

# St Columba's RC Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	105220
<b>Local Authority</b>	Bolton
<b>Inspection number</b>	324183
<b>Inspection dates</b>	24–25 November 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Diane Auton

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.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	222
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
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Fr F McCauley
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs N Collins
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	2 November 2005
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Ripley Street Tonge Moor Bolton Lancashire BL2 3AR
<b>Telephone number</b>	01204 333 421
<b>Fax number</b>	01204 301 420

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<b>Age group</b>	3–11
<b>Inspection dates</b>	24–25 November 2008
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This average sized urban primary school serves a mixed area which has a significant level of social and economic disadvantage. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds; since the last inspection, the proportion of pupils from other heritages has increased, but is still below average. A small number of pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. More pupils join or leave the school during the course of the year than in most schools. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average.

The school runs a before- and after-school club every day in term time.

The school holds the Healthy Schools Award, the Activemark and the Eco Bronze Award and it has Investors in People status. Its International Baccalaureate (IB) accreditation enables the school to provide the IB Primary Years Programme in all the year groups. In recognition of its IB World Status, the school has also recently become affiliated to the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school with many outstanding features. It operates successfully in very challenging circumstances. There is a strong focus on breaking down the significant barriers to learning that many pupils face and on securing the best possible outcomes for them. An ethos of self-respect and care for others is central to the school's happy and effective learning community. Pupils thrive in this supportive environment. They benefit greatly from the school leadership's evaluative and creative approach to all aspects of provision. This is reflected in pupils' good academic progress and in the high quality of their personal and social development.

Pupils' achievement is good. From very low starting points on entry to the Nursery children make good progress to reach levels of attainment that are below expectations for their age by the end of Reception. Pupils make good progress throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 and reach standards that are now above average by the end of Year 6. High quality support and well managed provision ensure that all pupils, including the more vulnerable, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those learning English as an additional language achieve well in relation to their abilities and starting points. The school's careful tracking of pupils' progress ensures that progress is consistent. Expectations are high; areas for improvement are identified and dealt with quickly and effectively. For example, the school is currently reviewing the links between the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Key Stage 1 in order to meet pupils' range of learning needs even more effectively when they transfer to Year 1.

The quality of teaching is good and good organisation helps all pupils to receive very effective support. The nurture group provides additional guidance and emotional support for pupils at risk of disaffection and makes sure work is targeted to their individual needs. Teachers are constantly evaluating the school's excellent curriculum and seeking out ways to make it even more vibrant and stimulating. Pupils say that lessons are interesting and learning is fun. Assessment is thorough. Pupils receive good verbal feedback on their progress. Written marking, however, does not consistently give pupils the clear advice they need on how to improve their work. Since joining the IB Primary Years Programme in 2004 the school has started to link subjects in a themed approach, based on enquiry and research. The school's evaluations show that this is having a very positive impact on achievement and helping pupils make good progress in writing.

Pupils develop excellent social skills and moral values in this extremely caring school. Their spiritual development is nurtured very well through regular opportunities for reflection in assemblies and lessons. Significant opportunities are provided to support their cultural development and prepare them for life in a multicultural society. They develop an extremely informed understanding of what life is like for children in other parts of the world through regular direct Internet contact with pupils from partner schools across Europe. The pupils are active fundraisers for local charities and show awareness of the needs of others. A strong focus on healthy living, ecological awareness and community involvement ensures that pupils are confident, sociable citizens, very well prepared to move on to the next stage in their education.

Excellent pastoral care ensures that pupils are happy and secure in school. Parents display great confidence in the school. 'Our children can't wait to tell us about what they've been learning,' and, 'School is such a happy place to be,' are typical comments, demonstrating how highly parents value all the school provides.

