

St John's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117475
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379426
Inspection dates	28–29 February 2012
Lead inspector	David Shepherd

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	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Blayney
Headteacher	Paula Smith
Date of previous school inspection	18 October 2006
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Age group	4–11
Inspection date(s)	28–29 February 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

David Shepherd

Additional inspector

David Radomsky

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 18 lessons led by eight different teachers for a total of nine hours. Meetings were held with the senior staff, six groups of pupils and the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at safeguarding documentation and the school's analysis of its data on pupils' achievement. Questionnaires from 105 parents and carers, 18 staff and 98 pupils were received and analysed.

Information about the school

This school is smaller than the average-sized primary school. The majority of pupils are White British, with a very small minority whose heritage is Irish. Few speak English as an additional language. A lower-than-average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportions of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are below average. A few pupils have behavioural difficulties. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of one Reception class. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. The school has gained Healthy School status and the Activemark award.

Inspection judgements

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

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. The Early Years Foundation Stage is good overall. Relationships between adults and pupils are good. Pupils from different backgrounds get on well together and learn to respect each other's views, customs and differences. The school is not good because progress in Key Stages 1 and 2 in reading and writing is no more than satisfactory, and the quality of teaching is not consistently good or better. Monitoring and evaluation of performance are not having enough impact on pupils' learning.
- Attainment in mathematics is higher than in other subjects because pupils are taught basic skills effectively; as a result, they are able to solve mathematical problems for themselves. Progress in reading and writing are slower and some pupils in Key Stage 2 do not have a secure understanding of the sounds made by individual letters and groups of letters (phonics), and are not given enough opportunities to write at length across the curriculum.
- Teaching varies in quality and is satisfactory overall. Much is good and some is outstanding and fully engages and motivates pupils in their learning. In these lessons, the teacher's expectations of what children can achieve are high. However, there is inconsistency across classes.
- Parents, carers, pupils and staff are rightly positive about pupils' behaviour. Pupils' considerate behaviour contributes to a safe and orderly environment. Pupils feel safe because they are looked after well.
- Monitoring and evaluation of teaching are carried out accurately and school performance is managed satisfactorily. The headteacher, effectively supported by the deputy headteacher, has successfully brought about sustained improvement, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage, mathematics and attendance. Through their monitoring of teaching, senior staff and subject leaders have improved provision in their subjects, but have not evaluated enough the impact on learning

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?

- By September 2012, raise achievement in reading and writing by:

- implementing a systematic programme of phonics throughout Key Stage 2 for those pupils whose reading would benefit
- providing pupils with more opportunities to write at length across the curriculum.
- By December 2012, improve the quality of teaching to good or better in enabling pupils always to learn and achieve well, by ensuring that all teachers consistently:
 - explain clearly to pupils of different levels of ability what they are to learn in lessons, and provide learning activities that are well matched to these levels
 - indicate to pupils in marking the next steps in their learning and provide them with opportunities to act on the guidance given.
- Ensure the monitoring and evaluation carried out by senior staff and subject leaders always lead to improvements in pupils' learning by:
 - extending the training of subject leaders in the techniques of monitoring and evaluation
 - ensuring points for development are identified accurately and lead to improved outcomes for pupils.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, most pupils make good progress and reach standards in all areas of learning that are above those expected nationally. They largely sustain their good rate of progress over Key Stage 1, but progress is satisfactory in Key Stage 2 and, consequently, satisfactory overall. By the end of Year 6, pupils' attainment in mathematics is above average and, in reading and writing, it is broadly average. Although fluctuating because of the different cohorts, this has been the pattern over the past three years as evidenced by test results and school data, as well as by standards seen by inspectors in lessons and pupils' books.

The majority of pupils read confidently for their ages. By the end of Year 2, pupils' attainment in reading, overall, is above average. However, not all pupils in Key Stage 2, especially pupils of lower ability, have a secure understanding of how to work out and read unfamiliar words and text. Pupils of different ages are mainly enthusiastic readers. They were keen to read to inspectors and talk about their favourite books and authors. In discussions and in replies in their questionnaires, many pupils say that the school helps them develop their reading skills well. Most written work is presented neatly and is easy to read but, occasionally, this is not the case. Most parents and carers are positive about how well the school develops their children's skills in reading and writing, but inspectors could not fully endorse their views.

Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall, although some of these pupils, especially in Key Stage 2, lag behind in reading. In small group sessions led by teaching assistants, pupils learn the sounds letters make, but sometimes are not given enough opportunities to practise the sounds themselves. This slows down the progress they make, and prevents it from being good. There are good examples of pupils whose circumstances have

made them vulnerable making good progress. However, provision is not always tailored to challenge more-able pupils, and these pupils do not always achieve as much as they could. Pupils who speak English as an additional language achieve at similar levels to other groups, and gain competence with the language so as to access the full curriculum.

Quality of teaching

Teachers have high expectations of pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour. Pupils are taught effectively how to act responsibly and to work together in pairs and larger groups. The indoor and outdoor areas in the Early Years Foundation Stage are particularly stimulating and well resourced, and this encourages children to make good progress in all areas of learning.

