



Our Lady and St Benedict Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124317
Local Authority Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number 292956
Inspection dates 30 November –1 December 2006
Reporting inspector Frances Gillam

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Abbey Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Abbey Hulton
Age range of pupils	3–11		Stoke-on-Trent ST2 8AU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01782 234646
Number on roll (school)	175	Fax number	01782 234648
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Diane Jones
		Headteacher	Deborah Sims
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average-sized primary school. Most pupils come from a White British background. Nine per cent of pupils come from minority ethnic groups and just over half of these are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils identified with learning difficulties is similar to most schools. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is slightly higher than average. Over the last 15 months, there have been a number of changes in staffing, including the appointment of the headteacher and deputy headteachers.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' progress and the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels.

The overall effectiveness of the school is inadequate. This differs from the school's view of itself, which is more generous. Standards have fallen and are well below average by the end of Year 2 and Year 6 as a result of a legacy of underachievement. This leads to unsatisfactory progress over time, particularly in writing, mathematics and science. This is because action to bring about change for the better has only recently started to have a positive impact on pupils' achievements. Pupils' progress in writing has been inhibited by the lack of opportunity for them to practise, consolidate and use their skills across the curriculum. This has now increased but senior managers acknowledge that further work is required to ensure consistency in the quality of these opportunities.

Predominantly satisfactory teaching ensures that most pupils do as well as expected in lessons but this level of progress has not been sustained over a long enough period of time to raise standards substantially. Teachers explain clearly to pupils what they expect from them and what they are to learn. This supports good behaviour and settles pupils quickly to their work. Most activities match pupils' abilities but sometimes teachers do not always adapt tasks well enough to fully challenge the more able pupils and some average attaining girls in mathematics and science.

In the past, action taken to improve the school's performance has not been robust enough and, as a result, leadership and management are inadequate. Senior managers and governors know the school's strengths and areas for improvement but they have only just got to grips with establishing why some groups of pupils do better than others. This has allowed weaker aspects of teaching and curriculum provision to persist for too long. A climate of enthusiasm and to 'get things right' shows in the recent improvements in pupils' achievement and reflects the school's satisfactory capacity to improve.

Provision for children in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Their attainment on entry to the Nursery is average. They settle quickly because staff pay good attention to the children's personal, social and emotional needs. By the time children are ready to move into Year 1, most reach the expected goals for learning and their achievement is satisfactory.

Pupils' personal development and well-being and the care, guidance and support they receive are satisfactory. Pupils' attendance has improved and most pupils say they like school. The curriculum provides a satisfactory range of relevant experiences for pupils and contributes well to aspects of pupils' personal development. Pupils make sensible choices about what they eat and many take part in the sporting clubs on offer. Behaviour is satisfactory, although there is a minority who find it more difficult to get

on with others. Older pupils comment that recent work on anti-bullying has had a positive effect on these pupils' behaviour. Pupils know how well they are doing but are not always clear about how they can do better. This is because they find the language in some of their targets difficult to understand.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide good quality opportunities for pupils to practise, consolidate and develop the writing skills they acquire in literacy.
- Make better use of assessment information to challenge the more able pupils and average attaining girls to achieve higher standards in mathematics and science.
- Implement more robust procedures to check teaching and the curriculum so that weaknesses are dealt with promptly and subsequent action is effective.
- Ensure that targets to help pupils improve are expressed in language they can read and understand.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Children's attainment when they start in the Nursery is broadly average. They make a positive start to school, including those at the early stages of learning English, because of the good focus staff place on developing personal and language skills. Children make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage and most reach the expected goals by the end of the Reception Year. Standards by Year 2 and Year 6 have fallen since the last inspection and pupils' progress has been unsatisfactory. Until recently, the school had been slow to tackle pockets of underachievement. This has led to gaps in pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding, which is not preparing them well enough for their future, particularly in writing and mathematics. Some inconsistencies in teaching mean that the average attaining girls and the more able pupils are not always challenged to do their best in mathematics and science. In spite of some good work in English in the oldest classes, there is too much to do to ensure that pupils' skills in writing are as good as they should be by Year 6. This is now changing because of improvements in teaching and the curriculum. Even though standards are still well below average, pupils' achievement is improving and is now satisfactory in lessons but remains unsatisfactory overall. Test results in 2006 improved in Year 2 and Year 6. This was due to well focused support for pupils but too few pupils reach the higher levels. Throughout the school, pupils with learning difficulties, looked after children and the lower attainers achieve satisfactorily. Strategies to support these pupils are successful, with activities suitably matched to their abilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Most pupils behave sensibly but some parents and children are concerned about the behaviour of a small group of pupils who find it more difficult to get on with others. Senior managers acknowledge this and strategies to help these pupils behave are

