



St Vincent's Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111376
Local Authority Warrington
Inspection number 288941
Inspection dates 15–16 November 2006
Reporting inspector Colin Smith

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Finlay Avenue
School category	Voluntary aided		Penketh, Warrington
Age range of pupils	5–11		Cheshire WA5 2PN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01925 726544
Number on roll (school)	292	Fax number	01925 721770
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Graham Dumbell
		Headteacher	Mr Greg Barker
Date of previous school inspection	30 October 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
5–11	15–16 November 2006	288941

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is larger than average in size and has a distinct Catholic ethos. Pupil numbers have risen over recent years, reflecting the school's popularity. The school mainly serves an advantaged community. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A very small number are of Pakistani or Chinese heritage or from mixed backgrounds. None of these pupils are at an early stage of learning English.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school's overall effectiveness and the value for money provided are satisfactory. The good level of guidance, very good support and excellent care provided ensures that the vulnerable pupils are safeguarded and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The headteacher is widely respected for creating a school with such a positive ethos. Pupils' personal development is outstanding. A good and rich curriculum promotes enjoyment in learning. Pupils' mature appreciation of healthy and safe lifestyles and heightened sense of responsibility for themselves and others prepares them very successfully for the future. These strengths are highly valued by parents. 'The school is a very safe, caring and happy environment in which children can blossom.' is typical of many parents' views.

Most children enter school with attainment above that expected for their age. Given their good starting points it is to be anticipated that they will achieve above average standards in English, mathematics and science, which they do. Children get off to a flying start in Reception and then make satisfactory progress through the rest of the school. Pupils' progress in English is slower than in mathematics and science. Pupils' reading skills are good, as are the technical aspects of their writing, such as spelling, punctuation and handwriting. However, the content and fluency of pupils' written work is not as good as it should be. Teaching and learning are largely satisfactory and excellent in Reception. In the good lessons, when pupils are presented with demanding tasks, they respond positively. However, not all teachers have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Consequently, the tasks provided are not always sufficiently challenging to enable the more able pupils to fulfil their potential.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and very successful in developing pupils' personal qualities, though not as effective in increasing the rate of pupils' progress. The school's effectiveness, particularly the impact of teaching and leadership on pupils' achievement, is not as good as the school believes it to be. However, there is a strong commitment to raise standards. The headteacher, staff and governors have identified correctly what needs to be done and are putting measures in place to remedy the weaknesses. The school's improvement since the previous inspection and the capacity to improve are satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the fluency and content of pupils' written work, in order to raise achievement in English.
- Raise teachers' expectations and increase the challenge in the tasks provided, in order to improve the achievement of the more able pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children make extremely good progress in the Reception class, particularly in their personal, language and mathematical development. Limited outdoor provision restricts their physical development, although it is satisfactory. Many are able to write phrases and handle numbers greater than 10. The progress most pupils make from Year 1 to Year 6 is satisfactory and has been so for the last three years. Standards in English, mathematics and science are above average overall by the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. Above average standards have been maintained over recent years and school targets have been consistently met. However, targets are currently being increased in an attempt to raise achievement to good levels. Standards in reading are higher than in writing. In some classes pupils do not have enough opportunities to practice and improve the content and fluency of their writing, because of the excessive time spent practising handwriting. However, pupils' awareness of descriptive language and how to engage the interest of the reader, is improving. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. However, the progress made by more able pupils is not as good as it should be, largely because the work provided is not sufficiently challenging. The small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as the White British pupils. In two of the last three years boys have performed better than girls. The school is aware of this and is taking appropriate steps to close the gap.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is excellent. Despite living within a mainly white community they have good appreciation of, and respect for, other cultures. Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their exemplary attendance and good behaviour. For Reception children, every new day is an adventure, full of eagerly anticipated surprises. Older pupils become diligent workers who take the utmost care in the accuracy and presentation of their written work. Pupils' appreciation of healthy and safe lifestyles is outstanding, largely because of the school's highly successful personal, social and health education programme. Pupils are confident to learn independently and their capacity to work in pairs and groups is exceptionally good. Throughout the school there is an atmosphere of social harmony. This is because pupils have heightened spiritual and social awareness and an acute sense of responsibility. 'We all look after each other', was how one pupil explained it. This is evident in the work of the school council and in the seriousness with which pupils carry out their duties to support and help younger ones. Pupils' secure literacy and numeracy skills provide a firm foundation for their future education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The atmosphere for learning in virtually all lessons is good. Pupils try hard and give of their best. Teachers explain the purpose of the lesson clearly. This helps pupils to judge how well they are learning. Computer projection screens are used effectively to make learning visual and increase pupils' understanding. Teaching assistants provide very good support. For example, a highly successful reading programme enabled selected Year 3 pupils to make rapid progress. Pupils' learning is carefully assessed. In the best lessons the information is used well to provide challenging work that stretches all pupils, particularly when the pace of teaching is quick. However, in a fair proportion of lessons, the learning needs of the more able pupils are not identified or provided for sufficiently to enable them to surge ahead and reach the higher levels of which they are capable. Hence, pupils' learning and the progress they make are satisfactory, rather than good. There are examples of excellent teaching in information and communication technology (ICT) in Year 5 and 6 and in Reception. Reception children love learning because of the teacher's infectious enthusiasm, very high expectations and highly imaginative approaches.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The highly stimulating curriculum provided for Reception children creates an appetite for learning. The quality of pupils' work on display around school illustrates the richness and diversity of the curriculum provided. Pupils' different learning styles are increasingly being taken into account and subjects linked together to provide more meaningful and creative learning opportunities. These strategies, along with additional experiences, such as residential visits, are at the heart of pupils' increasing confidence and enjoyment of school. Significant improvements in ICT, since the previous inspection, have culminated in a national award. Thorough analysis of the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensures they are well supported. However, despite the school's increasingly effective assessment and tracking systems the needs of more able pupils are not met consistently.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The exemplary care extended to all pupils makes a significant contribution to their impressive personal development. Health and Safety and Child Protection procedures and measures to ensure the safe recruitment of staff are fully in place. The most vulnerable children are clearly identified and their needs are very well understood. The excellent corporate efforts of highly committed support staff, teachers, health professionals and parents, ensure these children are safeguarded. Many of the barriers to their learning, emotional and academic, are removed successfully. As one parent

