

St Francis Xavier Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103998
Local Authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	286832
Inspection date	14 June 2007
Reporting inspector	David Carrington

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	249
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Margaret Beckett
Headteacher	Mary Simmons
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2002
School address	McKean Road Oldbury B69 4BA
Telephone number	0121 5521485
Fax number	0121 5442483

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Francis Xavier Catholic Primary School serves two parishes in the urban West Midlands. This area is very mixed socially and many pupils face social and economic disadvantage. Just under half of the pupils are from Catholic families. Over half the pupils come from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. Twice the usual proportion of pupils start school with little or no English. An above average number of pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities. When children start in Nursery they have low levels of skills and knowledge.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The popularity of St Francis Xavier Catholic Primary School amongst parents is not hard to understand. Virtually all parents rate it highly. Their children are extremely enthusiastic about their school. As one pupil said, 'It's worth getting out of bed to come to school.' The school is outstanding in its effectiveness. Every pupil is valued and encouraged to reach for their best. Expectations are high amongst all staff and the pupils. Work is extremely well matched to pupils' needs and they complete it with care, eagerness and a sense of purpose. The work is hands on and practical, which the pupils say helps them to learn and enjoy. For them, the best thing in school is the staff, who make learning fun and fascinating.

Leadership and management are outstanding. Staff at all levels carry out their duties very capably, led most effectively by the headteacher and deputy headteacher. The school's self-evaluation is fully accurate because it uses pupils' achievement as the benchmark to work from. Everyone is alert to the school's strengths and the areas for development. Rigorous checks are made to ensure learning is successful and provision is of the highest quality. Pupils' progress is tracked in great detail and potential underachievement is nipped in the bud very quickly. Governors make a strong contribution to the school's successes because they are very well informed of its performance and ask taxing questions to check that decisions will benefit the pupils.

Because teaching and learning are outstanding, pupils make the best possible progress. They build academic skills and knowledge at a very brisk rate and develop as children who are kind, caring and sensitive to the needs of others. Standards are well above average by the time the pupils leave Year 6. They are particularly well prepared for secondary education and the challenges of adult life. The personal development of the pupils is first rate. There is complete racial harmony in school and behaviour is superb. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The partnership with a school in India is a particularly valuable way of showing pupils how different people share some beliefs and traditions but differ in others. The pupils value their Indian friends as pen pals. Care, guidance and support are all of top quality and pupils are safeguarded thoroughly.

The curriculum stands out for its excellence. Whilst there is very firm focus on English, mathematics and science, the curriculum gives ample opportunities for the development of pupils' creativity. Music, dance and art are strengths and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are developed most effectively throughout all subjects. The curriculum for children in Nursery and Reception is of good quality. The small outdoor space for Reception children and the location of the two classes at the opposite ends of the school mean that it is difficult for Nursery and Reception children to work together when this is desirable. Children make fast progress from their starting points in Nursery, although their communication, language and literacy skills are well below average when they leave Reception. In other areas of learning standards are below average at the end of Reception but progress is consistently good in all of them.

The list of strengths in school is long. There are no real weaknesses. The school is not, however, complacent and continually seeks to improve. It has improved radically over the last 10 years and this trend is set to continue because of its outstanding capacity to forge ahead.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop ways to link the Nursery and Reception accommodation in order to ensure the curriculum provides appropriate opportunities for children to work together.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The school has an enviable tradition of outstanding achievement and well above average standards. This starts in Nursery and Reception, where the children make good progress and widen their experiences considerably across all six strands of their work. Although their standards are below average by the time they join Year 1, they are much higher than when they started school.

In Years 1 and 2 the pupils make spirited progress. Standards are broadly average at the end of Year 2. In the past standards in writing did not keep pace with those in reading and mathematics, although improvements over the last two years have been very successful in lifting standards in writing closer to those in the other two aspects.

As in other stages in school, the outstanding quality of teaching and learning has resulted in pupils continuing to make rapid progress in Years 3 to 6. At the end of Year 6 standards are well above average. Pupils who start school with hardly any English quickly gain confidence in the language because of the support provided and they achieve as well as the other pupils. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities also make outstanding progress because they know exactly what they have to learn next and are encouraged to take part and try their best. Work is very demanding for the more able pupils and they relish the challenges provided.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The pupils are extremely well prepared for future life. Their basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT are particularly strong and they are able to work together in a mature way and to show high levels of independence. Pupils show great initiative and have very sensible ideas for improvements to school, which the staff take seriously and work to put into practice. Pupils are very proud of their school and their achievements and their sense of enjoyment is intense. Pupils are able to give a very long list of the ways they think they help others, including the 'meeters and greeters' and 'playpals'.

