

Saint Bernadette Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117489
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379430
Inspection dates	1–2 February 2012
Lead inspector	Christopher Gray

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 of pupils on the school roll	229
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Bussandri
Headteacher	Elisabeth Barton
Date of previous school inspection	8 July 2009
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Christopher Gray

Additional inspector

Gill Walley

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 15 lessons or parts of lessons, taught by 11 teachers. Informal meetings were held with parents and carers in the playground before school. Inspectors held discussions with members of the governing body, teaching and non-teaching staff and groups of pupils. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed the school's work, heard pupils reading in Key Stage 1 and looked at school development planning, school self-evaluation, safeguarding records and the questionnaire responses of pupils, staff and 151 parents and carers.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is slightly above average, as is the percentage of pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. There is a below-average percentage of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs; the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is average. The school meets the current floor standard (a minimum level for pupils' attainment set by the government). The current headteacher was appointed in February 2011 after a period of turbulence in the school's leadership. A breakfast club is accommodated in the school but it is not managed by the governing body and did not form part of this inspection.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school that is improving rapidly. A period of downturn since the last inspection has been resolutely reversed by good leadership and management. This was recognised in one of the many positive comments from parents and carers: ‘The school has improved dramatically over the past few years.’
- Pupils’ achievement is satisfactory. In the period following the last inspection, standards declined and there was some underachievement. Pupils’ progress is now accelerating and is good in some areas. It is satisfactory overall. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make satisfactory gains in their learning, though staff do not have an accurate picture of the gains they make from starting school to entering Year 1.
- Pupils behave well and they report that they feel safe in school. They say there is very little bullying and are confident that any adult they approach with a problem will sort it out for them.
- Teaching is satisfactory and improving. There has been a marked turnover of staff recently and there are many examples of good or better teaching, though one in three lessons are satisfactory. Pupils’ progress is accelerating as a result, but it is not yet sufficiently strong for teaching to be judged good overall.
- The headteacher has the confidence of staff, parents and carers. Many middle leaders are new to their jobs but the impact of their work is clearly visible, especially in English and mathematics. Much of the work surrounding progress data is undertaken by the headteacher. Some other leaders have begun to use these data for themselves in their analyses of pupils’ performance and in gauging in detail the success of leaders’ initiatives, but this is not consistent. The school is aware of this and already working on it.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that progress is consistently good in all classes by:
 - ensuring all teachers offer appropriate challenge to all groups of pupils
 - increasing pupils' knowledge of how to improve their work through greater consistency in the feedback given to them in teachers' marking
 - helping pupils to know in more detail their levels of attainment and how to reach the next level.

- Add greater rigour to the work of middle leaders by:
 - ensuring they all make consistent use of data about pupils' progress, to measure the effectiveness of the school's initiatives to raise attainment
 - providing training for Early Years Foundation Stage staff to enable them to form an accurate view of children's skills on entry to school and the progress they make across Nursery and Reception.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The vast majority of parents and carers think that their children are making good progress in school. They state that this is because of recent changes; as one wrote: 'My daughter has been at the school for three years and I have seen a massive improvement in her learning since a change of leadership.' The inspection findings show that parents and carers are correct in saying that pupils are making much faster progress than in the past. However, progress is not yet consistently good in all classes and subjects. Pupils now make good progress in reading in most classes. Progress in writing is good in some classes. In mathematics, the proportion of pupils making good progress is increasing, but it is currently satisfactory overall. Standards in English and mathematics are broadly average by Year 6; the school is on track to meet its challenging targets for 2012.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage start from broadly-expected levels and their attainment is average by the time they enter Year 1, though a little weaker in aspects of communication and of personal, social and emotional development. Outcomes are satisfactory overall, though inspection evidence shows that progress is beginning to rise. Pupils in Key Stage 1 are developing good phonics skills (concerning letters and the sounds connected with them) and they blend and segment words with speed and accuracy. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is average by the end of Year 2. In Key Stage 2, pupils develop their writing skills systematically. By the end of Year 6 reading standards are broadly average. Year 3 pupils used persuasive writing to send letters to the council, objecting to the building of a supermarket on their park. Pupils show good motivation when teaching is brisk, and use their information and communication technology skills well - for example, in calculating the cost per person of a family's food bill. Older pupils assess their own learning well so that teachers are able to give further help to those who are unsure.

All groups of pupils perform at similar rates. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs have made satisfactory progress over time but are now making better progress as a result of revised provision. Pupils with statements of

special educational needs are given good support to enable them to achieve in small, well-judged steps.

Quality of teaching

A consistent strength in teaching throughout the school, that is having a big impact on accelerating progress, is teachers' use of 'success criteria'. These show pupils how they will achieve the learning intention, and they are always graded in terms of increasing challenge. Pupils are given activities pitched at the level of their prior learning so that they are not repeating work they can already do. An outstanding example of this was seen in a Year 6 mathematics lesson, where pupils were encouraged to decide for themselves when to move onto the harder work. In satisfactory lessons, the pitch of work for some of the groups is not always challenging enough, and pupils agree that this does sometimes happen. In others, the pace is slow and some groups of pupils lose focus.

The vast majority of parents and carers feel that teaching is good and note that it has improved recently. Inspection evidence shows that there is much good teaching in the school and a little that is outstanding, but it is satisfactory over time because pupils' achievement is still satisfactory.

