



St Austin's Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104806
Local Authority St. Helens
Inspection number 295689
Inspection dates 7–8 November 2006
Reporting inspector Eric Craven HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary	School address	Heath Street
School category	Voluntary aided		St Helens
Age range of pupils	3–11		Merseyside WA9 5NJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01744 606598
Number on roll (school)	265	Fax number	01744 819697
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr B Bielby
		Headteacher	Mrs Patsy Wade
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2005		

Age group 3–11	Inspection dates 7–8 November 2006	Inspection number 295689
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Introduction

When St Austin's Catholic Primary School was inspected in October 2005 it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on two occasions to monitor its progress. The school was inspected in November 2006 by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school with strong links to the parish of St Austin. Pupils come predominantly from the Thatto Heath area of St Helens. Nearly all are White British. Just a few are from minority ethnic backgrounds and have English as an additional language. Just over 17% are in receipt of free school meals and around one in ten have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Proposals for the amalgamation of St Austin's and another local Catholic primary school are to be published by the Archdiocese in the next few days.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005 HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

This is a school that has transformed itself since its last inspection. The senior leaders and the staff have risen to the challenge of improving the school and form a close knit team pulling in the same direction. The associate headteacher is leading the school with tireless determination and she is ably supported by the deputy headteacher. As a consequence, the school has made good progress in a short period of time.

Pupils are polite and courteous and have very positive attitudes to their learning. Their good behaviour along with the regular attendance of most shows that they enjoy coming to this school. One pupil said, 'I can't pick a subject, I just like being here.' The Christian atmosphere in the school is very evident and the staff care for and support the pupils admirably. Every effort is made to ensure their safety. Teamwork features highly amongst pupils and staff. Another pupil said, 'When we are stuck, we all work together'. Inspectors agree that lessons have become more interesting and exciting. The school has made decisive moves to ensure pupils recognise the importance of health and fitness. This is illustrated in a further quotation where a pupil said, 'The new Jamie Oliver meals have been a great success. We now know to eat all things in moderation.'

The quality of teaching and learning has improved strikingly and is consistently good. Many pupils start at the school with standards below average. The good start they get in the Foundation Stage identifies and addresses these shortcomings effectively. Because of the improvements in teaching, the regular assessment of pupils' progress and the tackling of underperformance, the rate of progress made by the pupils has increased so that they are making good progress overall as they move through the school and standards have risen. Pupils make most progress through Key Stage 2. The school's accurate evaluations show that its priorities are the need to increase the numbers of pupils achieving higher levels at the end of Key Stage 1 and more generally to improve boys' writing. The school sets goals for pupils so they know what they have to do to improve and they have a clear understanding of these. These are particularly well focused and effective in Key Stage 2 where they offer more challenge to pupils. The school also sets National Curriculum level targets for pupils. However, these are not as closely matched to individual capabilities as they could be. The curriculum has improved and is another key factor in why the pupils succeed as they do. The wide array of interesting and valuable extra-curricular activities is outstanding and highly valued. This adds considerably to pupils' understanding of the world and their roles within it.

The school is effective in checking how well it is doing and it makes appropriate plans and changes as a consequence. For example, staff training stems from the school's analysis of the curriculum and its assessments of pupils. A raising achievement action plan has been a very helpful roadmap for the school since its last inspection. A school improvement action plan is being compiled to take the place of this and an early draft

