and good relationships with their teachers and with one another. They show understanding and respect for different faiths and cultural traditions.
Attendance	Well below the national average, despite the best efforts of the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils in:	Nursery and Reception	Years 1 – 2	Years 3 – 6
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory throughout the school, with strengths in the nursery and in some junior year groups. During the inspection there were unsatisfactory features in some lessons with the infants as a result of insecure class management, but this is by no means typical of the school as a whole. In general teachers manage their classes very effectively and establish good relationships with the pupils. As a result nearly all try hard and want to succeed. At best, teaching is clearly focused and has a good pace to sustain the pupils' interest. Social skills and spoken language are very effectively developed in the nursery and reception classes. Basic literacy and mathematics are taught securely throughout the school, with generally good mathematics teaching in the juniors. Teachers have high expectations that the pupils will make an effort and present their work to a good standard. The teaching of information and communication technology (ICT) in the computer suite is secure, but the skills learned are not developed systematically as yet in each classroom.

As well as strengths, there are areas for development in the teaching. With a few notable exceptions, teachers tend to plan the same task for all the pupils in each class or set, so that the ablest are not always sufficiently challenged and the lower attainers sometimes find the work too hard for them. On occasions, teachers spend disproportionate time with the less capable pupils and those with special educational needs. This is largely because there is very little classroom-based support after the reception year. Marking does not always make it clear how the pupils could improve their work. Very positive attitudes contribute to effective learning. However, the pupils do not work independently enough and do not have many opportunities to research for themselves.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Sound. The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced, with priority given to religious education. Not enough use is yet made of computer technology to support learning across the curriculum, especially in the infant classes. Very good provision is made for sporting activities in the juniors.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision is generally satisfactory, but class teachers do not take sufficient account of pupils' individual targets when planning their lessons. Additional support for these pupils is limited, and the position has been exacerbated by staff absence.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Pupils' language needs are assessed at an early stage, but not enough use is made of this information in teachers' planning. Insufficient classroom-based support is available for those whose grasp of English is not entirely secure, especially older pupils.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	This is a major strength. St Clare's has a distinctive Catholic character, yet encourages pupils and their families to celebrate the diversity of faiths, cultures and traditions represented in the school. There are regular opportunities for quiet reflection and the school contributes strongly to the development of personal values.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. The staff know the pupils well, supervise them conscientiously and show concern for their welfare. Highly effective, positive systems are in place to promote good behaviour.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Sound overall. The headteacher provides good leadership, based on clear principles and values. The deputy head supports her, and has a key role in promoting good relationships with pupils and their families. Management is generally competent, but some promoted staff are not fully effective in their management roles.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Satisfactory. Governors have a vision for the school, support the headteacher well and fulfil most of their obligations conscientiously. Responsibilities have just been reorganised.
The school's evaluation of its performance	This is an area that requires development. A start has been made on analysing test results and setting targets, but not yet at a sufficiently sophisticated level. The format of the current development plan does not make it easy to measure progress towards the school's objectives.
The strategic use of resources	Generally sound. Some promising developments are in hand, such as a new computer suite. Senior staff and governors do their best to ensure that spending complies with the principles of best value. However, partly because of delays to a major project to repair the playground, too great a budgetary surplus has been allowed to develop. The school has also found it difficult to fill classroom assistant posts as planned and there remains an urgent need for more support in classrooms throughout the school.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most children enjoy their time in school. • The teaching is good. • Children are expected to work hard and do their best. • The staff are approachable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parents think there is not enough homework. • Some would like to see more extra-curricular activities. • Not all parents feel that the school works closely enough with them.

Inspectors largely agree with the positive views of parents. Homework requirements are reasonable, and there is good provision for out-of-school activities at the junior stage. The school has a sound partnership with parents, and efforts are currently being made to improve communications and to increase parental involvement.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

There is very good provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

1 Provision for the pupils' development as human beings is a significant strength of the school, as at the time of the last inspection. Senior staff and governors have a great commitment to sustaining the Catholic spirit and ethos of St Clare's, whilst celebrating the diverse faiths and cultural traditions of the pupils and their families. They succeed very well in achieving this fine balance.