The headteacher provides high quality leadership. She sets an ambitious agenda for excellence and the staff team and proactive governors share her vision and work with her towards its achievement. Whole-school targets are accurate and challenging. Action plans are strategic and creative. These factors, combined with the complementary skills and talents of the other senior managers and subject leaders, give the school good capacity for continued improvement.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 2**

When children enter the nursery their skills and abilities are well below those typical for their age. As a result of good provision children settle quickly so that by the time they enter Year 1, although still below the national goals for their age, they have made good progress in relation to their starting points. They make outstanding progress in their personal development and become happy and receptive learners. Daily sessions focusing on letters and sounds are helping to boost early literacy skills well and this is helping children to approach reading and writing activities with growing confidence. The quality of teaching is good. The curriculum is planned well, with indoor and outdoor activities well matched to children's needs and providing interest and fun. Children interact well and enjoy warm relationships with the caring staff. Vulnerable children, those with additional learning needs and those at an early stage of learning English are all supported extremely well. Children's progress is observed carefully, so that additional support is given promptly to those who need it. Positive relationships with parents are established right from the start. Parents are well informed about their children's learning. The outdoor area is used well to promote children's social development as well as their skills across all the areas of learning. The before- and after-school club provides a caring and enjoyable environment for the EYFS children who attend it.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve the management of links between EYFS and Key Stage 1 in order to ensure that provision is tailored even more closely to the very wide range of learning needs presented by pupils when they transfer to Year 1.
- Improve the quality and consistency of marking to ensure that pupils are given clear guidance on how to improve their work.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Achievement is good. Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are broadly average in all subjects. Inspection evidence shows that standards at the end of Year 2 were below average in 2008. This dip is related to the high proportion of pupils with additional needs in the year group and to the high number of pupils who joined or left Year 2 during the year. The school's detailed records show that pupils make good progress throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 from their starting points towards challenging targets. Boys' attainment, especially in literacy, is an area for improvement. The school is implementing effective action to deal with this. At the end of Key Stage 2 standards have varied from below average to above average in recent years. Inspection evidence shows that standards at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2008 were above average, due to a successful whole-school drive to raise standards in English, mathematics and science. The proportion reaching the higher Level 5 increased significantly. Evidence from the inspection, including pupils' work and lesson observations, confirms that pupils in the current Year 6 are

maintaining these standards. Pupils who speak English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress in this inclusive school.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils' outstanding personal development is a major contributor to their good achievement. It is shown by their excellent behaviour and in their good attendance and punctuality. The school's emphasis on nurturing and valuing each individual ensures that pupils grow in self-esteem and form good quality relationships with staff and with each other. Their spiritual, moral and social development is excellent. They have outstanding awareness of their own and other cultures, fostered through the curriculum and, currently, through involvement in a British Council project linking the school with six schools across Europe. They enjoy taking responsibility, for example as school councillors or eco leaders. They collaborate well in groups or with a partner in lessons. These important life skills are developed exceptionally well and this, together with their good basic skills in English and mathematics, means that pupils are prepared extremely well for the future. They have excellent awareness of issues of personal safety and healthy lifestyles. They are supported extremely well by the school's excellent induction arrangements for new pupils and by well designed systems to prepare them for their transition to secondary education.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The overall quality of teaching is good, with some outstanding practice, and this effectively underpins the good progress pupils make. Where teaching is outstanding, the pace of learning is lively, pupils are given a very clear understanding of the purposes of their learning and they are starting to be able to assess their own progress accurately. Across the school, lessons are planned well to meet the range of pupils' needs. Activities are engaging and absorbing and this makes pupils enthusiastic learners who speak with obvious interest and enjoyment about their work. Warm, happy relationships in the well managed classrooms enable them to feel secure and ready to learn. Teaching assistants work in partnership with class teachers and make an effective contribution to learning support for all pupils, including those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are learning English as an additional language. The school uses a range of effective strategies to ensure that all pupils, including those who are vulnerable or at risk of becoming disaffected, enjoy full access to learning. Systematic assessment enables underachievement to be identified and addressed quickly. Teachers mark work conscientiously and marking celebrates pupils' achievements. It does not always give them sufficient written guidance on how to improve their work, however. At Key Stage 1, teachers' planning is starting to build closer links with EYFS practice, in order to tailor provision more closely to the wide range of pupils' learning needs when they move to Year 1. This is at too early a stage of implementation to impact on progress.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 1**

