

St Bede's Catholic Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111372
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	310584
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Bamber

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	5–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	183
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Lawrence Hanrahan
Headteacher	Miss J Coughlan
Date of previous school inspection	12 April 2005
School address	Appleton Widnes Cheshire WA8 6EL
Telephone number	0151 4243112
Fax number	0151 4233521

Age group	5–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Most pupils who attend this school are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is around the average. There is an average percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals. Some pupils do come from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds. The school has many awards including Investors in People status, Artsmark Gold, the local authority Healthy School Award, Activemark and the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

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 provides its pupils with an excellent quality of education. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 2 they have achieved extremely well and attained exceptionally high standards in all areas of their work. They are very confident and extremely competent learners.

Underpinning pupils' excellent achievements are leadership and management of the highest quality. The headteacher is inspirational in leading from the front but is also very skilled at developing and building on the skills of all staff so that they can play a significant role in school improvement. Pupils enjoy a rich and diverse curriculum, which is particularly effective in promoting their basic academic skills. It encourages them to work equally well independently and in groups. Together with their excellent basic skills this means that pupils are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education.

The outstanding quality of teaching ensures that pupils enjoy learning, behave beautifully and make excellent academic progress. A very positive ethos exists throughout the school which reflects both its denominational status and the superb way in which pupils are cared for and supported. As a result, pupils feel safe and secure. Among the plethora of highly complimentary comments from parents, 'St Bede's is a caring and loving environment - an ideal place for our children to start their education,' typifies their overwhelmingly positive views.

One of the keys to the school's success is the very close links the school forges and maintains with a number of different partners. These include the church, diocese, local schools, the local authority and external support services. In their different ways each of these organisations contributes very well to pupils' achievements, to their personal development and to their care, support and guidance. In particular, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is particularly well promoted and visitors contribute to their very good understanding of how to eat healthily and to take regular exercise. The school not only gains from these partnerships, but also shares its excellent practice locally and nationally to help enhance the quality of education in other schools. The strides made in enhancing standards and provision since the last inspection have been very impressive because leaders, managers and governors constantly seek to improve all aspects of the school's work. It is clear from this significant improvement and from the outstanding quality of education provided that the school has an excellent capacity to improve even further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children start school with a varying range of skills and pre-school experiences. Overall, their attainment on entry is below that typical for their age group. Children receive an excellent start to their education in the Reception class because they have the benefit of very good teaching, together with a stimulating learning environment both inside and outside the classroom. There is a good balance between adult-directed and child-initiated activities. Adults place a strong emphasis on developing children's self-esteem to give them the confidence to 'have a go' and try out new experiences. As a result, the quality of learning is very good. Children are encouraged to explore for themselves and to become independent learners. Regular observations and assessments enable staff to build up an accurate picture of each child's all-round development and to track their progress accurately. Children make at least good and often very good progress.

Most achieve the nationally expected early learning goals by the time they enter Year 1, with a significant proportion exceeding them. Excellent progress is made in communication, language and literacy, especially linking letters and sounds, and in all aspects of their personal, social and emotional development. This contributes very effectively to laying the building blocks for the very rapid progress pupils make in Years 1 and 2. The Foundation Stage manager provides very good leadership and has high expectations of children's achievements. All staff make a vital and valuable contribution to the excellent quality of children's learning.

What the school should do to improve further

There are no significant areas for improvement that the school's perceptive self-analysis has not already identified.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The extremely solid foundations laid in the Reception class are built on expertly in Years 1 and 2 so that by the time they leave Year 2, pupils' standards are exceptionally high. Over the last five years, their standards in reading, writing, mathematics and science have been consistently high. Skilled, challenging teaching enables pupils who are more able to perform extremely well. The proportion attaining at the higher levels in the Year 2 teacher assessments is double the average in reading and mathematics. Recent, effective action to improve the quality of pupils' writing has resulted in the current Year 2 having a much higher percentage of pupils reaching these higher levels in writing. The high quality of support provided by well deployed and managed teaching assistants contributes significantly to the excellent academic progress made by pupils who find learning or behaving well more difficult than most.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and is underpinned very effectively by the school's religious character. Pupils have a good understanding of different faiths and celebrate the diversity of cultures within the wider community. They are motivated and excited by interesting tasks and it is no wonder they say they like coming to school and enjoy their lessons and the wide range of activities. This is reflected in their above average attendance. Behaviour and relationships between pupils and adults are excellent. Parents commented, 'We feel St. Bede's has a strong community spirit. The children feel confident and secure.' Pupils want to please and are keen to respond in class. Pupils work very well together and show respect and concern for others. Excellent playtime arrangements, particularly during the lunch break, encourage their energetic participation in a wide range of activities. Through serving on the school council and manning the 'Friendship Stop' in the playground, pupils are making a very good contribution to the school community. Collecting for charities such as Cafod, Alder Hey Hospital and Operation Christmas Child gives them a keen insight into the needs of others less fortunate than themselves.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Pupils' outstanding achievements and the high standards they attain results from excellent teaching. Teachers and their teaching assistants work very closely together to carefully plan work that very effectively meets the needs of all pupils. This means that the work set invariably challenges pupils to improve on their current levels of attainment. This would not be possible without teachers' rigorous day-to-day assessments of pupils' progress and the very helpful advice given to pupils about how to improve aspects of their work. Pupils thoroughly enjoy learning because teachers set them practical and engaging tasks. Teachers make it crystal clear what pupils should learn and what they will do to achieve that learning. All staff have high expectations of pupils' work rate, behaviour and ability to get on with their fellow pupils when working in groups. The excellent relationships that are evident in classrooms are based on mutual trust and respect and a total commitment from all staff to help pupils achieve of their best at all times.