2 Assemblies and acts of collective worship underpin the spiritual and moral development of the pupils. During the inspection pupils in Year 4 led one of the regular class assemblies on a theme of 'communication' – with one another, in society and with God. The peaceful and reflective start to the worship set the tone, with the pupils calm and attentive. They sang an unaccompanied prayer together beautifully before the Year 4 pupils took over with their presentation. This was performed with great confidence, both in dramatic speaking and in singing. Very good use was made of the pupils' individual talents and cultures, as in the performance of a popular song by a group of black Caribbean girls to a very high standard. The assembly ended with an African hymn, partly sung in the original tongue. Overall music-making in an unusually wide range of styles made an important contribution to worship. Later in the day, 11th November, the pupils held a brief silence in remembrance of the war dead. With a visual focus of harvest wheat and poppies this was a quietly moving occasion to which the pupils responded respectfully.

3 The spiritual and moral understanding promoted so effectively in assemblies is strongly reinforced in many classrooms. Prayer forms a regular part of the daily routine in many classes and ends the school day. Each room has a visual focus of religious significance, such as a candle or a cross, and school masses are celebrated on a regular basis.

4 The pupils' families are invited to attend class assemblies and other special celebrations, and the welcome extended to them emphasises the inclusion of all faiths and traditions at St Clare's. Teachers extend this in their own classrooms, for example acknowledging pupils who are fasting for Ramadan in an accepting manner as a matter of course. Understanding of religious beliefs beyond the Catholic tradition is developed through the National Curriculum as well as through the programme of religious education, as when pupils consider the religious beliefs of the ancient Egyptians in the course of their history lessons. In discussion, older pupils show a good understanding of what the school stands for in terms of mutual respect and understanding and, in almost all classes, strong and positive relationships are promoted between the pupils and with staff.

5 The school offers a very wide range of sporting and athletic activities, including football, cricket, netball, badminton and mini-rugby, with recent opportunities for learning about Gaelic football from an experienced coach. There are also established contacts with a well-known local professional basketball team. These activities all contribute to the pupils' experience of working together in teams and provide them with opportunities to meet others from contrasting areas of the city. St Clare's has had considerable success in local leagues and competitions, not only in sports, but also in the chess league, and this reinforces the pupils' confidence and sense of self-worth. In a different way, weekly 'club nights' also contribute to social and personal development. These provide an opportunity for pupils to share in an enjoyable range of activities such as board games, table tennis and computer

activities, in a relaxed and cheerful 'family' atmosphere. Club nights are very well supported by teachers, classroom support and administrative staff, showing considerable commitment on the part of those involved.

6 School visits broaden the pupils' horizons and contribute to their social development. Each year, pupils in Year 6 have a week-long residential visit to Minehead in Somerset, providing what is for some their first major experience of life beyond an inner-city environment. Cultural development is also effectively promoted by a range of visits, many of which make very effective use of the facilities of the city of Birmingham and its immediate environs. There are regular visits to historic houses such as the sixteenth century Aston Hall and the Georgian Soho House to support learning in history. A successful project on African drumming involved six workshop sessions in school, culminating in participation with other pupils from across the city in a cultural festival at Newman College. The pupils' appreciation of art is enhanced by visits to galleries, by some vivid displays in school and by the study of well-known artists such as Mondrian, Kandinsky and Van Gogh. By the upper junior years many pupils are able to express themselves and communicate ideas effectively through art, as seen, for example, in bold and colourful animal paintings in Year 5. Music, especially singing, and dramatic performances are also contributing to the pupils' overall cultural development.

The school is highly successful in promoting good behaviour, attitudes and relationships.

