

St Austin's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104806
Local Authority	St Helens
Inspection number	324108
Inspection dates	2–3 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Kevin Johnson

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	229
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	Mr B Bielby
Headteacher	Mrs Patsy Wade
Date of previous school inspection	7 November 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Heath Street St Helens Merseyside WA9 5NJ
Telephone number	01744 606598
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Almost all pupils at this average sized school are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. A smaller than average proportion of pupils has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Early Years Foundation Stage provision comprises a morning Nursery and a full time Reception class. There is a breakfast club in school. After school care on site was inspected separately and receives a separate report.

The school has achieved the International Schools Award and has gained Healthy School's status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Austin's is a good school, where pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Leaders have continued to build on the rapid improvement highlighted in the previous report.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also outstanding. Pupils are invariably polite and well mannered. Their exemplary behaviour and relationships stem from the school's ethos of respect, tolerance and understanding of others' feelings. Pupils enjoy school, not least because of the opportunities they have to test their creative talents through the lively curriculum. Links with schools overseas mean that pupils' resulting knowledge of other cultures is exceptional. Pupils say that their four most favourite things about school are, 'teachers, lessons, sport and food'. They relish the choices provided on the healthy lunchtime menus as much as they enjoy lessons, after school sports clubs and active playtimes. Much work has been done by the school to ensure pupils gain the life skills they need to become active members of a community and to secure their economic well-being. The school council gives pupils a strong voice in school matters. Currently, council members are considering ways to reward good attendance and punctuality. By the time pupils leave St Austin's they are confident, self-assured young people who are extremely well prepared to advance to the next stages of their education.

From starting points which are below expectations for their age when they enter Nursery, pupils achieve well by the end of Year 6. Progress is good, but has been more rapid in English than in mathematics. The school is currently focusing on improving achievement in mathematics across the whole school. The number of pupils who achieve higher than the expected levels in this subject, however, is relatively low. National test results for 2008 show that standards overall are broadly average at Key Stage 1. The school's assessments for Key Stage 2 indicate above average standards in English and average in mathematics and science. Currently, pupils are on track to reach the challenging targets the school has set for them in writing and mathematics. The consistently good quality of teaching and learning is a key factor in pupils' good achievement. Lessons are lively, enjoyable and well planned. Teachers' subject knowledge is good. Their particularly skilled use of electronic whiteboards keeps pupils well focused and lifts the pace of learning. There are excellent relationships in classes. Pupils feel valued and well supported. Their targets for learning are clear so they know what is expected of them. The guidance given through marking, however, is not of consistent quality in all subjects. Whilst good practice is seen in the marking of writing, pupils are given too little guidance about how to improve their mathematics. The curriculum is varied, interesting and promotes pupils' achievement and their enjoyment of learning well. There is an outstanding range of activities to enrich learning.

Leadership and management of the school are good overall. Outstanding leadership from the headteacher has successfully steered the school through an extremely difficult period and secured the support of the whole school community. Standards and the quality of provision continue to improve and leaders have consolidated the school's good capacity for further success. The deputy headteacher is highly supportive and carries out a crucial role in helping to monitor standards and provide an accurate overview of the school's effectiveness. Governors provide good challenge and support for the school. They monitor its progress well and hold the school to account over standards. Finances are managed efficiently to ensure the school provides good value for money. There are effective systems in place for checking on academic progress and the quality of teaching and learning. Academic targets have been raised to bring

about further improvement. All pupils and staff and parents are embraced by the school's inclusiveness and there is good emphasis on promoting community cohesion.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress because provision for their learning and development is managed well. When they enter Nursery, their skills are below those typically seen at that age especially in communication, language and literacy, and personal, social and emotional development. By the end of Reception, children are working securely within their early learning goals in all areas of learning. There is a good balance between activities led by adults and those that children choose for themselves. Children's progress in personal, social and emotional development is rapid. They quickly become familiar with daily routines in the classroom, such as tidying up, and learn to take turns and play amicably alongside each other. Independence is encouraged so that children are able to make choices and contribute ideas about what they want to learn by the time they enter Year 1. There is a good focus on developing early literacy skills. Daily lessons on letters and sounds boost children's confidence about tackling reading and writing. The outside area is used well to support children's learning alongside their physical development. Provision for children's welfare meets requirements. There are good systems for ensuring that children are happy and feel safe. Staff roles and responsibilities with regard to children's welfare are clear. All staff members contribute to assessing and evaluating children's progress and planning the next steps in learning. The school's positive relationships with parents and carers add considerably to children's feeling of security.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the numbers of pupils who reach higher levels in mathematics.
- Improve the consistency and effectiveness of marking across subjects, particularly in mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress as they move through the school. At the end of Year 2, in 2008, pupils exceeded the national expectation in reading and reached broadly average standards in writing and mathematics. Standards have risen over the past three years. School assessments for pupils in Year 6 indicate that standards are currently above average in English and broadly average in science and mathematics. Although the large majority of pupils reach levels expected for their age in mathematics, fewer than expected attain higher levels. The school is working towards improving overall performance by raising standards in mathematics to match those in English. Teachers are focusing particularly on the level of challenge for the more able pupils in mathematics, especially among girls, in order to increase the number of pupils who attain Level 5. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given good support. Work is planned well to match their particular needs and ensure their good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils really enjoy school and attendance is good. They feel safe because relationships and behaviour are outstanding. There is a highly developed sense of inclusion, which all pupils respect fully. As a result, pupils are adamant that aggression and racism are not present in the

