

St Nicholas Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103475
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	323836
Inspection dates	4 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Ted Wheatley

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	
School (total)	213
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Patricia Platt
Headteacher	Mrs Anna McGuire
Date of previous school inspection	13–14 March 2006
School address	Jockey Road Sutton Coldfield West Midlands B73 5US
Telephone number	0121 355 2649
Fax number	0121 355 6303

Age group	4–11
Inspection date(s)	4 March 2009
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

- The impact of staffing changes on the school, especially in the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.
- How the school is dealing with small variations in achievement between different groups of pupils.
- The quality of academic guidance, and how well pupils are informed about how well they are doing and how to improve their work.

Evidence was gathered from data on current standards and achievement, examination of pupils' work and school documents, observation of lessons, discussions with the headteacher, governors and staff, and pupils. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments of these areas, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage Reception class having attended a large number of different nurseries or playschool centres. Nearly all pupils come from White British backgrounds and all speak English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average but varies between year groups.

The school has an acting headteacher, a deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher. There have been several other recent changes to staffing. A non-governing body managed school club is available for 4 to 11 year olds before and after school opening hours.

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 excellent school. In Years 1 to 6, pupils achieve outstandingly well and reach high standards. In the Reception class, children reach or exceed expectations and make good progress. Almost all parents are very pleased with the school and are delighted that their children attend it. They speak highly of the care and attention provided, the headteacher and staff and the quality of the Catholic ethos of the school. One parent typically wrote in response to the Ofsted questionnaire that their child 'had a spring in their step and a big smile on their face every morning on the way to school'.

Pupils reach high standards from above average standards on entry to Year 1. The progress they make in nearly all classes is excellent, and pupils exceed the minimum expected of them and reach challenging targets. Recent small variations in achievement between different groups of pupils have been reversed. Pupils have excellent literacy skills. The great majority write well and speak confidently. They are keen to show how well they read and speak. Numeracy skills are also excellent and problem solving skills, which were relatively weaker in the recent past, are significantly improved. Standards in science are high and pupils have good enquiry skills and an excellent ability to express their scientific understanding and knowledge. Impressively, pupils are enthusiastic learners, taking part in all lessons with great enthusiasm.

Pupils' personal development is excellent, as the school recognises. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and their attendance is exceptionally high. Their behaviour and attitudes are outstanding and pupils arrive at school with high expectations of what they can achieve. Pupils have an excellent understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles. They eat sensibly, take part in a wide range of physical activities and enjoy the 'Wake up! Shake up!' programme and the 'Active Lunchtime' activities. Pupils treat each other and adults with respect and care. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils feel that they are privileged to be at a Catholic school and have an excellent understanding of Catholic values, and also of the beliefs and traditions of other religions and cultures. They take on responsibilities readily and carry them out meticulously. Those who are peer mediators report with some pride that they rarely have incidents to deal with. Pupils' contribution to the local community is excellent, much of it through the church, but also through other activities. For example, they have worked on environmental issues and on efforts to resolve local parking difficulties. At a wider level, they have broadened their knowledge and understanding of other cultures, for example, through activities organised by the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development to provide clean water in other countries. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their future lives.

Teaching is excellent and the great majority of lessons are full of activities that capture pupils' enthusiasm and effort. Teachers match work closely to pupils' learning needs. Lessons are fast paced and teachers ask challenging questions that mean pupils have to explain their thinking and understanding. This helps their learning and has been particularly effective in improving pupils' problem solving skills in mathematics and investigative skills in science. Support teachers and classroom assistants work closely with individuals and small groups of pupils, ensuring that

pupils of all abilities make equally excellent progress. The curriculum is outstanding and carefully designed to engage and challenge all pupils. Links between subjects are well established and a rich range of residential visits, day trips and visitors and special activity days enrich pupils' experiences. For example, pupils have participated in external visits to study environmental issues, visited the Tutankhamen Exhibition in London, and theatre and historical enactment groups have visited the school. The range of out-of-school activities is excellent and includes a choir, dance, drama, cricket, golf, athletics and swimming, and the level of participation is high. The personal, health and social education is effective and has a strong focus on emotional development and developing personal strengths within the context of Christian values.