7 This area is a very high priority for the headteacher, and has been a major focus for development in the past two years. This shows good judgement. Indeed, without this thrust, pupils' attitudes, behaviour and relationships might well have been adversely affected by the staff turnover of the past year or so. Instead, good standards of conduct have been sustained through a difficult period. Attitudes and relationships are at least as good as at the time of the last inspection, and the behaviour of the older pupils is believed by senior staff to be better.

8 St Clare's has a thoroughly constructive approach to promoting good attitudes and behaviour. Assemblies are used very effectively to share successes and to reinforce positive messages on a regular basis. In weekly celebration assemblies, for example, pupils are chosen from each class to receive awards for such attributes as sharing, good manners, observing school rules and good behaviour in the playground, whilst an individual is celebrated as 'pupil of the week'. 'Good work' is chosen for public display, with a focus on success in spelling during the inspection. Very clear messages are conveyed by both class teachers and senior staff so that the pupils know that their efforts and self-discipline are appreciated and valued. The pupils respond to this public acknowledgement with obvious pleasure.

9 The system of rewards and sanctions has been carefully thought through to encourage group loyalty and to be relevant to the pupils. Formal systems of allocating points are in place, as in many schools, and the whole class receives a small treat such as extra play when a given level has been achieved. In exceptional cases a group may earn a major reward such as an expedition to the cinema or to play bowls. This is an unusual strategy, but seems to work and provides a huge incentive. Pupils in the junior age group are allowed to attend the weekly 'club night' as a reward for hard work and good behaviour. There is some flexibility in this system, however, to ensure that all have some opportunities to attend in the course of the year. Systems are adapted and simplified for the infant classes. Although this works reasonably well, St Clare's real success is with its older pupils, including boys and girls who might in other circumstances become disaffected.

10 Relationships at breaks and in the playground are almost invariably friendly and harmonious, and the occasional squabble is readily resolved. Supervision is effective, despite a site that is steep and awkward to manage. The deputy head is almost invariably around the school buildings and grounds during the lunch-break, talking informally to the pupils and forestalling any problems that might arise, whilst the headteacher also plays a key part when other duties permit. Some teaching staff are specifically employed to take on extra responsibilities at lunch-time. Supervisory assistants have been fully briefed in the school's system of behaviour management and award 'playground points' for helpful behaviour. The availability of a good range of small play equipment and opportunities to play organised team games at lunchtime ensure that the pupils do not lack enjoyable ways of filling their time. The headteacher is keen to appoint a qualified play leader to provide further stimulating structured activities.

11 Systems for managing inappropriate or challenging behaviour have been the subject of recent whole-school training. These are based on a local education authority initiative, 'Framework for Intervention', which provides staff with a framework of graduated responses if a pupil behaves unacceptably. This has helped to strengthen professional skills throughout the school. Most teachers are highly skilled in managing their classes and establish strong relationships with their pupils, especially in the nursery, reception and junior classes; in one or two infant classes these benefits are not so evident, however. Where pupils are identified as having significant emotional or behavioural problems, individual behaviour plans are in place, with specific targets subject to regular review. There is a productive working relationship between the school and specialist staff from the relevant local support agency. Exclusions are regarded as a last resort and are kept to a low level. Overall, St Clare's provides a haven of civilised behaviour and relationships for its pupils.

Teaching is consistently good in some classes.

12 Teaching is satisfactory overall at each stage, with some consistent strengths but also areas for development, as set out in paragraphs 28 – 35. During the inspection the strongest teaching was seen in the nursery and in some junior classes, but there were also good features in both reception classes. In classes where teaching is usually good, achievement is lifted and standards start to rise.

13 There is a successful focus on social training and language development to support learning in both the nursery and reception classes. Most nursery children talk little in the course of imaginative play and other activities, but they receive constant encouragement from the adults working with them. As a result they make good efforts to converse in group situations, for example at snack time. In one session, the nursery nurse emphasised the importance of saying "please" and "thank you" whilst the children were putting on aprons to protect their clothing. The teacher helped others to distinguish between 'soft' and 'hard' objects and used gentle questioning at the right level to reinforce these terms and other basic vocabulary. In a reception literacy session, the teacher had high expectations that each child would contribute to a group discussion based on the 'big book' *I Love Animals*. The children responded positively, all making an effort to follow and participate. In another lesson, the concentration of a group of younger reception children was sustained by the sheer enthusiasm of the teacher, even though this was the end of the afternoon. The session was designed to follow up previous work on baby animals, but the plans also covered personal and social objectives such as listening to others and taking turns in answering. Skills important for future learning were being developed successfully.

