

Our Lady and St Benedict Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124317
Local Authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	314885
Inspection dates	15–16 January 2008
Reporting inspector	John Eadie

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	167
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Diane Jones
Headteacher	Deborah Sims
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2006
School address	Abbey Lane Abbey Hulton Stoke-on-Trent ST2 8AU
Telephone number	01782 234646
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Our Lady and St Benedict is in an estate of largely social housing on the edge of the city and serves the local and Catholic community, with Catholic pupils coming from a wider area. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than average. There are a very few pupils who speak languages other than English as their home language. The school has had problems with staff absence through illness over the last couple of years and has also had difficulty finding replacements for staff who have left.

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 has had some difficulties in the last few years with discontinuity in staffing and a consequent legacy of underachievement, but has come through this and is now giving its pupils a satisfactory education. In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

The most important factor in the progress that the school has made is in the improvement in the quality of teaching which is now good. This is helping pupils catch up lost ground and they are making much better progress. Their achievement is now satisfactory but standards are still low, particularly in writing and mathematics. Although most teaching is now good, there are occasions in lessons when the pace of learning slows and others when the marking policy is not used consistently. There is appropriate support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and these pupils make the same progress as their classmates.

The process of improvement is well under way and recognised by some parents who say things such as, 'I am extremely pleased with the difference in the last twelve months; it is definitely a more challenging school than it was before.' A significant minority of parents is less happy though, with several being concerned about the number of changes of teacher in some classes, which has disrupted their children's learning. This has been addressed as almost all classes now have a full time teacher.

Parents also expressed concern about the disruptive behaviour of a few pupils and a lack of communication about the changes that are happening. Although a very small minority of pupils do have problems maintaining acceptable behaviour, the school has implemented good systems for managing this. These systems are applied consistently by teachers so that other pupils' learning is rarely affected. As a pupil said, 'The behaviour policy stops pupils wasting time and our class has made a lot of progress.' Although the school has made a start at improving communication with parents, by holding regular pupils' progress meetings for example, parents are not given sufficient information to help them to support their children's progress.

Provision for children in the Nursery and Reception is satisfactory. Children settle quickly as the staff rightly focus on their personal, social and emotional development from the start. The curriculum through the school is suitably broad and balanced. Pastoral care for pupils is good, with all adults showing high levels of care and concern for pupils. A strength is the work of the newly appointed learning mentor, who is helping pupils deal with social problems. This is appreciated by many other pupils who know there is always someone with whom to discuss their concerns. There are good new systems to set targets for pupils' next steps in learning and to check on progress. These are being used well and pupils are enthusiastic about the progress they are making and how their targets are helping them. Parents also recognise their value, saying such things as, 'My children have made excellent progress and can tell me exactly what they are working towards in their own targets.' These new systems are not yet resulting in improving pupils' achievement as they have not had time to take full effect. Rates of attendance are well below average as far more families take holidays during term than in most schools.

Leadership and management are satisfactory as, although many of their new initiatives are the reason behind the improvements being made, subject leaders are not yet sufficiently involved in monitoring. Although staff are working well to improve the behaviour of some pupils, systems have not been set up to ensure that they always share information about these pupils. Bearing

in mind the progress made since the last inspection and the drive from all staff and governors to continue to improve, the school is soundly placed to continue on its upward path.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children start in the Nursery with levels of skills and knowledge below those usually found. They make sound progress but, by the time they start Year 1, their standards are still below expectations. Planning for all areas of learning is good, with a balance of activities led by an adult and those children choose for themselves. However, children are not always guided sufficiently to ensure that they have as wide a range of experiences as possible. There are also opportunities missed to reinforce areas of learning while children are involved in other activities, for example by using questions to get them to improve their speaking skills. Teachers assess pupils' gains in skills well and make good use of these assessments to plan next steps in learning. Good practice is also seen in children being encouraged to look for good features and areas that could be improved in their classmate's work, which helps their learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, particularly in writing and mathematics, by ensuring consistently good teaching, especially in terms of its pace and the feedback on the progress that pupils receive through marking.
- Raise standards by improving the monitoring role of subject leaders.
- Improve behaviour by ensuring that all staff share information about pupils with behavioural difficulties.
- Work more closely with parents to ensure that they are fully involved in their children's learning and that rates of attendance are improved.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory, but which have areas of underperformance, will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The school now gathers good data on pupils' progress, which shows that this has accelerated considerably with most pupils beginning to catch up the lost ground of previous underachievement. Many pupils, particularly in Year 6, made excellent progress last term. However, there is much ground for pupils still to cover and standards are low, although achievement is now satisfactory. The last inspection highlighted the low levels of challenge for more able pupils and this has been addressed well, with many examples of these pupils being given really challenging work and making better progress. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language make the same progress as their classmates.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils make a good contribution to the school community by accepting a broad range of responsibilities which they take seriously. For example, older pupils act as monitors for younger children. Others represent their peers on the school council, which they feel is an influential