beginning to work. Pupils say they enjoy school. Their attendance has improved and is now satisfactory, and they respond well to the rewards they receive for good attendance. Pupils contribute satisfactorily to their school and the wider community but are not yet fully involved in contributing their ideas to make their school a better place to be. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Many older pupils set a good example by helping out around the school and showing respect for others. Opportunities to work and talk together are improving but this is not consistent. In some classes, teachers make insufficient use of 'talking partners' to help pupils to develop their ideas successfully.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Staff in the Foundation Stage provide good opportunities for children to talk and express their feelings. This helps children to settle quickly and make a positive start to school. Throughout the school, most teachers are responding well to initiatives to improve pupils' learning. In every class, teachers now provide better opportunities for pupils to develop their own ways of recording their work. This is improving pupils' achievement in writing but sometimes teachers do not give enough thought to how these opportunities could be made more relevant, for example, to the things being taught in literacy lessons to extend the pupils' learning even further. Pupils commented that lessons are more exciting, particularly in science, where there are increased opportunities for them to experiment and investigate. Teachers are providing greater challenges for pupils through problem solving in mathematics and science but not all teachers make enough use of assessment information to plan work in these subjects that always matches the needs of the more able pupils and the average attaining girls. Support for the lower attainers and pupils with learning difficulties is well focused and ensures they build satisfactorily on their previous learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum provides a broad range of activities for pupils, including after school clubs, which contribute successfully to pupils' experiences, fitness and health. Improvements to the curriculum have ensured that activities build more effectively on pupils' previous learning, although there is still some inconsistency for the more able pupils and average attaining girls. A carefully planned curriculum for lower attaining pupils, and those with learning difficulties, ensures they make satisfactory progress. Work to increase the opportunities for writing across the curriculum and to make best use of teaching time by linking work between subjects is developing satisfactorily.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school carries out robust health and safety checks and carefully assesses risk to ensure that pupils are safeguarded. Most pupils say they feel safe and well cared for, and they are routinely reminded about the need to take care. Staff care for pupils and promote healthy lifestyles and physical activity successfully. Pupils receive good information about how well they are doing and targets for improvement are challenging and well matched to pupils' abilities. However, the wording used is sometimes too difficult for pupils to read and understand. This means the targets are not always effective in helping pupils to do better.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Senior managers and governors understand the school's strengths and weaknesses but are less clear about the reasons why some groups of pupils do better than others. Until recently, procedures to check the quality of what the school was providing for its pupils were underdeveloped. These are now satisfactory and are improving but there is still some way to go. Senior managers are picking up on some inconsistencies related to implementing new strategies such as 'The Big Write', but this work is not yet fully developed. Checking the quality of teaching is not rigorous enough to identify precisely what needs improving in teaching to help pupils learn more effectively. This leads to inconsistencies in pupils' experiences and sometimes in their pace of learning. Subject leaders monitor and evaluate their subjects but their evaluations are not always robust enough to set a clear agenda for improvement. Plans to improve are now in place but not yet fully implemented or resulting in improved standards and achievement. Governors are not yet sufficiently involved in holding the school to account for its performance.

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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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
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?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

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?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
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	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making the team of inspectors so welcome when we visited your school recently.

You may know by now that your school is not doing as well as it should and needs additional support if it is to get better. This is because the people in charge of your school are not making sure you are making fast enough progress. This leads to low standards by the time you leave in Year 6. Your teachers are working hard to help you make better progress and the curriculum is improving but there is still some way to go before all of you are learning as well as you can. You can help by trying extra hard in lessons.

- These are some of the things we think are working well in the school:
- Children in the Nursery make a good start because the adults help them to have the confidence to talk about their experiences, to learn new words and to work and play together sensibly.
- You enjoy school and your attendance has improved.
- You are making good choices about how to grow up fit and healthy.
- You make good use of out-of-school clubs and this is helping you to develop your sporting skills.

We have asked the staff and governors to work together on the following things:

- Help some of the girls and the more able pupils to do better in mathematics and science.
- Make sure that the opportunities you have for writing are really interesting and link more effectively to what you have learned in literacy lessons.
- Check that your teachers are doing the best job they can and make sure that changes are really working well to help you do better.
- Make sure that your targets are clear enough for you to understand.