14 Nearly all teachers establish good relationships with their pupils and manage the class well. Throughout the school, most successfully insist on a quiet start to each lesson and remind the pupils pleasantly but firmly not to call out. Staff are mainly patient and

encouraging as they try to involve all their pupils in the activities concerned. With inadequate levels of classroom support, this sometimes involves them in giving disproportionate time to the lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs. Especially in the junior classes, many teachers succeed in establishing a secure and relaxed working climate in their classroom. One teacher has rightly identified that the pupils need more opportunities to use their initiative and work independently, and is currently focusing on the use of reference works such as dictionaries to enable the pupils to help themselves to a greater extent.

15 There are generally high expectations about the appearance and presentation of the pupils' work. In the reception classes there is close attention to the way in which children hold and control their pencils and crayons, which pays off later. The children learn to copy carefully and accurately, although this is sometimes at the expense of developing independence in their writing. By Year 2 teachers are effectively promoting joins to develop cursive writing. Throughout the school most staff give priority to teaching and practising handwriting, and, even though not all pupils manage to transfer their best writing to everyday exercise books, standards are generally good. There are just one or two classes where untidy writing and crossing out are accepted. The pupils are taught to set out their work in both mathematics and science systematically and neatly. Some diagrams in the science books of the older pupils are of a very high standard.

16 Mathematics teaching is mainly good in the juniors, and exercise books show that the pupils work productively, at a steady rate. In a very successful lesson in Year 4, the teacher explained the purpose of the lesson clearly and started with brisk questioning, at first general, then targeted at individual pupils to bring in the whole ability range. The teacher's use of the whiteboard to reinforce the main teaching points was quick and neat, helping to focus the pupils' attention. Vocabulary such as 'product', 'multiple' and 'factor' was effectively reinforced and concepts such as 'the inverse of' were clearly presented. Pupils' explanations were listened to carefully, and the teacher was alert to potential misunderstandings. Questioning was tactful and encouraging. When one child offered a jumbled account, for example, the teacher said, "I'm still a bit confused – can you try explaining that again?" Similarly, in both Year 5 and Year 6, mathematics lessons were thoroughly prepared, had clear objectives and were conducted in an enthusiastic and lively manner to keep the pupils on their toes. Teachers have good subject knowledge and make effective use of the National Numeracy Strategy format for their lessons. A number make effective use of the final part of the lesson to consolidate learning, for example by playing a relevant game, or to extend the pupils' ideas in preparation for subsequent sessions. Good teaching in a separate group is provided for pupils in Year 6 who find mathematics difficult. Teachers throughout the school cater for pupils' different levels of understanding more effectively in mathematics than in other subjects.

17 The older pupils' science books show that teaching in some of the junior classes is also good in this subject, although in others there is more emphasis on the acquisition of information than on important concepts such as fair testing. At best, there is effective introduction of scientific terminology and an appropriate focus on first-hand investigation, with good processes in place for recording experiments. A successful science lesson in Year 5, for example, was concerned with the heart and the effect of exercise on the pulse rate. The teacher started with a lively question and answer session that engaged many of the pupils. Testing was well thought through and clearly explained, with good attention to practicalities and safety issues. As a result the pupils responded sensibly and produced accurate results. Throughout the lesson, the teacher showed very secure subject knowledge and an understanding of the stages of the pupils' learning. Whilst remaining positive and encouraging, she was alert to possible misconceptions and quick to correct errors.