school. Sport is high on their agenda and after-school clubs are exceptionally well attended. Pupils fully appreciate their need to combine a sensible diet with their physical activity in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Pupils are keen to exercise their initiative by taking on responsibilities in school. They work exceptionally well with their local high school and recently collaborated very successfully in the production of a French nativity play. A Mini Enterprise competition, which the school has won in consecutive years, enabled pupils to demonstrate to a panel of judges how they would spend £2,000 to organise a themed event. The school council is a very active body, which has negotiated considerable improvements to the internal fabric of the school as well as to the playground. Other pupils act as play-leaders to help make playtimes safer and more enjoyable; some are trained as peer mentors to help maintain pupils' sense of justice and fair play in the playground. There are always willing volunteers to organise charitable fund-raising events. Consequently, by the time pupils leave the school they make outstanding progress towards developing the skills and attitudes they need to secure their economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Consistently good teaching accounts for pupils' good achievement. Lessons are planned well and are well organised to make sure there is a good balance between listening and practical learning. Resources are used effectively to engage pupils in interesting activities. Skilled teaching assistants make a valuable contribution by giving good support to groups and individual pupils during activity times, but sometimes their role during the first part of the lesson is unclear and less effective. Relationships in lessons are very good. Pupils know that their contribution to lessons is valued. As a result they are more confident and keen to learn.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum promotes pupils' achievement well. Pupils' learning is enhanced by the inclusion of French and Spanish and through work linked to the International Schools projects. The good focus on developing literacy, mathematics and information and communication technology skills in recent years has brought about good improvement in standards and achievement in those subjects. The calendar of activities planned to enrich pupils' learning is an outstanding feature. There is a very wide selection of after-school clubs and residential visits to France where pupils can test their French speaking skills. Provision for pupils' personal, social, health education and citizenship is well established. Good use is made of outside agencies to inform pupils about the potential dangers of drugs and other substances and of the importance of secure relationships.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Parents typically comment that their children enjoy school and make good progress. They agree overwhelmingly that their children are well cared for. Pupils endorse their parents' views. They describe the care they receive from adults in school as, 'brilliant'. They feel safe in school because expectations regarding behaviour and relationships are clear. All procedures to safeguard pupils meet requirements and pupils are aware of possible hazards they may have to face both

in and outside of school. Support for the most vulnerable pupils is good. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from clearly written individual plans, which guide their learning and help them to achieve well. The school has raised attendance levels and met its targets through close monitoring and encouragement given to the families of persistent absentees. Systems for tracking pupils' academic progress and setting targets are good. They are used well by teachers to review progress and set new challenges on a regular basis. Pupils know their targets well and often assess their own progress to measure how well they do. They receive good day-to-day guidance about improving their writing from teachers' marking, but less so with regard to mathematics where marking does not clearly show the next steps they should take.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is led and managed well. This has brought about good improvement over the past three years. Professional development for all staff and effective monitoring has secured consistently good teaching throughout the school. There are good systems for checking the school's overall performance. The roles and responsibilities of some within the leadership team have been revised very recently. Although there is no complacency in their drive for improvement and their contribution to the self-evaluation process, it is too early to measure fully the outcomes of their work. All staff and governors contribute to the school's accurate self-evaluation. The school's progress is reflected in the more challenging targets set for future attainment. The school reaches out to the community that it serves and because of the hard work of staff, governors and pupils it is held in high regard. Community cohesion is nurtured through opportunities for family learning and ample occasions when pupils link with local schools and businesses on various projects. The school offers good value for money.

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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?	2
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
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?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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/or disabilities make progress	2

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	2
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 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

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	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

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

Thank you for the wonderful welcome you gave us when we came to inspect your school recently. It was a pleasure to talk to you about your school because of your outstanding politeness and good manners. We were pleased to find out that your attendance has improved. We judged it to be good. That is a very important step, so do keep it up. Your behaviour is excellent too and that is why you are all able to work so hard and enjoy school as much as you do.

St Austin's is a good school and you all achieve well. You told us that your lessons are fun and we agree with you. Your teachers and headteacher work very hard to make sure you all do your best and that there are lots of exciting things for you to learn. The grown-ups in school take good care of you. Nevertheless, even though the standards you reach in English have improved you could still do better in mathematics.

Your parents, teachers and school governors love your school as much as you do and would like it to be even better. I have suggested two things to help that happen and make them all feel even more proud of you. I have asked your teachers to help more of you reach the highest level in mathematics that you can so that standards will improve. I have also asked that when they mark your work, especially your mathematics books, they make sure that you know exactly what to do next to improve on what you have done.