Pupils report that teachers' marking helps them to improve their work when it gives them pointers. Teachers write these in green ink so they are easily spotted. In some classes, these are frequent and pupils respond well, demonstrating that they have understood the point being made. In other classes, such comments are less frequent and pupils do not always act on the advice. Pupils' assessment of how well they have learnt in a lesson is regularly asked for; the school plans to give them a more detailed idea of where their learning is in terms of National Curriculum attainment levels, so that they can see clearly how to reach the next level.

Teachers link subjects of the curriculum together well to develop pupils' overall experience in school. Year 2 pupils practised their phonics skills on a book about the Great Fire of London, which they are studying in history. Older pupils reflect on what they have learnt in various subjects; for example, an older pupil, thinking about the nature of belief, observed: 'People may believe in different things from us but it does not make them less important.' This shows teaching is helping to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding well.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The vast majority of parents and carers see behaviour as good in the school and inspection evidence corroborates this. Pupils say that behaviour is mostly good. They respond well to their teachers and other adults and willingly take on responsibilities. They are courteous to visitors and look after their peers if they are upset or unwell. They think that lessons are rarely disrupted by poor behaviour and school records show this is so, because teachers manage behaviour well. There have been no recent exclusions. Pupils behave well in most lessons; where teaching is outstanding, pupils show high levels of engagement, self-discipline and application to their work. In some satisfactory lessons, pupils do not always attend to their teacher when they sit passively for too long on the carpet, nor do some get on with their work if it is too

easy.

Pupils show a good awareness of how to keep safe in the playground, round school and on the internet and the vast majority of pupils who responded to the questionnaire said they feel safe in school. They also say that bullying of all types is infrequent and that adults deal well with it. Bullies have to write letters to their victims and pupils think this is a good idea. Virtually all parents and carers who sent in responses corroborate pupils' views, one person adding, 'My child could not be in a more caring environment.'

Leadership and management

The commitment and drive of the whole staff to raise attainment are clear and are summed up in a comment made by a member of staff: 'We have had a rocky time over the last few years but it's good to feel that we are now on an even keel and moving forward in all ways.' The school's monitoring records show that teaching has improved because of the effective training given where weaknesses had been identified. Consistency in teachers' planning, especially in mathematics, is testament to the drive to make teaching better. Much-improved use of assessment data enables senior leaders to have a clear view of the progress made by all groups of pupils, to ensure that all have equal opportunities and that there is no discrimination. Middle leaders' impact on their areas is clear from progress data and from improving provision. Some are already using data analysis to add greater precision to their work but others are not.

The governing body has had some tough decisions to make, from which it has not shrunk. It has worked successfully to win the support of parents and carers, as evidenced by the high and very positive response to the questionnaire. It understands the school's strengths and weaknesses because it is involved in self-evaluation and gives good challenge to leaders. As a result, the school's development planning is astute. The success so far of initiatives to improve teaching and raise achievement shows good capacity to make the necessary further improvements, to continue on the journey towards being a good school. All safeguarding requirements were met at the time of the inspection.

The curriculum meets pupils' needs well and is contributing effectively to better progress. The use of graded success criteria, described above, is a key factor in this. Higher-attaining pupils are mostly offered good challenge, and disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs gain self-confidence and enjoy learning. Many aspects of the curriculum contribute strongly to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Assemblies and the work displayed in religious education demonstrate this. Year 6 pupils recently were asked to plan an English lesson to teach to Reception children. Their plans were judged by a panel of adults and the winning pupils taught specific skills (such as full stops and capital letters). Pupils evaluated the experience; one wrote, 'I realised how hard it is to teach younger children,' and another observed, 'I have always wanted to be a teacher.' Extra-curricular activities add much to pupils' personal development, for example, the high quality of singing heard in a choir practice.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



3 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Saint Bernadette Catholic Primary School, St Albans AL2 1NL

Thank you for the courteous and friendly way in which you welcomed the inspectors to your school. We enjoyed meeting so many of you, talking about your work and hearing the lovely singing from the school choir.

You behave well in most lessons and round the school. You know how to stay safe and you told us that you trust all the adults in the school to look after you and help you if you are worried. Bullying is rare and you showed that you know what to do about it should it happen. You have a good understanding of the feelings of others and are considerate in how you behave to them. This is one of the reasons that your school is such a pleasant place to be.

You go to a satisfactory school; it is improving rapidly and aims to be a good school. You make progress similar to that of most pupils and reach similar standards by the time you leave Year 6. Your teachers are now helping you to make faster progress. This shows most in your reading, because of lessons such as the guided reading I observed in Year 6. Your writing and mathematics are catching up, but not as quickly.

The reason your school is improving is because it is well led by the headteacher and other staff and because teachers are working hard to do their best for you. Your parents and carers indicated that they think the same. We have asked the school to do two things.

- Help you make faster progress by always giving you challenging work and making it clear to you how to improve.
- Make sure that all those who have responsibility in the school know as much as possible about how well you are doing and where they could help you to do better.

You can all help by telling your teachers if your work is too easy; in fact, I heard some of them telling you to do just that. I hope you continue to enjoy your learning.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Gray
Lead inspector

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