

St Laurence Church Infant School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 103459 |
| Local Authority | Birmingham |
| Inspection number | 286666 |
| Inspection date | 11 January 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Ian Knight |

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

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| Type of school | Infant |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 4–7 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 261 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Sarah Brown |
| Headteacher | Helen Hickman |
| Date of previous school inspection | 17 June 2002 |
| School address | Bunbury Road Northfield Birmingham B31 2DJ |
| Telephone number | 0121 4642888 |
| Fax number | 0121 4643424 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This large infant school serves the parish of St Laurence and the surrounding area of Northfield. Most pupils are White British, with small numbers who are Asian, Caribbean or of mixed heritage. Relatively few pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those who have a statement of special educational need, is about average. Children start Reception with a broadly average spread of skills and abilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'My child has enjoyed being at this school from her first day. I feel my child is valued and that the school nurtures the whole child, not just academic ability.' This was a typical response from parents, echoing the inspection findings of this excellent school.

Within a really positive ethos, founded in the school's Christian setting, pupils thrive and demonstrate excellent personal development. 'Both of our children settled very quickly and have been supported, encouraged and very well catered for,' said one parent of the outstanding care, guidance and support offered by the school. Pupils really enjoy lessons and say that the best thing about the school is, '...the work. They (the teachers) make the work fun to do. It's fun learning new things.' Others said, 'I really like when we're on the playground, we all get on.' The outcome of this successful focus on making learning fun is that all pupils make excellent progress and standards are exceptionally high. This starts in Reception. Sessions are planned very carefully to ensure that all activities, be they led by an adult or undertaken independently, follow a theme and reinforce the main focus of learning. As a result, there is a real buzz of industry in these classrooms.

High expectations, based on the good curriculum and fuelled by accurate tracking of the progress of individuals, are a significant factor in the excellent teaching that drives pupils' achievement throughout the school. The tracking gives early warning of any pupils who might be in danger of underachievement and further support is immediately available. In 2005, boys' writing was noted as being considerably weaker than girls'. The school analysed what boys enjoyed and undertook training that revitalised the teaching of writing and enthused boys. The outcome was a leap in standards in 2006.

The driving force for the maintenance and improvement of such high standards lies in the leadership team. Excellent leadership and management ensure that staff and governors are united in their quest to ensure that each pupil gets the best deal possible. The school development plan has appropriately few targets on which to focus. Middle managers are now writing their own action plans but these do not always explicitly include actions that will contribute to the overarching foci. The school has maintained high standards consistently since the last inspection and taken successful action to deal with weaker areas. One area that was identified as requiring further work at the time of the last inspection concerned multicultural awareness. The school has improved its provision here, but agrees that more could be done to fully prepare pupils for life in multicultural Britain.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on the existing provision that ensures that pupils know about other cultures to fully prepare them for life in multicultural Britain.
- Ensure that subject and key stage action plans reflect the major priorities identified in the whole school development plan.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Children enter Reception with broadly the expected range of skills and understanding. They get a flying start here and most exceed the goals set for five-year-olds by the time they join Year 1, demonstrating outstanding achievement. This continues throughout Years 1 and 2. In

2005, standards in national assessments were well above average in all areas. However, the school noted that standards in writing were not quite as good as the other areas and further analysis identified that the underlying reason was that boys were not doing as well as they should. Concerted action in 2006 paid dividends: standards rose in all areas, and for girls as well as boys. Standards in assessments in 2006 are exceptionally high and indicate outstanding achievement. Of particular note is the huge proportion of pupils who gain the highest levels and the paucity of pupils gaining the lowest. These together suggest that all pupils, including the gifted and talented and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are catered for particularly well in the school; a view confirmed by inspection evidence. The reasons for this include the rigorous individual and group targets set by the school that are closely monitored to ensure all pupils progress rapidly, setting the foundations for the basic skills they will need when eventually they enter the workforce.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils really enjoy school. This is reflected in their exemplary attitudes to learning; they say that teachers make the work fun and then reciprocate by working hard and very sensibly, with first-rate behaviour and high attendance. A forest of hands follows questions to the class. Pupils working independently of the teacher do so maturely, engrossed by their tasks. They show a very well developed understanding of how to keep safe. They trust the staff completely and know exactly what to do should they need help, moving around the school and classrooms maturely and safely. Pupils understand about healthy lifestyles as a result of the school's excellent provision. They can talk authoritatively about the importance of exercise. 'I like PE', said one girl in Reception, 'it makes my heart beat fast!' Healthy eating messages are consistent across the school as it works towards the Healthy Schools Award. Older pupils participate in decision making as part of the 'Playground Council', which also develops everyone's understanding of living in a democratic society. All pupils in Year 2 proudly take their turn as 'Playground Leaders', taking responsibility for playtime games, organising equipment and accompanying any injured pupils to adult help.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. A minor issue at the last inspection involved providing better opportunities to develop pupils' multicultural awareness. Changes in the curriculum since then, and links with a school in Zambia, ensure that pupils have a clear understanding of other faiths and cultures. However, whilst this gives pupils a factual knowledge, it does not yet fully prepare them for life in today's multicultural society.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