18 Positive features throughout the school include secure subject knowledge, thorough lesson preparation and good relationships with the pupils. Some teaching is good enough to provide a model for others and to provide a basis for improvement throughout the school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Standards, especially in reading comprehension and writing

Years 3 to 6

19 The most recent national tests, taken in summer 2002, showed that standards at the age of eleven were below average in mathematics and science, and well below average in English, where relatively low numbers of pupils reached the higher level 5. However, these results were better than those of similar schools, and well above in mathematics. As in previous years, boys achieved much better overall than girls at eleven, even out-performing them slightly in English. This is against the national trend. Test scores for eleven year olds have declined steadily since the last inspection, with average point scores lower in 2002 than in 1998.

20 On the basis of the work seen during the inspection, current standards in Year 6 are broadly consistent with the 2002 test results: well below the national average in English and below average in mathematics and science. National test scores are not likely, on present form, to improve much in 2003. This is confirmed by tests taken by this year group at the end of Year 5, which showed many pupils with low scores, especially for reading comprehension. One reason for this is that pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language are not receiving the classroom support they need to make faster progress. Another factor is that teaching is not always matched closely enough to the capabilities of individual pupils. Even so, steady progress is being made through the juniors, with better progress in classes and year groups where the teaching is consistently good. The pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning contribute a lot to the progress they make.

21 Mathematics is at present the most secure of the core subjects (English, mathematics and science) in the juniors. The older pupils' books demonstrate competent number skills and facility with mental mathematics. Mathematical vocabulary is not so strong: in one lesson, for example, average pupils in Year 6 needed to be reminded of the names of ordinary solid shapes. Sometimes pupils struggle to explain what they are doing. Mathematics teaching in the present Year 6 booster group is proving effective and is helping some pupils to catch up. Throughout Years 3 to 6 the pupils set out their work neatly and accurately.

22 In some of the junior classes the pupils undertake interesting investigative work in science, and are developing effective ways of recording their findings in writing and through graphs. However, on the basis of last year's work, there is too great a focus on the revision of facts in Year 6, at the expense of developing an understanding of investigations in greater depth. Science books are well presented, with some very well executed diagrams.

23 English is at present the weakest of the core subjects in Year 6. By eleven, most pupils appear to read reasonably fluently and accurately, with competent technical skills. This often disguises a failure to grasp the meaning of the text, however. During the inspection a lower attaining pupil in Year 6 found it difficult to explain anything that had happened in a simple story, whilst another read a poem with virtually no understanding. Average pupils find idiomatic phrases such as 'he had met his match' hard to interpret,

whilst an above average girl did not understand vocabulary such as 'procession' and 'sedately'. These problems are exacerbated for pupils who have English as an additional language. Whilst a few able pupils enjoy fiction such as the *Harry Potter* books, most convey little enthusiasm for reading. The ability to use reference books, including dictionaries, is a general weakness. Standards of writing are also low in Year 6, although handwriting and presentation are good. Punctuation, including sentence demarcation, is insecure for the average and below average pupils, and the spelling of some basic vocabulary is inconsistent. The pupils find it difficult to control tenses and to sustain an argument or 'voice' in their extended writing.

24 With a consistent programme of work now established in the computer suite, current standards in ICT are just average in Year 6, as at the time of the last inspection. However, the pupils do not yet have enough opportunities to consolidate and apply their skills in the classrooms.

Years 1 and 2

25 Test results in 2002 were well below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. This broadly matched the standard achieved in similar schools in writing and mathematics, but reading results were below average for comparable schools. Test scores for seven year olds have declined in reading and writing, with low numbers reaching the higher level 3. Although there has been an improvement in pupils' raw scores in mathematics, these have not kept up with the national trend. Overall, the trend of national test results at seven is a matter of concern, especially in areas such as reading.