The need for healthy and safe lifestyles is felt keenly by the pupils. They are particularly alert to the hazards posed by the fast flowing stream at the other side of the school fence and the separation of the older pupils' playground from the main school by a public footpath. They follow the safety rules carefully. Attendance rates, which have been a little below average in the past due to a particularly potent flu epidemic, are improving well and most pupils have almost full attendance. A few pupils do not attend as regularly, but the school is always watchful and has good procedures to ensure their attendance meets the targets set for them.

The feeling of community is very strong amongst the pupils. Playground games include pupils of different ages, gender and ethnicity. There is a real sense of inclusion amongst the pupils. No one is left out. Links with the parish church are strong and pupils of all backgrounds are respectful of the Catholic traditions of the school. The first Holy Communion Mass for Year 3 pupils was a shared special event that all the pupils enjoyed and talked appreciatively about.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The pupils recognise the high quality of teaching in the school. They are unanimous in their opinion that lessons are often inspirational in giving them opportunities to discover new things and learn a lot. The pupils say their teachers do not talk too much but give them the opportunity to work together at tasks that are involving and enjoyable. Pupils have a realistic understanding of how their work is planned to meet their different needs. They know that they do different work to pupils in other groups. They also know their targets and talk fluently about how well they are reaching them. Children in Nursery and Reception love their work. They are fascinated by their new experiences and are inquisitive.

These outstanding responses are due to the great care with which teachers and teaching assistants plan and prepare the work. No pupil is allowed to take a back seat. All are expected to participate, learn at a brisk pace and work productively. They are also expected to know the importance of what they are learning and how well they are meeting their targets. Opportunities for pupils to self-assess their own work are frequent and very well focused on what has to be done next.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

School leaders recognise that the weakest bond in the curriculum is the linking of activities for Nursery and Reception children due to the limitations of the school site. They have firm plans to correct this. Because the two classes are a way apart it is not always possible to give the children the shared opportunities to learn that fully benefit their individual needs.

In all other respects the curriculum is rich, rewarding and enjoyable. Because the curriculum is well planned to include strong links between subjects, pupils develop essential skills at all times of the day. The development of 'e-learning', using computers as the origin of the work, is an exciting innovation for staff and pupils alike. Year 6 have set up their own newspaper office and are working as journalists and editors to produce their own news-sheet; this is enhancing their writing, ICT and research skills fully. Year 3 pupils are all mastering the skill of guitar playing very capably. Out of school activities are many and varied. Pupils join in with vigour and eagerness which benefits both their personal development and their academic achievement.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The Catholic traditions of the school are the root of its extremely caring and family centred ethos. All pupils are looked after thoroughly, including those vulnerable to pressures from outside school. Procedures for child protection and the vetting of staff are robust. Pupils with little or no English are given effective support and they make rapid progress. Sensitive support is provided for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities which enables them to take a full part in the many different and inspiring learning opportunities. Children in Nursery and Reception are carefully guided as they explore the world around them. They settle to school quickly and their confidence and enthusiasm leap ahead.

Pupils are given firm and very useful advice about how to achieve greater things in their work. They know their targets and how to reach them. 'We all have targets to reach so we can be clever' said one. They know what to look for when checking their own progress. More than this, they know they are valued for their achievements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Parents have virtually unanimous views that the school does its best for their children. They put this down to the exceptional quality of leadership and management. Their assessment is right; the school is given firm direction and high expectations are set by the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. Their strong partnership is the bedrock of the school. Other staff and governors play their part too. Between them they know exactly what needs improving and how well they are meeting their goals. The highly effective procedures to check and evaluate the work of the school are based on measuring pupils' achievement as accurately as possible.

The school has made consistent progress over the years to become the centre of excellence it is today. Its leaders are not complacent and constantly strive for even better things. The prospects for even more success are very secure.

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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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 behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Francis Xavier Catholic Primary School, Oldbury, B69 4BA I hope that you remember my visit to your school. I thoroughly enjoyed my day with you, especially when some of you showed me the things and places I must not miss. Thank you for making the day so much fun.

In my report I have written a lot about what makes your school so good. I hope some of you will read it. Perhaps Year 6 would like to write something about it for their newspaper. The most important things I mention in my report are all about your excellent education.

- You make fast progress and reach well above average standards.
- You are extremely well behaved, kind and caring children.
- You thoroughly enjoy your learning because you are taught so well.
- You have many chances to find out new things about all the subjects you study.
- Children in Nursery and Reception love coming to school and working together.
- All of you are well looked after, kept safe and know how to be healthy.
- Your school leaders are expert in making sure your education is first class.

There are not many things that need improving. However, there is one area which your teachers and school leaders are keen to upgrade.

- Nursery and Reception are taught in rooms that are a long way apart and this does not help them to work together enough.

I am sure that you will help your teachers to hold on to all the really good things in school. You have lots of bright ideas to make things even better. Keep on sharing them with your teachers.

Good luck in your future work.

Yours sincerely

David Carrington Lead inspector