commented, 'Staff are always there for the children no matter what the problem is.' The quality of guidance pupils receive is largely good, although not sufficient to enable all of the more able pupils to reach challenging targets. This is why the overall quality of care, guidance and support is good but not outstanding, as the school believes.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The realisation amongst staff that pupils are making only satisfactory progress has prompted a determined effort to raise achievement. The headteacher is aware that the school needs to improve the consistency of teaching and learning. New systems of management and renegotiated responsibilities, together with extensive training and professional development, have successfully created a shared understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The substantial emphasis placed on teamwork is enabling all staff to contribute towards the leadership of the school. Subject leaders, for example, have a clear understanding of how their subjects are doing and they identify appropriate ways to improve. These are shared with staff and set out in detailed action plans, although some lack ways to judge the outcomes. Governors have a good recognition of where improvements are needed and are keen to support the school in this process. Teaching and learning are regularly checked. Pupils' achievement is being increasingly tracked and the data analysed to identify where additional support is needed. Action taken to improve pupils' reading skills has proved very effective. However, there is more to do to improve pupils' overall achievement, particularly in writing.

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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?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
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	2
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	2

Personal development and well-being

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	2
The attendance of learners	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2
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	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?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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	2
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 for making us welcome and answering our questions. We enjoyed our visit. We have judged your school to be satisfactory but there are some good and excellent features. Standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. The information from the tests you have done and lessons we observed show that you are making satisfactory progress. Your progress is better in reading, mathematics and science than it is in writing. Those of you who do not find it easy to learn are very well supported. This is helping you to reach your targets. However, the most able ones amongst you do not always achieve as well as you could, especially when the work provided does not stretch you enough.

Young children make an excellent start in Reception. Higher up the school, the variety of lessons and activities keeps you interested and Information and Communication Technology is getting better all the time. We noticed immediately how well you are cared for and looked after. This is why the school is a happy one and your parents agree. You try hard in lessons, your behaviour is good and attendance is excellent.

To help your school to be even better, this is what we have asked your teachers to do.

- Improve your writing, to help standards in writing to catch up with reading. You can help by trying to use more interesting words.
- Make sure that you are given challenging work in every lesson to help you to reach higher levels, particularly the more able ones amongst you. You can help by trying to finish your work quickly then you can do the extension activities.