

St Ambrose Barlow Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103465
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	323833
Inspection date	5 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Martin Cole

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	215
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Gunn
Headteacher	Gregory Jones
Date of previous school inspection	19 September 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Shirley Road Hall Green Birmingham B28 9JJ
Telephone number	01214 642791

Age group	4–11
Inspection date	5 December 2008
Inspection number	323833

Fax number

01214 647008

Age group	4-11
Inspection date	5 December 2008
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

the latest evidence of achievement by pupils in Years 3–6

pupils' responses to guidance on being healthy

provision for the most able pupils

the guidance pupils receive on their work.

Evidence was gathered from the school's assessment information, planning and monitoring documents, observation of lessons in each class, discussions with staff and pupils, and from parents' written comments. There was no detailed investigation of other aspects of the school's work but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The great majority of pupils are White British or White Irish. A small but growing number of pupils from various minority ethnic groups is being admitted as the profile of the local population changes. The proportions of pupils receiving free school meals or having learning difficulties or disabilities are below average. The school's Early Years Foundation Stage provision (EYFS) comprises a Reception class.

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. Pupils' achievement, in both their academic work and their personal development, is exceptional. Their excellent academic skills and admirable personal qualities are preparing them extremely well for their future education and the later demands of adult life. The close-knit community of this school revolves around a sure sense of values and purpose implemented through very caring and supportive relationships. Both pupils and their parents have very high regard for the school. 'Happy', 'friendly', 'family feeling', 'stimulating' and 'supportive' are amongst the many words of praise repeated frequently in the large number of written comments parents sent to inspectors.

From their early days in the Reception class right through to Year 6, pupils grow greatly in confidence, enjoyment of learning and pride in achievement. The excellent pastoral care of staff ensures pupils feel very happy and safe at school and that they understand well what they must do to be healthy. Rigorous attention is paid to formal procedures for safeguarding pupils and ensuring their personal welfare. Staff manage pupils with much warmth and encouragement. Behaviour is excellent and attendance well above average. Pupils contribute very responsibly to the life of the school, doing the sensible and caring thing as a matter of course. They undertake conscientiously a good many duties to help others in school, for example as 'peer mediators'. Opportunities to contribute to the wider community are rather few. The excellent atmosphere in the school is highly conducive to pupils' learning and personal growth. It allows and encourages pupils to take full advantage of the excellent teaching and curriculum provided. As a result, pupils make outstanding progress at each stage of their education. Pupils start in Reception with attainment that is in line with, or slightly above, the level typical for their age. They leave the school with very high standards, the great majority of them exceeding the attainment expected for their age. Results in the national tests for pupils aged seven and eleven have been exceptionally high in all of the subjects tested in each of the four years to 2007. The 2008 results have yet to be finalised but provisional school data suggest they are likely to be just as high as previously. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds make equally good progress. Boys do as well as girls – an improvement on the national situation.

The outstanding strength of the teaching is the way it combines tough challenges for pupils with provision of all the support and encouragement pupils need to succeed. Teachers and well-trained teaching assistants work together very closely to ensure all pupils' needs are met. Together with the excellent relationships staff make with pupils, all of this makes pupils enthusiastic, confident and determined learners. Pupils are given clear targets to aim at as they learn and receive good guidance on how they can improve their work. However, teachers' marking is more constructive in some classes than others. Pupils are effectively encouraged to assess their own and each other's work in ways which enhance their responsible attitude to learning as well as their understanding of how they can improve.

The excellent curriculum includes thoroughly planned and highly effective programmes of formal work in subjects as well as a wide range of educational visits, visitors, special events and cultural activities. A lively variety of after-school clubs cater well for pupils' interests, especially in sport and music; they extend learning opportunities and further enhance enjoyment.

The school has made valuable improvements to its ways to help pupils appreciate the growing cultural diversity of their community and society, particularly through links with other faith communities and visits to places of worship such as a mosque and a synagogue. The school

recognises, though, that it can do still more to promote community cohesion through more frequent contact with adults and children representative of the wide cultural diversity amongst the local population. The very many excellent qualities of the school reflect the determined and visionary leadership of the headteacher and the total support he receives from a dedicated staff that is united by fully shared values and complete commitment to the pupils' needs. Staff teamwork is extremely strong. The remarkable consistency in the results pupils have achieved in recent years reflects the school's very accurate evaluation of itself through rigorous checks, particularly on pupils' progress and on the teaching. It also results from the school's constant search for ways in which it can further improve the already high standard of its work. Governors play their part in keeping a close watch over the school and giving full support and encouragement to its ambitions and endeavours. The school's unerring record of success and improvement shows it has an excellent capacity for further improvement, wherever scope for it can be found.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The school's many positive qualities are as evident in the Reception class as elsewhere. A welcoming, encouraging and caring atmosphere helps the children to feel confident and content quickly. The very well-managed provision includes excellent teaching and a curriculum very firmly focused on pupils' carefully identified needs. Extremely close teamwork and a full consistency of approach amongst the staff make for very well-organised activities and a very happy and purposeful atmosphere. All of this leads to the children's excellent progress. By the end of Reception, standards are already well above average. There is a very appropriate mix of child-chosen and play activities with structured and intensive adult-led learning. Wide-ranging activities are carefully designed to be both very purposeful and fun. At the same time children are constantly but sensitively challenged to learn as much as they can, and they enjoy rising to the challenge. The curriculum is well supported by indoor accommodation, which is spacious, well organised, vibrant and attractive. However, some limits on the range of ways to learn are imposed by the outdoor accommodation, which is limited in space and equipment. Children are less keen to learn there.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the accommodation and resources for outdoor curriculum activity in the Foundation Stage.
- Extend ways to help pupils understand and participate in the increasingly diverse community the school serves.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	1

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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	2
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 learners' needs?	1
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

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

9 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Ambrose Barlow Catholic Primary School, Birmingham B28 9JJ

The inspectors who visited your school recently really enjoyed their day with you. We want to thank all of you for your very friendly welcome.

It was great to see that you really enjoy school. You clearly have a lot of fun and get on very well with each other and with the adults. We were very impressed with your sensible attitude to school and to your work. Your behaviour is excellent and you try really hard in your lessons. This is all helping you to make extremely good progress.

The teachers also help your progress by giving you excellent lessons. They provide you with very suitable work that helps you learn a lot. The adults all give you plenty of help and encouragement. They look after you extremely well so that you are happy and safe at school. They also arrange plenty of interesting visits, events and after-school clubs which you enjoy.

We have said that yours is an outstanding school. The adults in charge of the school are doing an extremely good job. They make sure that you receive an excellent education. However, we have suggested two ways that the school could be even better.

- We think the Reception children should have better places and equipment for learning and play outdoors.
- We want the school to increase its links with the local community to help you understand and get on with all the different sorts of people who live there.

We hope you will play your part by joining in any new opportunities the school provides for you.

We wish you all the best for the future.

Yours faithfully,

Martin Cole Lead inspector