shows good promise. However, further involvement from parents and pupils in its construction would add to its usefulness. Recent training has helped curriculum coordinators develop their roles. Nevertheless, the school has rightly identified further advances in this area as being necessary for coordinators of the foundation subjects (subjects other than English, mathematics and science) to have even more influence in managing their subjects.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further develop the roles of foundation curriculum coordinators.
- Further extend the pupils in Key Stage 1 who are capable of achieving highly.
- Strengthen the school's self-evaluation arrangements to include the views of parents and pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Results in the 2006 national tests for pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 showed good improvement on the previous year with particularly impressive results at Key Stage 2. The pupils exceeded the average performance of pupils of a similar age, both in the local authority and nationally. The score for the value added by the school through Key Stage 2 for this particular year group provisionally places it in the top five per cent of schools in the country. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and other pupils, who might fall behind in their learning, is good because they are picked up quickly and given additional attention. Significant differences in the achievements of boys and girls in some areas of the curriculum, notably boys' writing, have been identified by the school as needing to be tackled and the school has embarked on a programme to make writing more appealing and relevant to the boys.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Children enjoy everything that they do in school. As a result they are regular in their attendance, punctual, well behaved and attentive in lessons. The curriculum has a strong influence on their enthusiasm for learning. One child wrote recently, 'This morning I was jumping for joy...' about the class trip to an art gallery in Liverpool. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, but their knowledge and understanding of life in other countries is outstanding. Children feel safe because adults care for them so well and the rare episodes of bullying are dealt with swiftly. They have a healthy attitude because school meals are prepared thoughtfully and exercise is regular and beneficial. Children possess a good knowledge of religious beliefs different from their own. They are well involved, through the school council, in the running of the school. However they could be further drawn into, and be influential in, matters beyond the physical state of the buildings and grounds.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The consistently good quality of teaching is impressive. This has been achieved through a cohesive plan to enliven learning so that more lessons come to life and sparkle. Lesson monitoring and feedback, well considered training for teachers and visits to and links with other schools have been key factors in this development. The use of computers by staff has helped add interest and learning has generally become more active. This was borne out in an outstanding literacy lesson on Macbeth where pupils were inspired and motivated by becoming characters in costumes and having tasks as newspaper reporters. The work of teaching assistants is good as they work in harmony with teachers to provide focused support for individuals and small groups of pupils. In a very small number of lessons the work set does not challenge all the pupils as much as it could.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum, from the beginning in the Foundation Stage, is full of practical and engaging activities, which facilitate good achievement. Throughout the school, the children who find learning difficult are helped by work that is well geared to their needs. The International Schools' Award recognises the wide range of opportunities children have in finding out about other countries, for example, by listening to the didgeridoo played by an Australian visitor to the school. This aspect of the school, coupled with the teaching of Spanish and French, fascinating trips and after-school clubs is an outstanding feature of provision. Higher attaining pupils, particularly in Key Stage 2 enjoy work that challenges them, including that designed to develop their skills in thinking. There is more to do in ensuring that the curriculum in Years 1 and 2 results in better achievement for the more able.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care and support for all children is sensitively provided and exemplifies the Catholic ethos so prominent in the school. Arrangements for keeping them safe, including the vetting of staff, are in place and working. Parents are delighted with the school and appreciate the strides it has made of late. They value the good communication and rightly feel knowledgeable about their children's learning and areas for improvement. Positive relationships and a good curriculum ensure that children know about keeping fit, healthy and safe. The advice given to children about how to improve their work is generally good, but the guidance for higher attainers varies in quality across the school. This is one reason why attainment in Year 6 has improved so dramatically and why in Year 2 there is scope for higher attainment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The acting headteacher decisively picked up the gauntlet following the October 2005 inspection and has been well supported by the local authority, consultant headteacher and Archdiocese. Support progressively reduced as the school improved allowing it to stand on its own two feet. The local authority plans to continue with an enhanced level of support to help the school maintain its rapid rate of improvement. Effective management systems have been introduced to give clarity to staff and to raise expectations. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements feature highly and are making a difference in suitably holding staff to account. The governors have benefited from the support and training received from the local authority. Because of this, and the good quality reports they receive, they are well placed to both support and appropriately challenge the school in acting as a critical friend. Given the rapid progress made in the year since its last inspection, its effective self-review processes and the increasing impact of the governing body, the school's capacity to improve further is judged to be good.

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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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?	2
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?	2
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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 me and Mr Gill so very welcome when we came to see how you were getting on. It was particularly nice to meet with the school council. We were impressed with how polite and courteous you were and also with the way you wanted to talk to us about what you like about your school. We agree that St Austin's is a good school. Here are some of the things that we especially liked:

- that most of you are making good progress because lessons have become much more interesting
- the friendly atmosphere in the school and the teamwork between you and your friends and between the staff
- your behaviour is good
- there are many interesting and exciting things for you to do
- you know about the need to keep healthy and fit
- you are well cared for and looked after by the staff
- your headteacher is doing a good job in helping you be successful.

I have asked the staff to think about some things to make the school even better. These are:

- for teachers to be more involved in managing the subjects they look after
- to help some of you in Key Stage 1 to get even higher grades
- to involve yourselves and your parents more in planning to help the school improve further.

Thank you again for being so friendly and helpful.