

St Catherine's RC Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105524
Local Authority	Manchester
Inspection number	324234
Inspection date	8 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Ian Thompson

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)	434
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	256
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Wilson
Headteacher	Mr P Hennessey
Date of previous school inspection	14 September 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	School Lane Didsbury Manchester M20 6HS
Telephone number	0161 445 6359
Fax number	0161 445 0648

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school, the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, the effectiveness of leadership and management and the effectiveness of the school's measures to promote inclusion and community cohesion. Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, the scrutiny of pupils' work, assessment data, school documents and parents' questionnaires. In addition, there were discussions with the headteacher, staff, governors and pupils. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This larger than average school serves an urban area of south Manchester. Pupils come from the full range of social and economic backgrounds, including some areas of disadvantage. The school has Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision in the Nursery and two Reception classes. Slightly more than 10% of pupils are from a number of minority ethnic backgrounds with no groups of significant size. The proportion of pupils with home languages other than English is above average and has doubled in recent years, and a small number of pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is about average as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school holds the Healthy School and Sports Gold Standard awards. There is a playgroup and a wrap around care provision on site, which are run by private providers and did not form part of this inspection.

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 that serves its community exceptionally well and, consequently, has gained the support of the overwhelming majority of parents. The keynote of the school is how much pupils enjoy their time in it. As a result, their personal development and well-being are outstanding. This is because of the excellent way that all staff contribute to making the school a happy place to learn that presents its pupils with a very wide range of opportunities for learning and enjoyment. Many parents wrote to praise the school, typically referring to the way it 'provides a very caring and supportive environment' and the 'diversity of opportunities it offers the children'. Parents are also very appreciative of the dedication of the staff and the individual support that they provide. The school's arrangement for the care and safeguarding of pupils meet requirements. Internet use is monitored and controlled through appropriate programs.

Pupils' above average attendance, their excellent behaviour, eagerness to learn and the way that they work together and support each other contribute significantly to their outstanding achievement as they move through both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Apart from a dip in performance in 2007, the causes of which the school has identified and tackled successfully, results in national tests have been consistently well above average at both key stages since the last inspection. Work seen in lessons and in books shows that by the end of Year 6, current standards are well above average and the school's data show greater than average proportions of pupils reaching higher than expected levels in English, mathematics and science. These high standards of literacy and numeracy together with the development of excellent work habits prepare pupils well for the future. Pupils have a voice in the running of the school and their views are listened to, as is seen in developments to the curriculum that include an increase in extra-curricular activities, particularly for younger pupils. These contribute much to pupils' personal development by providing an exceptional range of opportunities for them to discover interests, talents and skills.

Teaching of the excellent curriculum is outstanding. Effective links are made between areas of learning with close attention paid to the development of basic skills in literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT). Teachers bring a lively approach to lessons that are matched very well to individual needs and planned to capture and maintain pupils' interest. An outstanding feature of lessons is teachers' use of practical activities that involve pupils in working together, add enjoyment and give a clear point to learning that helps understanding. In the best lessons, well focused questions make pupils extend their thinking and help them develop their own ideas. All lessons are characterised by teachers' consistently high expectations of work and behaviour to which pupils respond admirably so that no time is wasted. Teachers and classroom assistants provide a high level of sensitive individual support that enables all pupils, including those with learning difficulties or at an early stage of learning English, to participate fully in lessons and to make the same excellent progress as their classmates.

A principal feature of the curriculum that is reflected in all the school's work is the exceptional way that it promotes community cohesion. The cultural diversity of pupils' backgrounds is celebrated and used to enhance the curriculum, for example, through 'language days' that also involve contributions from parents speaking their home languages. Pupils' understanding of other cultures is promoted very well through, for example, contacts with schools abroad. Pupils are encouraged to develop an understanding of local, national and global challenges. They

show their awareness of the needs of others by their charitable activities that have a specific focus on supporting children in schools in developing countries with which they have contact. On joining the school, teachers are provided with information about the local community that encourages the use of the community as a curricular resource. The school's many links with the local community provide opportunities for extended learning and for pupils to enjoy participating in events.

Leadership and management are excellent. The headteacher and senior management team have succeeded in setting a tone in the school that ensures pupils feel valued as individuals and are all able to participate fully in everything the school has to offer. Close monitoring of teaching and learning means that the school has a clear view of its performance and areas for improvement are identified and tackled promptly. High standards have been maintained but there is no complacency. All developments are carefully reviewed to ensure their effectiveness and that resources are deployed to best advantage. Because planning for improvement is linked well to training and professional development, and taking account of the improvement since the last inspection, the school has a good capacity for further improvement. The school has a wealth of data on pupils' progress that is carefully analysed to identify any potential underachievement at an early stage so that action can be taken. However, the school does not derive full benefit from the work involved because information is not always provided in an easily manageable form for staff with responsibilities for areas of learning. Data are well understood by senior staff but not accessible enough to middle managers. Excellent links have been established with partner schools and local organisations that enrich the curriculum. Governance is good. Governors have taken note of the issues raised in the last report and are more closely involved in keeping a check on the school's performance. They bring professional expertise to supporting the school's work and are well informed so that they can hold the school rigorously to account.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in EYFS is good with some excellent features, such as arrangements for children's welfare, but its effectiveness does not quite match that of the main school. This is because recent changes in structure and ways of working are still developing and have yet to have a full impact. The EYFS provides children with a good start to their education. They thoroughly enjoy what they do and successfully learn and use key skills. Induction arrangements are excellent so that the children settle quickly and happily into school. There is a strong emphasis on learning to cooperate and become independent so that children make excellent progress in these key attributes. They are confident and their behaviour towards each other is excellent. The curriculum is well organised to provide lively, first-hand experiences and covers all areas of learning. There are many opportunities to develop imaginative and structured play. The good and sometimes outstanding teaching enables children to make good progress in a vibrant atmosphere. Leadership and management are good. All adults work well together as a team and are fully committed to the welfare and progress of all children. Regular assessment is thorough and accurate and guides future teaching and learning. Parents are rightly pleased with the provision and this is exemplified in the typical comment, 'my child has blossomed in confidence'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make assessment data more accessible to all who need to use it, particularly middle leaders.

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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	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?	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	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?	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?	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	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 warm and friendly way that you welcomed us into your school. We enjoyed being able to talk to so many of you and hearing how well you are doing. You are right to be proud of your school and I am sure that you will be pleased to know that we agree with you that it is outstanding. Your achievement is excellent and you reach high standards because the school is run exceptionally well and everyone helps you to do your best. The displays around the school show the wide variety of activities that you enjoy, in and out of lessons, and it was good to hear how many of you take advantage of the opportunities for sport and other activities. We were particularly pleased to see how well you work together and support each other because this helps you to make rapid progress. At the end of the inspection, we told your staff that you had done them proud because you play a big part in making the school such a happy place to learn. It was clear that you enjoy learning because your teachers make lessons interesting and fun. Your understanding of the challenges that can face children in other countries and your support for them is admirable.

Part of our job is to suggest things that will help to make the school an even better place to learn. We have asked the school to make sure that information on your progress is made easily available to all staff who need it so that they can help you to continue doing well.

Thank you again for helping us with our work. We wish you well for the future and hope that you will all continue to play your part in making your school an excellent place to learn.