The school provides a vibrant and innovative curriculum that engages pupils' interests very successfully and contributes extremely well to their personal and academic development. Subjects are linked together in well planned units of enquiry. These units give learning activities

purpose and meaning and give pupils opportunities to develop a wide range of independent learning skills. Frequent, well structured opportunities enable pupils to develop their basic skills in literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT). Experiences to enrich pupils' learning are wide-ranging and of exceptional quality. They include visits, residential trips, visitors to school and contacts through virtual link-ups with other children in schools across Europe. The curriculum provides very well for pupils' personal, social and health education, effectively supporting their understanding of the importance of responsible relationships. French is taught in Key Stage 2. There are very good opportunities to enable pupils develop their interests and skills in sport and the performing arts.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils are extremely well cared for and receive great encouragement to achieve as well as possible in all aspects of their education. The school supports its most vulnerable pupils very well, working sensitively with them and their families to ensure that barriers to learning are overcome. Pupils are confident that adults are readily on hand to help with any problems that arise and so feel secure. Those who have additional learning needs or are learning English as an additional language are supported very well. The school liaises effectively with external agencies to promote pupils' progress and well-being. The use of individual learning targets is being developed well and helping older pupils to assess their own progress accurately. The school tracks progress very systematically, with regular checks on how all pupils are getting on with their learning. The school complies fully with statutory requirements for safeguarding pupils and for child protection. Health and safety requirements are met and pupils' awareness of health, safety and ecological issues is promoted extremely well. Partnerships with parents are developed very well through regular communications, including the school website, and through initiatives, such as family learning sessions. These support parents' involvement in their children's learning. Very good levels of care and support are also evident in the before- and after-school club.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher's clear vision for taking the school forward is shared wholeheartedly by the governors and by staff at all levels. Systems for evaluating how well the school is performing are firmly embedded and subject leaders assist well in ensuring the good and often outstanding quality of provision. Whole-school targets are challenging and aspirational. The school's leaders are skilled in identifying and planning appropriate actions to achieve them. A strong team ethos enables staff to share and develop their skills and to be confident curriculum innovators. A supportive and proactive governing body holds the school to account and acts as its critical friend. The school addresses the community cohesion agenda extremely successfully through an excellent range of partnerships that promote pupils' well-being, through its activities in its community and parish, and through its very well developed international links. The leadership has correctly identified a need to respond to the challenge presented by pupils' below average skills levels on entry to Key Stage 1. Subsequent work to improve the continuity of learning between the EYFS and Key Stage 1 is at an early stage of development.

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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?	1
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?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
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

<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
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**

Inspection of St Columba's RC Primary School, Bolton, BL2 3AR

Thank you for the lovely warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school. We really enjoyed our visit and the conversations we had with you. As you know, we came to see how well the school is doing and how you are all getting on with your learning. This is what we found.

- You are being given a good education at St Columba's. We think you go to a lovely school and I know you think so too.
- You work hard and you reach good standards. Well done. Keep it up and carry on enjoying learning!
- You are taught well. The teachers make your lessons very interesting and enjoyable and they make sure you have the help and support you need.
- We think you have a wonderful curriculum at St Columba's. Your work in the units of enquiry is helping you to develop so many excellent skills and we could see how much you enjoy your investigations and activities.
- The school is well led and the headteacher and the staff are always on the lookout for ways to make it even better!
- The adults in school look after you and care for you extremely well.
- Your behaviour is excellent and you are polite and caring young people.

I've asked the headteacher and staff to work on improving the written marking in your books, to be sure you're given clear advice on how to improve your work. I've also asked them to work on making some improvements in how the links between the EYFS and Key Stage 1 are organised to help pupils with their learning when they move to Year 1.

With my very best wishes for the future.