



St Columba's RC Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105220
LEA Bolton
Inspection number 277319
Inspection dates 2 November 2005 to 3 November 2005
Reporting inspector Mr Paul Bamber CfBT Lead Inspector

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Ripley Street
School category	Voluntary aided		Tonge Moor
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		Bolton, Lancashire BL2 3AR
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01204 333 421
Number on roll	175	Fax number	01204 301 420
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr R Hall
Date of previous inspection	8 November 1999	Headteacher	Mrs N Collins

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors over two days.

Description of the school

This is an average sized, urban, Roman Catholic primary school within the East Bolton regeneration area. There are 175 children on roll with 22 in the nursery.

Many children come from disadvantaged backgrounds and the vast majority is of white British heritage. No child has English as an additional language. The proportion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and with a statement of special educational need is around the average. There are no looked after children, but the school has recently admitted two children from families seeking asylum. Attainment on entry is well below that usually found and a significant minority of children have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. Children entering or leaving the school at times other than the normal times is above average.

The school runs a before and after school club, employs a learning mentor and has a nurture group (to help those children with social and emotional difficulties to cope better with school life), together with a parents' group and a toddler group. The school's Investors in People Status has been renewed this year.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school that it is good with some outstanding features. It offers good value for money. Children make good progress. Their achievements are particularly good in Years 5 and 6. However, apart from in these year groups, achievement in writing is satisfactory rather than good. Standards in Year 6 are above average in all subjects. From a very low entry point children make good progress in the Foundation Stage, but could achieve better standards in speaking. Achievement is good overall in Years 1 and 2 and particularly good in Year 2.

The curriculum, care and support the children are given are outstanding. The school rather underestimated the quality of its very rich and inclusive curriculum. Teaching is of good quality overall, and is especially effective in Years 2, 5 and 6. Although teaching is good overall in the Foundation Stage adults could do more to help children speak more clearly and at greater length. Children behave well and enjoy all the school offers. However, the school council only meets three times a year and could be more involved in influencing aspects of the school's provision and its members more active in assuming committee responsibilities.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is very effective in promoting improvement and has built a strongly motivated team. She is well supported by senior managers. At middle management level more systematic evaluation of provision is required. The school has made significant improvement since the last inspection and has a good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to improve children's writing, especially through modelling good language.
- Help middle managers to carry out more systematic evaluation of provision within their areas of responsibility.
- Provide opportunities for the school council to meet more often, to be more active in influencing decisions about the school's work and for the members to carry out committee responsibilities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Overall, children achieve well. Over the last three years the progress made by children in Key Stage 2 has been significantly better than that found nationally. The challenging targets set for them have been exceeded over the last two years. Standards in the Year 2 and Year 6 national tests have improved each year over the same period. This is the result of good and sometimes outstanding teaching in Years 5 and 6. Standards are highest in mathematics and science and least good in writing. The school has diagnosed the reasons for the relative weaknesses in writing and recent initiatives to improve the teaching of letter sounds in the nursery and reception classes are showing

encouraging signs of success. However, there is still a relative weakness in younger children's speaking skills.

Children enter the school with well below expected skills and their communication, language and literacy skills are very low. They make good progress overall, and outstanding progress in their personal and emotional development. Despite their good achievements a significant minority fail to catch up enough to achieve the expected learning targets by the time they enter Year 1. Progress is good in Years 1 and 2, and particularly good in Year 2. At the end of Year 2, children attain broadly average standards in the national tests. In those tests in Year 6, children attain above average standards. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress as a result of effectively managed and well targeted support. Very able, gifted and talented children also achieve well as a result of an outstanding curriculum that meets their needs well. Vulnerable children make good progress which is no small measure due to the excellent support they receive from the learning mentor and staff in the nurture group.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Children enjoy their education and their attendance is above the national average. However, a minority of children are often late. It is clear from classroom and other observations that children's attitudes and behaviour are mostly good, although in the past there has been a very small number of fixed term exclusions. The management of behaviour at the school is good. Children feel safe and secure and that they have some voice in the way the school is led and managed. Members of the school council take their responsibilities seriously, but this provision is underutilised at present because the council only meet once each term and there is no elected chair or secretary. Members of the school council said that 'we enjoyed the challenge of the recent 'walk to school' week. The school provides many opportunities for children to enhance their personal development, for example, by looking after the school office at lunch time. Older children support younger ones in the dining room and act as buddy partners in the playground. This provision allows children to make a positive contribution to the school community and to learn how to be helpful members of society.

Teachers and support staff act as very good role models and they promote children's personal development and character well. The outstanding provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is at the heart of the school and it underpins the very positive Christian ethos. The school makes good use of many external visits into the community to enhance children's personal development. There is also a wide range of extra-curricular activities and clubs that are well used by children of all ages and which lead to improved access to sport and a developing understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are of good quality and enable children to achieve well. In the best lessons, high expectations, a fast pace, interesting and enjoyable tasks and rigorous assessments, promote very good progress. This is most evident in Years 2, 5 and 6. The good teaching of Spanish in all classes provides children with a basic vocabulary and promotes their self-esteem and cultural development well.