The needs of pupils with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities are met very effectively because teachers and support staff are knowledgeable about how to meet these pupils' particular needs. Classrooms are positive and purposeful places in which pupils of all abilities learn extremely well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum meets the needs of all pupils exceptionally well because the activities provided are carefully tailored to develop pupils into skilled learners. It strongly promotes pupils' enjoyment because it is based on practical activities. For example, there is a good emphasis on experimentation and problem solving in mathematics and science. Very good links across the curriculum provide opportunities for pupils to practise their basic skills. The good opportunities to use information and communication technology in other subjects, such as history, not only improve pupils' standards but also build their obvious enjoyment of using computers. The opportunities for pupils to develop their speaking and listening skills through role-play activities such as the Florist Shop and the Scutari Hospital are exemplary and impact positively on the school's drive to improve standards in writing. The curriculum is enriched by a very good range of visits and visitors that make learning more relevant. The impressive number of out-of-class activities help to improve pupils' sporting, creative and musical skills and reflect the school's Artsmark Award. Themed days and weeks such as the Arts Week add to pupils' enjoyment. Very good provision for personal, social and health education is at the heart of each day's work and contributes extremely well to pupils' personal development and well-being.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of the care, guidance and support is outstanding and is at the centre of the school's extremely positive ethos. Crucial factors are the staff's very good understanding of the needs of individual pupils and the close working relationships with parents. By sounding out parents' views and responding to them, the school enables parents to become active partners in their children's learning. For example, there are workshops to explain to parents the way literacy,

numeracy and science are taught. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well cared for. Teachers and teaching assistants support them very well, linking with outside agencies where necessary to give added support to parents and carers. High priority is given to safeguarding pupils and procedures for child protection are firmly in place. Pupils receive very good guidance, backed up by a rigorous assessment system, to help them achieve as well as they can in all aspects of their academic work and personal development. As pupils said, 'Teachers don't just tell you the answer, they help you to work it out.'

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school's outstanding performance is due to the impact of the excellent quality of leadership and management at all levels. The headteacher is highly successful in her determination to provide pupils with the best possible start to their education and to life. To achieve this she sets the highest expectations for all who work in the school, at the same time ensuring that high quality support, relevant training and plentiful resources are provided to help staff to perform at their optimum. She is rewarded with total commitment and high quality performance, both of which mean that pupils achieve outstandingly. She is ably supported by other school leaders who contribute expertly to the induction and mentoring of newly qualified teachers and have led changes to the way writing is taught. Similar significant impacts have been made in pupils' calculating and problem-solving skills in mathematics, in the quality of pupils' art, in the improvements of pupils' physical education and in their musical skills, as a result of the excellent work of middle managers.

All staff and governors are deeply involved in evaluating the school's performance in order to identify areas that might require improvement. Leaders at all levels are open to change and prepared to try out new ideas but at the same time vigilant in their evaluation of the impact of these actions on pupils' learning and achievements.

Governors are very supportive of the school's work but also attentive in challenging aspects of its work through a keen understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Governors contribute very well to whole-school development and play a crucial part in maintaining excellent provision.

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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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	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 disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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	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 the 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

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.

Annex A

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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of St Bede's Catholic Infant School, Widnes, WA8 6EL

On behalf of myself and the other inspector can I tell you what a joy it was to visit your wonderful school recently. It is an excellent school and you play your full part in making it such a warm and friendly place in which to learn. You are very lucky to have so many super teachers who help you to get on so well with your work and to become such nice young people. We were so impressed with your art work and your lovely singing in assembly and in classrooms.

All the adults who work in your school look after you very well and those who particularly help in the classrooms make sure that those of you who find your work a bit more difficult can keep up and do well. This ensures that all of you make excellent progress and reach much higher standards than most other children.

We were also delighted by the way that you played and worked together so nicely and that many of you can get on with your work on your own, trying your best all the time. You headteacher and the other teachers who run the school are really good at finding ways of making it even better. Usually when we visit schools we leave them with one or two ideas about how to improve it. This time we couldn't find anything that your teachers do not already know about and are working on.

Well done for being such lovely children and for working so hard. Thank you again for making us feel so much at home and for a really lovely two days.