

St Monica's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111322
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	310564
Inspection date	29 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Derek Aitken

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	125
School	
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Ms Angela Williams
Date of previous school inspection	18 November 2003
School address	St Monica's Close Appleton Warrington Cheshire WA4 3AG
Telephone number	01925 267609
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the effectiveness of the school's actions to improve achievement at the higher levels in mathematics at Key Stages 1 and 2; how well pupils develop independent learning skills and understand how to improve their work; and the quality of the Foundation Stage. The inspector gathered evidence from the school's self-evaluation; national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, policies and minutes; observation of the school at work; interviews with senior members of staff, the chair of governors and pupils; and the parents' questionnaires. The evidence found the school's own overall assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, to be largely justified. Discrepancies between self-evaluation and inspection judgements only arose because the school judged itself too harshly in a few aspects of its work.

Description of the school

This small school is situated in a residential area on the outskirts of the town. Pupils come from a variety of backgrounds but social and economic circumstances are generally favourable. The vast majority of the pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Very few pupils have a statement of special educational need. The school holds a number of awards including the National Healthy Schools Award and the Activemark, both of which were achieved this year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school in which pupils achieve very well both academically and in terms of their personal and social development. Parents and carers are very supportive of the school and value highly the contribution it makes to the education of their children. St Monica's is, as parents agree, 'like one extended family, where all children's needs are sensitively catered for by hardworking staff to ensure they reach their potential'.

On entry to Reception, the levels of children's skills and knowledge vary from year to year because group sizes are relatively small. In most years they are broadly at the level expected nationally for four-year-olds. Children make extremely good progress in Reception and their skills and knowledge are above average when they join Year 1. They continue to progress at this rate thereafter, which enables them to reach high standards in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6. Standards have risen progressively in these subjects, culminating in the school's best ever results in 2007, with two-thirds of pupils achieving the higher Level 5 in all subjects. A significant factor in this improvement is the high quality of the monitoring of the planning for different subjects and the progress of individual pupils. When relative weaknesses are identified, appropriate action is swiftly taken and rigorously evaluated to gauge the impact in raising pupils' competence in specific aspects of their work. For example, when it was noted that pupils were making some routine errors with mathematical calculations, lesson plans were changed to allow pupils more time to practise their computational skills. There are some encouraging early signs of the impact of this initiative, for example, in the current Year 6 class. The school has successfully addressed the weaknesses in pupils' investigational skills in science identified at the previous inspection to enable pupils to achieve very well in this subject too. Boys and girls of all abilities achieve equally well. The school's very successful commitment to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities shows in the exceptional progress these pupils make.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Pupils take great enjoyment in their education because of the excellent care, guidance and support they receive and an outstanding curriculum. Despite its small size, the school works tirelessly to provide pupils with a wide range of opportunities which underpin their personal development and help them develop a broad range of skills and interests. Good examples of these are the recent drama sessions delivered in conjunction with the partner high school as part of the national 'Anti-bullying Week', and lessons taught by specialist sports coaches. Pupils enthusiastically support the ever-expanding number of after-school clubs. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good overall, with particular strengths in the first three elements. Pupils are open and welcoming and behave maturely. They carry out a very wide range of duties responsibly and make equally good use of other opportunities to contribute to the school and wider community. Examples include their effective participation in the Healthy Schools Task Force and raising large sums of money for charity. Pupils have an exceedingly good understanding of healthy lifestyles, as reflected in their recent awards, and of how to stay safe. Excellent relationships ensure that pupils are confident in sharing concerns with adults. The school has effective liaison with outside agencies to support pupils with identified needs. The pupils' excellent grasp of basic skills, combined with their exceptional attendance, sets them up very well for later life.