Children have a good start in the nursery and right through Foundation Stage adults ensure that children's personal development is nurtured extremely well. As a result, progress in this area of learning is outstanding. However, adults do not model good language sufficiently and this contributes to children's satisfactory rather than good progress in communication, language and literacy. Conversely, the new strategies for teaching letter sounds are beginning to bear fruit in better reading standards.

Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress as a result of the good teaching and support they have from class teachers, teaching assistants, the learning mentor and in the nurture group. Staff constantly encourage these children who respond very positively to praise by working very hard to improve their work and behaviour. Specialist teaching contributes well to the good achievements of gifted and talented children, especially in the areas of sport and music. Since the last inspection, much better teaching of art and design and of physical education has ensured good improvements to standards in these subjects. Teachers mark children's work thoroughly and children speak knowledgeably about their targets for improvement. They enjoy working both independently and cooperatively.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school feels that the curriculum is good but inspectors judge it to be outstanding. The provision for the teaching of basic skills is good. Careful record-keeping systems ensure that children are kept on track and teachers monitor children's work thoroughly and consistently. The nurture group and learning mentor programme add an outstanding pastoral and academic dimension to curricular provision and care. The school's response to the government initiatives to enrich children's curriculum has been innovative in that it is in the process of acquiring the International Baccalaureates accreditation for the primary years. This has meant that children are more engaged in independent learning and in using new technologies to research topics.

The curriculum is very inclusive and significantly enriched by a very wide range of out of school activities and clubs. In physical education, for example, Year 6 children now have access to the local velodrome for the development of cycling skills. There are also many opportunities provided for children to visit, study and work in the local and wider environment, such as the Bolton Wildlife Project. Children say that they very much enjoy all the activities provided by the school; one commented, 'there is so much

to do'. Children are taught how to make healthy food and to begin to think about lifestyle choices. An extensive range of external visitors provide support to the curriculum in areas such as drugs awareness, developing relationships and also in music, drama and art, the provision for which has significantly improved since the last inspection. The curriculum for all children is further developed through the introduction of Spanish which is taught to all year groups for short periods each week. A Spanish video link with a local language school is helping to significantly enhance the outstanding curricular provision at this school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

This area of the school's work is outstanding. The school's very significant attention to detail in the care, guidance and support to all children permeates every strand of its work. The impact on children's personal development and well-being is excellent. Child protection systems and procedures are in place and are well understood. School staff and a wide range of support assistants are very proactive in dealing with any incidents or accidents and appropriate records are maintained. Regular fire drills are undertaken and recorded and effective health and safety risk assessments take place in advance of school trips and visits.

The school provides particularly strong and effective support to any looked after or vulnerable children, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The nurture group and the learning mentor programme provide excellent pastoral and academic support and guidance to a range of children throughout the school. Parents are very much part of the process and are active partners with the school in supporting their child's progress.

Children receive good support and guidance in the classroom, which often includes self-review and an evaluation of progress at the end of a lesson. The school's very well developed educational, sporting and social contacts with the local and wider community and with other schools, adds to the overall effectiveness of this outstanding provision.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher leads from the front, taking firm action when improvements are required, but responding sensitively to the needs of the children, their families and members of staff. As a result, there is constant improvement in standards and achievement, a very inclusive curriculum and a strong sense of teamwork amongst all who work in the school. Outstanding partnerships have been established with other schools, colleges, the parish and with parents. These contribute significantly to the rich experiences enjoyed by the children. Parents think very highly of the school, especially of the standards, teaching and quality of care provided.

Senior managers make telling contributions to the development of children's basic skills and to the provision for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

There is a need to enable middle managers to carry out more systematic evaluations of provision within their areas of responsibility. This would enable them to identify relative weaknesses, to disseminate good practice and to link the measurements of success in their action plans, much more closely to improvements in children's achievements.

Governors carry out their duties conscientiously and effectively. They are knowledgeable about the school's strengths and weaknesses and make significant contributions to school improvement. For example, in the areas of attendance and health and safety. They hold the school rigorously to account for its performance. The good quality of the school's leadership and management and its ability to accurately evaluate its own provision, has led to effective improvements since the last inspection and signals its good capacity to improve further.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Mr Anderson and I very much enjoyed visiting your school recently to find out how well you were getting on. Thank you for making us feel so welcome and chatting to us in such a friendly way. We were very interested in what you had to tell us. We would like to share with you what we thought the school was doing well and those things which we felt it could do a bit better.

Things we liked about the school were:

- how many interesting things that you can do, both in your lessons and outside the classroom
- how well you improve in your work as you move through the school
- the lovely way in which the school looks after you and works with your families to make sure you are safe, healthy and happy
- how well you speak and understand Spanish.

Things we thought the school could do a bit better are:

- to give you all, but especially the younger children, even more help with your writing
- to make sure that teachers who look after subjects can help you improve even further
- for the school council to meet more often, to make more decisions about the way the school is run and for council members to form a committee with a chair, secretary and a treasurer.