The quality of care, support and guidance is good. Pastoral care is excellent and is based on excellent relationships between pupils, families and adults. The school provides outstanding support for pupils with learning or social difficulties, working closely with external agencies where needed. Safeguarding requirements are fully met and the school is safe and secure. Academic guidance is good and based on accurate assessment of pupils' performance. However, while teachers set academic targets, and most pupils know what these are, not all do. Some pupils do not know what they need to do to reach their targets, and marking does not always provide enough guidance.

Leadership and management are outstanding and the headteacher provides exceptional direction for the school's work. Some parents are concerned at the uncertainty of staffing because of the acting nature of several senior posts. These concerns were not confirmed by inspectors. The school provides excellent support and training so that all staff in leadership roles carry out their responsibilities effectively. Evaluation of the school's performance is accurate and actions taken to address relatively minor weaknesses have been very effective. For example, the minor differences in achievement between different groups have been eliminated. The one issue from the previous inspection has been dealt with well and the capacity to sustain excellence and ensure that improvement continues is outstanding. The school promotion of community cohesion is excellent, with many activities that help pupils learn to respect the traditions of different groups locally and of other cultures in Britain and around the world. Governors are exceptionally well informed, take an active role in school development and improvement and provide continuing challenge for the headteacher and all staff.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter school with skills and capabilities broadly in line with those expected for children of their age. Good provision enables children to make good progress and, by the end of the Reception Year, most have reached above average standards in all areas of learning. Outstanding progress is made in the development of children's personal, social and emotional skills. Children behave well, take turns, work collaboratively and play well together. They thrive in a safe, secure environment where excellent welfare arrangements are in place. A caring, nurturing atmosphere supports children's individual needs well. Good planning successfully achieves a balance between adult-led and child-choice activities. Themed weeks and

days contribute well to children's learning opportunities. For example, a 'Bob The Builder' week provided a range of stimulating activities, including building bridges, designing posters and making cakes. Children respond well to the exciting indoor environment. However, the limitations in outdoor provision do not extend children's understanding in all areas of learning well enough. Plans to improve this are advanced and have been delayed only by other building problems that are nearly resolved. Strong relationships with parents and good induction procedures ensure that children settle quickly into school. Good photographic evidence is used well to support the assessment process. However, all areas of children's learning are not assessed systematically. Staff recognise the need to improve procedures for assessing children when they first join the school, so that they can be absolutely sure that work is accurately matched to children's learning needs. Good leadership is based on a clear vision of improving provision even further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that assessment in Reception is thorough and systematic in all areas, right from when children start school, so staff can be sure that work is fully matched to children's learning needs.
- Make sure that all pupils know what their targets are and are given clear advice on how they can reach them.

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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?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good is 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?	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

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.

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
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 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?	2

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?	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

Annex B



5 March 2009

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Nicholas Catholic Primary School, Sutton Coldfield B73
5US**

Thank you for welcoming us so warmly when we visited your school. We spoke to quite a few of you and you gave us some really useful information and told us about how good your school is and why you like it so much.

These are the main things I found out about your school.

- This is an excellent school. The headteacher, staff and governors work really hard to keep it like that and to make sure that it becomes even better.
- You make excellent progress.
- Teaching is outstanding and the range of subjects and activities for you to do are exceptionally good.
- You like school very much, you work really hard and your behaviour is excellent.
- You take on responsibilities willingly, whether they are in school, the church or local community and carry them out extremely well.
- You have an excellent understanding of what being a Catholic means, and you also have respect for people from other religions and cultures.
- You take being healthy seriously. You all eat sensibly and nearly all of you take part in some form of physical exercise.
- The school is exceptionally safe and adults take excellent care of you.

To improve things, we have asked the school to do the following.

- Make sure that staff in the Reception class know exactly how well children are making progress, from when they start school until they enter Year 1, so that they can always make sure work is exactly matched to their needs.
- Make sure that you all know what your targets are and are told clearly how you can reach them.

You can help too. If you are not sure what your targets are or how to reach them, then ask.

Yours faithfully

Ted Wheatley

Lead inspector