26 Pupils in the present Year 2 are currently performing well below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics, as in 2002. This is partly because of a large group of lower attainers who are barely off the ground, but also because not enough of the more capable pupils are achieving at a higher level. The Year 2 exercise books provided for scrutiny during the inspection were mainly those of average or above average pupils, and the standards being achieved by this higher group are fairly typical of the age group. These pupils, who by and large represent the top half of the year group, are beginning to develop their ideas into short sequences of two or three sentences, and most are developing a feel for when to use a full stop. On the other hand, they are not making enough use of first dictionaries or word books, so many common words are spelled incorrectly. A large group of average to lower attainers are only just starting to write independently and still need a great deal of help when writing and reading back what they have written. Technical reading skills, such as an understanding of phonics, are developing satisfactorily, but are not matched by the pupils' understanding. Some pupils have a poor recall of common words such as 'said' and 'there'. In mathematics, the pupils' books suggest that number skills are broadly average for the age group, but there are too few working at a higher level. Standards are below average in ICT because the pupils have not had enough hands-on experience of computers in the infant classes.

27 The children now in reception are making steady progress, but few are likely to come close to national targets for communication, language and literacy and for mathematics by the time they reach Year 1. Current progress in the infant classes is satisfactory, but the teaching is not good enough to lift standards by the end of Year 2. Few of the more capable pupils are yet stretched enough to reach a higher level in national tests, and lower attainers lack the extra support they need to give them a boost.

Some aspects of teaching

28 There are some important strengths in teaching at St Clare's, as identified in paragraphs 12 – 18. Even so, the overall picture is not at present as positive as in many other primary schools, where the proportion of teaching that is good or better is considerably greater. Largely because of the high level of staff turnover, teaching has not improved since the last inspection. During the inspection, very little teaching was seen that showed real flair and imagination, and there were some borderline and unsatisfactory lessons. Where teaching is less strong, it is clearly associated with lower levels of attainment and the pupils are making satisfactory rather than good progress. This is not enough to raise standards, especially at the end of the infant stage, given the low starting point of many of the pupils. Hence improving teaching is an important area of development for the school.

29 During the inspection two lessons were seen where teaching was unsatisfactory. Uncharacteristically, class control and management were weak in both these cases and relationships with the pupils suffered as a result. This resulted in time being wasted and learning proceeding at an unsatisfactory pace. One of these lessons included low-level time-filling activities such as colouring in.

30 A more widespread problem is that too little allowance is made for the different abilities of the pupils in each class or group. As a result, the most capable are not always sufficiently challenged and, more frequently, lower attainers and those with special educational needs flounder. In one unsatisfactory lesson these pupils only got by with the help of others on their table, who told them the answers. A lack of discrimination of different needs is evident as early as the reception class, where the children's work shows that they often complete exactly the same worksheets. On one occasion during the inspection, the teacher wrote all the children's names on their work for them, even though some were capable of completing this task by themselves. In Year 1, pupils were all expected to distinguish consonants from vowels, a task that was easy for some but well beyond the capabilities of others. In a Year 2 mathematics lesson, the teacher was not clear what the pupils already knew about telling the time and so all the pupils undertook exactly the same tasks, some of them too easy. Even though this was an upper group, a very wide range of ability was represented and needed to be catered for. In a Year 6 literacy session, the lower attaining pupils found the writing task set for the whole group too difficult and, without enough support, became muddled in their use of tenses.

31 Although many teachers know their pupils well, one of the reasons for the mismatch of activities and tasks to pupils' precise learning needs is that day-to-day assessment is not being used as well as it might be to establish just what pupils do understand and can do. Teachers are not deriving as much as they could from formal assessments, such as baseline testing on entry and national tests taken by pupils in the junior age group. Where specific targets have been introduced this is a step in the right direction, but at present some are too general to be useful.

32 During the inspection, provision outside the classroom for pupils with special educational needs was adversely affected by long-term staff absence. In these circumstances, provision at classroom level for pupils with special educational needs was often less than satisfactory, largely because of lack of support. Some teachers gave disproportionate time to these pupils in an effort to meet their needs. Provision is clearly sometimes successful: for example the pupils' books show that lower attainers in the juniors make good progress in science in some classes, with ideas helpfully simplified and distilled for them. There are shortcomings in planning to meet individual needs. The objectives and targets included in pupils' individual education plans are seldom reflected in lesson plans.