body. Most pupils enjoy school, behave well and attend regularly. A small minority of pupils very occasionally disrupts learning, but this is diminishing as a result of the actions taken by the school. Most pupils feel safe because they know that occasional bullying and racist remarks are dealt with well. They have a sound understanding of the importance of diet and exercise, as shown by the healthy snacks they buy from the eco café and their participation in exercise. Pupils' moral, cultural and social development is satisfactory and spiritual development is good. Pupils respond well to the frequent opportunities for prayer and reflection provided by the school. They have a sound awareness of the importance of looking after the environment and are involved in recycling and keeping the school free of litter. Pupils' sound academic progress and social skills are a satisfactory preparation for their secondary education. Despite the best efforts of the school, a small number of pupils do not attend regularly enough and attendance is below average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Effective teaching is a major contributory factor to the recent improvement in pupils' achievement. Most lessons have clear learning objectives, which are easily understood by pupils. A particular improvement is that lesson planning is based on an accurate assessment of previous learning, enabling pupils to make much better progress. The use of a wide range of activities, including individual research, reinforces pupils' learning. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively and provide good support for pupils. Relationships between teachers and pupils are largely characterised by mutual respect. Discussion with other pupils and frequent opportunities for peer and self-assessment, help pupils to develop their ideas and improve their literacy skills. Work set for more able pupils presents a good level of challenge, which they enjoy. However, all this good practice, whilst improving rapidly, is not yet consistent across all classes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum provides a suitably broad and balanced range of activities, which meets the needs of pupils of all abilities. Opportunities for writing have been increased and these are beginning to have an effect in improving standards, although there is still some way to go. Clear targets set for pupils' improvement and work closely focused on these targets have resulted in improved achievement in reading. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory and enables these pupils to make sound progress. The small number of pupils who are at the early stages of learning English are usually soundly supported in lessons, although there are times when their particular needs are not met so well. A satisfactory range of educational visits gives more relevance to pupils' learning and the school provides a fair range of extra-curricular activities, which pupils enjoy.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good systems are in place to ensure pupils are healthy and safe. These are strengthened by effective liaison with external agencies, for example in relation to improving behaviour. Arrangements for promoting pupils' social and emotional well-being are good and improving. Pupils particularly value the support of the learning mentor when they are experiencing social,

behavioural or emotional difficulties. Teachers provide pupils with good guidance on how to improve their work so they reach their learning targets. Marking also provides good guidance to pupils on how to improve their work, but this is not consistent across all classes. These systems are relatively new but are already having an effect in improving pupils' progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

One of the major issues at the last inspection was to implement more robust procedures to check teaching. A thorough programme of monitoring is now in place and records show that this is having the desired effect in improving the quality of teaching. Leaders have rightly focused on raising standards in English and mathematics. Although progress has been hindered somewhat as many subject leaders are new to their posts and have not yet been fully involved in the monitoring process. However, challenging targets have been set for pupils' progress and the school's development. The local authority, after a slow start, is now being very supportive in the setting of, and helping the school progress towards, these targets.

The school has built an accurate picture of its strengths and areas for development. However, it is only recently that governors and staff, other than the headteacher and deputy headteacher, have been fully involved in this process. Governors' involvement in monitoring has developed well over the last year and governors are now in a better position to hold the school to account.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	3
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?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	4
The behaviour of learners	3
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	3

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?	3
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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

17 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Our Lady and St Benedict Catholic Primary School, Stoke-on-Trent, ST2 8AU

Thank you so much for the welcome that you gave us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you and hearing how much you think your school has improved. You will know that when it was inspected a year ago it was not doing as well as it should have been. Things have improved and your school is now giving you a satisfactory education.

These are the best things about your school:

- You are making much better progress as teaching has improved and is now good.
- Another reason for your improved progress is the very clear targets that have been set to help you improve your work. Many of you told us that these are very helpful to you and you are therefore trying hard and doing well.
- All adults take very good care of you and you told us that you really appreciate having the learning mentor to talk to and help you when you are finding it difficult to get on with others.
- You enjoy school because lessons are interesting and you can see how well you are doing.

There are still things which need improving, these are the most important:

- The standards you are reaching, particularly in writing and maths, are not good enough and we have asked your school to try to make sure that lessons are always good to help you do better.
- Some teachers have started new jobs in looking after their subjects and we have asked the school to make sure that they start checking on standards in their subjects as soon as possible.
- Some of you do not always behave as well as you should and, although the learning mentor and other staff do well to try to help you behave better, they do not always share information which might help you improve quicker.
- The school does not always tell your parents enough so that they can help you learn and a few of you do not attend school regularly enough.

We are sure that you will continue to work hard and help the headteacher and teachers continue to improve your school. Well done!

Yours sincerely John D. Eadie Lead inspector

17 January 2008

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We are sure that you will continue to work hard and help the headteacher and teachers continue to improve your school. Well done!

Yours sincerely
John D. Eadie
Lead inspector