



St Francis de Sales Catholic Infant and Nursery School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104651
Local Authority Liverpool
Inspection number 287000
Inspection dates 15–16 November 2006
Reporting inspector Clare Henderson

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Margaret Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Walton, Liverpool
Age range of pupils	3–7		Merseyside L4 3RX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0151 5258489
Number on roll (school)	383	Fax number	0151 5259345
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Fr John Thompson
		Headteacher	Mrs S Irlam
Date of previous school inspection	9 May 2001		

Age group 3–7	Inspection dates 15–16 November 2006	Inspection number 287000
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Francis de Sales Catholic Infant and Nursery school has more pupils than average and they come from a mixed socio-economic background. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average whilst those who are entitled to free school meals is above average. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The school has gained the Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Francis de Sales Catholic Infant and Nursery is a satisfactory school which provides satisfactory value for money. The absence of a permanent headteacher since December 2005 has slowed the school's progress. During this time, governors noted a slippage in the school's overall performance. This term they appointed the present acting headteacher, to stabilise the situation and halt a further decline. She has held the school steady, quickly identifying those steps needed within leadership and management at all levels, to enable the school to move forward. For example, staff have now been given time to review their areas of responsibility and, as a result, they are now using their skills to enable them to have a better understanding of standards in their subjects. These positive actions give the school a satisfactory capacity for improvement. The management team is beginning to have a better understanding of the school's performance. But weak self-evaluation in the past has prevented the school from having an accurate picture of its progress. As a consequence, it judges itself to be better than it is in all aspects except personal development.

Many children begin school with skills which are below average, particularly in their social, speaking and listening skills. As a result of the good teaching they receive, children in the Foundation Stage get off to a flying start making good progress, particularly in their communication and reading skills. By the time they start in Year 1, the vast majority of children reach the national expectations for their age, and a small proportion exceed these. Within Years 1 and 2, teachers do not always plan appropriately to meet the different needs of the pupils and the curriculum does not present enough challenge for higher attaining boys. Not enough effective checks are in place to identify and support children who are not doing as well as they could, particularly higher attaining boys in writing. As a consequence, pupils progress is uneven and attainment is satisfactory. In 2006, standards in reading, writing and mathematics were slightly above the average. Girls, particularly higher attainers, did far better than boys, reaching above average levels in reading, writing and mathematics. Levels achieved by boys, particularly those higher attaining, remained below average in writing, having slipped back further than in 2005.

The school provides good care which ensures that all pupils, including the most vulnerable, are supported and safeguarded well. Parents say all staff 'are caring and attentive' to the personal needs of their children. Within this positive ethos, pupils' personal development is good. Pupils develop an excellent understanding of the need to live a healthy lifestyle and have a good understanding of how to keep safe. They respond sensitively to needs of the local and worldwide community. Pupils have a secure grounding for future life, although boys' basic literacy skills are not as well developed as they should be.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the achievement of higher attaining boys, particularly in writing.
- Ensure planning and assessment are used more effectively to meet the learning needs of all ability groups.

- Put in place checking systems for managers, at all levels, which clearly focus on raising standards and on improving the quality of teaching.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children in the Foundation Stage achieve well because of the good range of planned activities and early intervention by staff to support children's speaking, listening and literacy skills.

For the past three years, pupils in Year 2 have attained above average standards in reading and mathematics. Writing standards have fluctuated but are usually broadly average. Because teachers in Years 1 and 2 do not always plan work precisely enough to meet the needs of all the pupils, girls' achievement is better than boys. This is particularly so in writing. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress as a result of the additional support they receive. But there is more to be done to enable these pupils to do even better.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good overall. Good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is reflected in pupils' excellent behaviour, relationships and good awareness and celebration of their own and other cultures. Pupils say they thoroughly enjoy school and are keen to learn and to be involved in school. They take very seriously the responsibilities given to them, for example, as members of the school council or as 'buddies' to younger pupils. Consequently, they contribute to decision making and learn to take care of one another. Achieving the Healthy Schools Award has ensured that pupils understand and put into practice the principles of healthy eating and living a healthy, safe lifestyle. Good links with parents keep them well informed about their pupils' personal development. Recently introduced incentives have brought about improvements and attendance, which in the past has been below average, is now broadly average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teachers do not, in all cases, make sufficient use of information about pupils' progress to pinpoint their next learning steps. The inconsistencies in the quality of teachers' planning result in pupils making uneven progress within Years 1 and 2, particularly higher attaining boys who do not achieve as well as they could. However, where teaching is good, pupils respond well to the high expectations teachers have of them and they are actively engaged in

challenging tasks. Teaching assistants provide satisfactory support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, they could be more fully used within lessons to enable these pupils to do even better. In the Foundation Stage, where teaching is good overall, children make good progress in their learning and in particular in their personal development.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is well supported by a good range of after school activities, visitors to the school and visits to places of interest. These provide pupils with many opportunities to develop their personal qualities and add excitement to their learning. For example, the pupils enjoy the football sessions taken by personnel from Everton Football Club. Personal development is well supported through the very good personal, social and health programme, which gives pupils opportunities to express their own ideas and thoughts as well as learn about their own personal health and safety. The school has identified the need to raise achievement and is beginning to introduce ideas to make improvements. However, these strategies are not yet sufficiently well developed or embedded to have a real impact on raising standards.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Staff work well with other agencies and parents to enable vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to receive the help they need to make satisfactory progress. Child protection and health and safety procedures are in place, ensuring pupils are safe at all times. Pupils say they feel safe because the staff deal effectively with any problems, such as bullying. Despite the good level of care, pupils and, in particular higher attaining boys, are not given sufficient guidance and support in order to improve their work further.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The appointment of the acting headteacher by the governors has been a positive step. As a result, the school is now in a better position to move forward with a clear sense of purpose. Subject leaders are developing their skills, but they are not sufficiently involved in checking the standards of teaching and learning. Consequently, the school does not fully meet the needs of pupils of all abilities. The school development plan identifies areas for improvement, but there are too many and the key priorities are not given sufficient prominence.

Governors support the school wholeheartedly and fulfil their responsibilities satisfactorily. However, they do not focus strongly enough on how well the school is doing to improve pupils' performance. The school has addressed the issues identified at the time of the last inspection.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

As you know, three inspectors recently visited your school to find out how well your teachers are helping you with your learning. Thank you for being so friendly and welcoming to us. We really enjoyed being in your school and listening to what you had to say. The things we particularly liked were:

- your excellent behaviour and attitudes to school
- the way you look after and care for each other
- how well your teachers have taught you about how important it is to keep fit and healthy.

We think you have a happy, caring school but have asked your teachers to improve three things. We want them to:

- help you all, especially the boys, to do better in your writing
- to plan lessons which help you all to do your best work
- to check on how well you are doing in lessons and to let you know how you can make your work better.

Thank you for helping us so much with the inspection of your school. We hope that you will carry on working hard in school and help the teachers so that St Francis Infants' and Nursery becomes a better school.