A long established system of tracking pupils' progress throughout the school enables staff to set challenging but achievable targets and to identify any pupils in danger of underachievement. This has a very positive impact on classroom teaching because it generates high expectations and teachers are clear about what pupils can do. As a result, tasks set meet the needs of all in the class, challenging them to do their very best. Pupils respond by doing so, working with application and enjoyment. In Reception, the balance between activities led by an adult and those chosen by children themselves is planned for especially well and accelerates progress. Here, skilled practitioners keep detailed notes on children's progress and keep a close, if informal,

watch on the activities that children choose, ensuring that they experience the wide range on offer.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school is currently reviewing its curriculum in the light of recent initiatives, and has successfully improved its provision for writing, especially for boys, resulting in the improvements noted above. It also now incorporates more detail about other faiths and cultures, although the school is aware there is more to do to fully prepare pupils for life in a multicultural society. The current curriculum is broad and balanced and takes due note of national guidance. The Foundation Stage curriculum is well planned and organised for pupils of this age and their transfer into the National Curriculum is smooth. A variety of visits to places of interest and visitors to the school promote pupils' sporting prowess, understanding of the arts and their personal and social development. These are further supplemented by a number of themed weeks over the year, covering areas including road safety, citizenship, healthy food and creativity.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils and parents agree that staff provide a high level of care that reflects the school's powerful Christian ethos. Pupils are well known to staff and an atmosphere of mutual respect pervades the school, promoting effective learning and personal development. Arrangements for child protection are rigorous and effective. Academic guidance is first-rate; the school has a long established tracking system that enables it to set targets for pupils' progress based both on local authority guidelines and also on its own excellent track record. This enables the school to ensure that all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who are gifted and talented, know how well they are doing and are able to maximise their progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Excellent leadership at all levels ensures that a vision of a school in which all pupils do as well as they can in a supportive atmosphere is realised. All staff work harmoniously together in teams towards this end. Outstanding management is reflected in the highly effective self-evaluation in the school that speedily identifies areas of concern and sets in train effective strategies to improve matters. The maintenance of high standards since the last inspection and the successful action taken to improve standards in writing, especially of boys, show the school has an excellent capacity for further improvement. The school development plan has appropriately few major targets, identified as those which will have the most impact on pupils' experience of school. Subject leaders are rapidly growing into their roles and are effectively monitoring their own areas, but the resulting action plans do not always reflect the whole school development plan enough. Following a change in the deployment of staff, some parents said that the school does not consult them enough. The school accepts that communication could have been more effective in this case, but in general parents have appropriate opportunities to comment on the school's provision via an annual questionnaire. The governing body is very well organised and takes a very active part in the school, acting very effectively as a 'critical friend' and participating in the annual 'Big Picture' meeting that evaluates the school's position and future needs.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| <i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i> | School Overall |
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Overall effectiveness

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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 1 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 2 |
| The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 1 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 1 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 1 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 1 |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 1 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 1 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 1 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 1 |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures? | No |
| Does this school require a notice to improve? | No |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you so much for being so welcoming and polite when I visited your school. I really enjoyed seeing your lessons and chatting with some of you at lunchtime. You told me how much you enjoy school and how good you think it is. I agree – I think this is an absolutely super school that helps you all to do as well as you can.

Some of the best things about the school are:

- Children in Reception do really well and learn lots of useful things, ready for when they start Year 1. The adults in Reception make sure that children have lots of time to learn for themselves as well as with an adult.
- You carry on learning lots in Years 1 and 2. The pupils I spoke to said the best thing about the school was that your teachers always make the work fun. You certainly enjoyed the lessons I visited!
- You help the teachers by being so well behaved. I'm glad you really enjoy school and always want to try hard and do your best. Your teachers like that too!
- The headteacher and the other teachers are especially good at seeing the things that the school is best at and any things that might need to get a bit better, and then doing something to improve it.

There are just a couple of things that would make the school even better:

- The school teaches you a lot about other people and how they live; a good example is the link you have with a school in Africa. I think that it could do a bit more to help you understand about living in Birmingham, where lots of people from different countries live together and usually get along.
- When teachers decide how to make their own subjects better, they don't always include things that the whole school agrees need to be done, and the school could improve even faster if they did.

I hope you carry on enjoying school and working as hard as you do now. I wish you well for the future.