The detailed analysis of data, which directs appropriate readjustments to the curriculum, is complemented by a very effective tracking system. The school uses this information to build in-depth profiles of all pupils to help them realise their potential. Precise and detailed individual

education plans provide the basis for excellent support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Tailored programmes are very successful in consolidating basic skills for pupils who would benefit from extra help and links with local primary schools have been exploited effectively to extend opportunities for gifted and talented pupils. Targets for pupils' progress set high expectations for staff and pupils alike. Nonetheless, these very challenging targets are regularly met and often exceeded.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers reinforce excellent relationships and capitalise effectively on pupils' responsiveness and highly positive attitudes to learning. Lessons move at a good pace and teachers plan effectively to meet the needs of all pupils. Resources, including information and communication technology (ICT), are used well to sustain pupils' interest and concentration. Pupils contribute well verbally, for example in lesson summaries, which boosts their self-esteem. Opportunities are sometimes missed in lessons, however, for pupils to assess their own learning and so gain a better understanding of their next steps. Similarly, while teachers' marking is conscientious and often contains helpful comments, it is insufficiently related to the targets pupils have to push their learning on very quickly.

A key factor in the success of the school lies in its outstanding leadership and management. The headteacher, ably assisted by the deputy headteacher, sets a very clear direction for the school and a strong steer for the staff who meet their high expectations well. The work of the school is meticulously organised and systems are monitored, evaluated and reviewed with an unsparing eye to promote further improvement. The school's small size imposes several constraints on strategic planning and annual uncertainty with regard to arrangements for pupil groupings. Nonetheless, school leaders have used resources, both financial and human, very creatively and astutely to raise standards and further develop the quality of education. Middle leaders are reflective practitioners who monitor their subjects very effectively. Governors work very well to support the school and have developed good systems to enable them to monitor its work closely. The school has taken considerable strides forward since its previous inspection and demonstrates the capacity for similar improvement in the future. It provides very good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The Foundation Stage provides a very good education for the youngest children. Children make excellent progress in all areas of their learning, so that when they leave the Reception class, nearly all achieve the early learning goals and a large number exceed them. High levels of care ensure that children settle in quickly and enjoy their learning. One of the many strengths is the highly effective links the staff have built with parents to underpin all areas of children's development. A wide range of well planned and stimulating activities ensures that children are fully engrossed in their learning. Resources are chosen carefully to provide children with multi-sensory experiences to help them acquire and reinforce basic skills. Outstanding teaching is supported by the careful deployment of the teaching assistant and additional adults to ensure sensitive support for small groups and individual children. Arrangements for recording children's skills and progress are thorough and detailed, and assessment is used very effectively to plan lessons and to target support for the children who need extra help. The Foundation Stage is led and managed very well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that pupils have further opportunities to assess their own work and use their individual targets more productively to contribute further to their achievement.

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Annex A

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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	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

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?	1
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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

Inspection of St Monica's Catholic Primary School, Warrington, WA4

I am writing to thank you for helping me when I visited your school and to tell you about the inspection findings. I was lucky to have the opportunity to have a longer conversation with some pupils. You told me how much you enjoyed school because of the fun lessons and how much you appreciated the school's efforts to provide you with lots of opportunities to develop new interests and skills in the afternoon lessons and after-school clubs. I, certainly, could have benefited from learning cookery skills at an early age! The huge range of duties you carry out so well and without any fuss impressed me. This enables all of you to do your bit for the school and helps you become very responsible.

I judge that your school is outstanding in nearly all the parts of its work. It helps all of you, including the Reception children, to reach high standards in your work and make extremely good progress. You are taught well, and because you get on so well with the staff and are keen to answer their questions, you learn well. The school also supports very well those pupils who sometimes find learning difficult - not just in the classroom but also in ensuring that they can take a full part in after-school activities. The pupils who find learning easier are not overlooked either, as your school works hard to ensure that they are given extra opportunities to stretch them in their learning.

As you said, you are like 'one big, happy family'. This does not happen by chance. The headteacher and her staff look after you exceptionally well. They make sure you are safe, well cared for and valued. Importantly, they also keep a very close eye on how well you are learning, so that they can step in quickly to make sure each and every one of you can do your best.

I have asked the headteacher and her staff to do one thing to help you learn even more quickly. That is, to give you more opportunities to check your own work in lessons and make better use of the targets you already have.

You can help by keeping up your amazingly high levels of attendance and thinking hard about what you do well and how you can do even better!