Evidence from pupils' questionnaires and discussions with pupils indicate that most regard teaching as good. Parents and carers are equally positive about the quality of teaching. Inspectors found evidence of good and outstanding teaching, but this was not consistent in all classes. Although teachers' planning indicates the main focus of learning, it does not always show pupils of different levels of ability what they are expected to learn. Learning is not consistently tailored to meet individual needs and this slows progress, particularly of pupils of higher and lower ability. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together and provide good guidance to pupils. On occasions, not enough support is given to pupils working independently and their written mistakes are sometimes not corrected quickly enough to enable them to make faster progress. Marking is encouraging but does not consistently provide guidance about how to improve. Not enough opportunities are provided for pupils to respond to suggestions made.

In the best lessons, teachers enthuse and motivate pupils in their learning. For example, pupils in Year 6 were captivated by repeating the actions their teacher demonstrated to help them remember the differences between the mathematical terms median, range, mode and mean. This helped their learning and raised the standard of calculations. Under the guidance of their teacher and teaching assistant, children in the Reception class tidied up at the end of an activity session with a will and purpose that was exceptional for their age, and this helped their learning to proceed at a quick pace.

The teaching of reading is stronger in Key Stage 1 than in Key Stage 2. This is because a programme of systematic phonics is taught in Key Stage 1 that helps pupils tackle unfamiliar words. This is not the case throughout Key Stage 2 where some pupils, especially those who find reading difficult, do not have the skills to help them work out new words.

The teaching of different cultures, beliefs and ways of life is good. Pupils have good opportunities to learn about the major world religions. The teaching about personal values, such as respect and responsibility, is also good. The teaching of art and design provides pupils with good opportunities to experience working with different textures in different styles. Teaching contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Good relationships promote pupils' positive attitudes to school and their willingness to respond promptly to their teachers in lessons and work cooperatively with each other. This is seen throughout the school and is evidenced by the sustained above-average levels of attendance during recent years.

Older pupils mentor younger ones as 'special friends' and 'young leaders', which helps to promote positive relationships between pupils of different ages during playtimes and lunchtimes. Discussions with pupils indicate that all, including those with identified behavioural difficulties, are aware of the school's strategies for managing and improving behaviour, and think they are appropriate and carried out fairly by staff. Pupils successfully conform to these behaviour strategies.

In replies to their questionnaires, the large majority of parents, carers, pupils and staff were very positive about behaviour and bullying. Although a very small minority of pupils and parents and carers commented that behaviour is not always good, inspection evidence gained from pupils and discussions with staff confirmed that any inappropriate behaviour and all types of bullying, mainly very occasional name calling are addressed quickly and effectively by the school.

In replies to their questionnaire, the very large majority of pupils indicated they feel safe, and their parents and carers agree with them. Pupils have a good understanding of the risks they face and how to keep safe. For example, pupils of different ages told inspectors how they keep safe on roads, rail, around water and in the event of fire. Older pupils in particular have a good understanding of internet safety.

Leadership and management

Leaders at all levels are clearly focused on improvement and have successfully instilled a sense of ambition and drive to improve the work of the school. They incorporate areas for improvement into detailed plans of action. Monitoring and evaluation by senior staff and subject leaders have a positive impact on school performance. Sustained improvements have been effected over a considerable period in learning and progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, in attainment in mathematics and in behaviour and attendance. This trend of improvement and the maintenance of good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development show the school has a satisfactory capacity to sustain further improvement. An extensive programme of professional development of staff is contributing effectively to school improvement. Currently, similar improvement in the specific areas of reading and writing in Key Stage 2 is lacking, in particular for less-able readers. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning by subject leaders does not currently identify necessary improvements in pupils' learning.

The curriculum includes all the required subjects and is enriched by a range of visits to places of interest and visitors to school. Out-of-school clubs are popular with

pupils and support their learning. The curriculum does not provide pupils with enough opportunities to consolidate and extend their writing skills in different subjects, nor enough guidance about how to tackle unfamiliar words in reading.

The governing body is keen, enthusiastic and shows high levels of commitment to the school. It provides a satisfactory level of challenge and contribution and is, quite rightly, seeking further training to increase its level of support and challenge for the benefit of pupils to enable the school to become good. Safeguarding procedures comply with statutory requirements. Pupils and their parents and carers indicate that the school provides a secure environment for learning.

The school promotes equality of opportunity for all groups of pupils and tackles discrimination appropriately. This enables all groups of pupils to achieve satisfactorily. Provision is allocated effectively to pupils whose circumstances have made them vulnerable and there are examples of these pupils making good progress. However, provision is not always tailored to challenge more-able pupils, or less-able pupils in reading and these pupils do not always achieve as much as they could.

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.



1 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John Catholic Primary School, Rickmansworth, WD3 7HG

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting and talking to you. Thank you to those of you who completed the questionnaire for us. We found your responses very helpful. You go to a satisfactory school where adults work hard to prepare you for the future. The progress you make in lessons is satisfactory. Here are some of the best things we found.

- You enjoy school and get on well with each other.
- You feel safe and work in a calm, colourful and stimulating environment.
- You like your teachers and teaching assistants and try your best to please them.
- You are well mannered and courteous to each other and adults.
- You are enthusiastic about all the different activities provided for you, including visits out of school and extra clubs out of school hours.
- You enjoy reading and talking about books and stories you have read.

We have asked your headteacher, teachers and the governing body to do three things to make your school even better.

- Provide you with more opportunities to practise reading and writing.
- Let you know what you are expected to learn in lessons, set you challenging activities, and tell you what you need to do next with time to improve your work.
- Make sure that the plans that the school has to help you learn in different subjects are working well.

All of you can help by continuing to work very hard.

Yours sincerely

David Shepherd
Lead inspector

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