33 There is a similar problem with pupils for whom English is an additional language. Although careful assessments are made of the pupils' level of language development, these result in few practical outcomes. Beyond the reception classes, very little support is available in classrooms, and specific issues affecting these pupils are not usually addressed in planning.

34 Marking is done conscientiously, but is of variable quality. Nearly all is encouraging and supportive, and some teachers offer useful advice, for example to read work through carefully. Sometimes problems are identified, but there are no practical suggestions about how the pupil might improve. Occasionally remarks are unhelpful, such as "Write more" in the book of a struggling lower attainer. Mathematics is generally marked accurately, but without comment. Occasionally inaccurate statements are accepted in science books and the spelling of technical language goes uncorrected, so that exercise books contain references to 'oxeygen', 'vains' and 'soulton' (= solution). Non-standard forms used by pupils who speak English as an additional language are seldom picked up.

35 Other areas for improvement in teaching include the use of ICT in subjects across the curriculum so that pupils have the opportunity to use the skills that they are now learning steadily in the computer suite. There is a particular need for further development in the infant classes. Pupils are at present too reliant on staff for information, and there are too few extended opportunities for them to consult reference sources independently and to undertake their own research. This is an unresolved issue from the last inspection.

Planning for school development

36 Management of the school is sound overall, but self-review, setting whole-school priorities and forward planning of finances are areas of relative weakness. Action to improve behaviour management - a recent success - barely features in school planning documentation, so that arrangements for evaluation and follow-up are not clear. The school does get things done, however. For example, a high quality foyer extension has been built recently, including a well-organised management suite, disabled facilities and a medical room. The disadvantage of current practice is that major developments are not weighed up and prioritised in the light of the benefits they will bring to the pupils and there is not enough planning ahead, including forward financial planning.

37 A school development plan is in place, covering the period 2002 – 2004. The plan consists of a review of previous developments, policy statements about training and performance management, and detailed action plans for each area of the curriculum produced by subject co-ordinators. These are of uneven quality. There is no written plan for developing special needs provision, despite current changes in legislation, and little mention of pupils for whom English is an additional language. There are also no priorities or targets for the Foundation Stage (nursery and reception classes). There is, however, a brief but appropriate action plan for the development of the site and buildings. A major shortcoming is the lack of any clear statement about the main whole-school priorities. For example, although everyone knows that writing development is a current priority, this is not made explicit and is not reflected in subject plans. Even the plan for literacy development contains more action points connected with reading rather than with writing.

38 A strength of current planning is the perception that performance management is tightly linked to whole-school development, and whole-school priorities are said to be reflected in the performance targets of individual teachers. However, this information is, for reasons of confidentiality, not in the public domain. Hence governors have no effective means of monitoring and evaluating progress in these areas, apart from the headteacher's targets.

39 School self-review to support future planning is an area that requires further development. There are already arrangements for regular monitoring of pupils' work in books and files, and most subject co-ordinators refer to monitoring teachers' planning. A small number of subject plans contain useful insights as an outcome of monitoring: for example, the literacy co-ordinator identifies that there are inconsistencies in the way in which staff are planning their work and rightly flags up an intention to address this issue. However, there is very little evidence based on direct observation in classrooms. There are no examples in the school development plan of assessment or test results being used to identify areas that require development to raise standards. Although a start has been made by the headteacher and deputy head, discussions during the inspection suggest that such analysis is not yet being undertaken at a sufficiently sophisticated level.

40 A large budgetary surplus has been allowed to build up over the last two years. The reasons for this are understandable, in that there has been an interruption to the normally good flow of financial information provided by the local education authority service to which the school subscribes. There have also been unavoidable delays in costing and going ahead with necessary maintenance work on the site. However, more effective forward planning and budgetary profiling would have enabled staff and governors to manage such contingencies better by diverting funds to other priority areas.

41 A newly introduced format for governing body self-review is included with the development plan. If utilised, this will provide the basis for a rigorous review of the leadership and management role of governors and, with the co-operation of senior staff, could go a long way to address current shortcomings in development planning.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

42 St Clare's has a tradition of high standards and is highly thought of, both in the neighbourhood and in the wider educational community. In view of the staff turnover and recruitment difficulties of the past two years, it has been a struggle for the headteacher and deputy head, both appointed since the last inspection, to maintain the good standards achieved in the past. The school has been successful in sustaining and developing very good provision for pupils' personal development and strategies to ensure good behaviour, but the instability of the last two years has taken a toll in some other respects. It is the view of the inspection team that the school has the capacity to tackle the challenges that it faces. In order to redress the position, the headteacher, staff and governors should take the following steps:

Improve standards in reading comprehension and writing by

- A greater focus on vocabulary development, especially for pupils with English as an additional language.
- Regular classroom-based support for lower attainers.
- Earlier intervention for pupils with special educational needs.
- More independent writing in each area of the curriculum, from the earliest stages.
- More training and opportunities for the pupils to use dictionaries, reference books and the school library for independent research.

Strengthen teaching by

- Ensuring that work is consistently well designed to meet the learning needs of all groups of pupils in each class or set.
- Making better use of information from tests and assessments, including baseline assessment, as a basis for planning.
- Using day-to-day assessment to set specific, achievable targets for individual pupils.
- Marking in such a way that pupils know what they can do to improve.

In addition: continuing to make every effort to appoint suitable classroom assistants throughout the school to support learning, especially in the literacy hour and the daily mathematics lesson.

Improve school development planning by

- Identifying a small number of whole-school priorities clearly in the school development plan and establishing a well-defined action plan for each.
- Improving analysis of test and assessment data to target areas needing development.
- Sharpening the focus of school self-review through classroom observation.
- Strengthening financial projection and forward planning, and linking the budget more clearly to priority areas for development.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	21
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	15

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	1	8	10	2	0	0
Percentage	0	5	38	48	9	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents almost five percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	18	352
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	N/a	140

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	1	53

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	101

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	29
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	28

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.8
National comparative data	5.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	0.5

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 (Year 2)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	17	28	45

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	10	9	13
	Girls	24	25	25
	Total	34	34	38
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	76 (89)	76 (89)	84 (87)
	National	84 (84)	86 (86)	90 (91)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	9	12	10
	Girls	24	26	24
	Total	33	38	34
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	73 (89)	84 (85)	76 (91)
	National	85 (85)	89 (89)	89 (89)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	23	30	53

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	15	19	20
	Girls	22	22	26
	Total	37	41	46
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	70 (76)	78 (78)	87 (96)
	National	75 (75)	73 (71)	86 (87)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	16	21	20
	Girls	21	23	26
	Total	37	44	46
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	70 (n/a)	83 (n/a)	87 (n/a)
	National	73 (72)	74 (74)	82 (82)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	20	0	0
White – Irish	2	0	0
White – any other White background	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	31	1	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	111	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	19	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	121	4	0
Black or Black British – African	5	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0
Any other ethnic group (Vietnamese)	9	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	0	0	0

The table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only. It gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y[] – Y[]

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	18.6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	20
Average class size	25

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	3.6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	111.50

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18
Total number of education support staff	1
Total aggregate hours worked per week	32
Number of pupils per FTE adult	9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	13.5
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	9.6

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2
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	£
Total income	1,070,083
Total expenditure	979,479
Expenditure per pupil	2,418
Balance brought forward from previous year	84,126
Balance carried forward to next year	174,730

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	386
Number of questionnaires returned	78

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	60	35	5	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	38	49	6	0	6
Behaviour in the school is good.	42	44	10	0	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	35	18	6	13
The teaching is good.	59	33	3	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	41	36	14	3	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	64	31	5	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	63	32	3	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	42	36	17	0	5
The school is well led and managed.	51	29	3	6	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	41	45	3	3	9
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	19	40	17	5	19