

Our Lady's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	118768
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	379680
Inspection dates	23–24 February 2012
Lead inspector	Helen Hutchings

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	215
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Margaret McAleese
Headteacher	Isabel Quinn
Date of previous school inspection	7–8 November 2006
School address	King Edward Avenue Dartford DA1 2HX
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Age group	4–11
Inspection date(s)	23–24 February 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Helen Hutchings

Additional inspector

David Lewis

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed different aspects of the school's work including 15 lessons involving eight teachers. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, and looked at documents including those relating to safeguarding, pupils' assessment information and pupils' work. They held discussions with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils, and analysed questionnaires from 131 parents and carers, as well as those completed by staff and pupils.

Information about the school

Pupils in this average-sized primary school come from a wide variety of social and ethnic backgrounds. Almost a half of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds, which is much higher than average. Around a fifth of pupils speak English as an additional language, which is above average. Few are at an early stage of learning to speak English. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs is in line with that found nationally. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a Reception class. Since the last inspection, all but one of the class teachers have joined the school and the headteacher took up her headship in September 2009. The school holds a number of awards, including Quality Mark and Extended School awards. The school meets current floor standards, which sets the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

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

Key findings

- This is a good school. It has improved well since its last inspection but is not yet outstanding because pupils' progress in lessons is good rather than outstanding. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school, reflected in comments such as, 'Staff are welcoming and always helpful. My children are perfectly happy to be at school each day.'
- Pupils build well on the good start they make in Reception, and their progress is consistently good throughout the school. Teachers monitor pupils' achievement closely and take effective early action if a pupil begins to fall behind. Consequently, the school's improvement trend is better than nationally, and pupils' attainment is significantly above average. Pupils' particularly strong achievement in reading effectively supports their work in all subjects and contributes well to their enjoyment of learning.
- The proportion of good and better teaching is rising. Teachers plan tasks which are practical and motivating for pupils. Occasionally, work is not sufficiently challenging and pupils do not have enough opportunities to reinforce writing and numeracy skills in other subjects.
- Pupils' good attitudes to learning help them to thrive academically, and their attendance is above average. Pupils understand what they have to do to improve their work, but do not routinely test out this understanding by responding to teachers' advice. They respond well to the school's high expectations of behaviour, seen in their respect for one another. Because of the school's caring, family atmosphere, pupils feel safe and bullying is rare.
- The headteacher and senior leaders have managed staff changes well to ensure continuity in learning, by ensuring that the school's expectations are clear to all and effective support is provided to improve teaching. The school has successfully tackled the issues raised in the last inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sharpen the focus of teaching to accelerate pupils' progress, by:
 - raising the expectations of what pupils, particularly higher-attaining pupils, can do for themselves so that work is always sufficiently challenging

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- ensuring that pupils routinely respond to teachers' written advice about how their work could be improved
- giving pupils more opportunities to consolidate their writing and numeracy skills in other subjects.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils take a pride in their work and this contributes well to their good achievement. When visiting lessons, their enthusiastic responses show that they greatly enjoy their education. This was seen in an introductory lesson to Iceland when Year 4 pupils keenly shared their existing knowledge, for example about the impact of volcanic dust on air traffic, which helped the class to identify further aspects for investigation. Similarly, in a lesson on light and darkness, Year 2 pupils worked together well in small groups to discover how much light was necessary to see things clearly. Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 2 and when they leave school is above average with standards in reading better than in the majority of primary schools. Pupils write confidently when required to do so, for example to make notes or concept maps for themselves. Writing throughout the school is improving well with the introduction of new approaches such as regular opportunities to write at length. This is increasing the progress pupils make in writing through the school. This was shown last year when all Year 6 pupils made two National Curriculum levels of progress in English from Year 2, which is significantly higher than achieved nationally. The school's monitoring information shows that pupils currently in the school, including those who speak English as an additional language, are making progress in English and mathematics at rates above those normally found nationally. There is no significant difference in the progress made by different groups, and over the last few years the school has effectively narrowed the gap between the performance of disabled pupils or those with special educational needs and that of other pupils.

Recent improvements made in Reception, particularly in the way the room is organised to promote enjoyment of reading and writing, have resulted in children making good progress from their starting points on entry. Attainment at the end of Reception, including in early literacy and numeracy skills, is now above average and gives children a stronger foundation for later learning than was previously the case. Pupils speak keenly about how they enjoy their learning and almost all parents and carers are positive that their children achieve well because of good teaching. Pupils work hard because they know what is expected of them and are given good feedback on their achievements to help them to understand what they have to do to improve further. However, although they know their targets and, in general terms, what they have to do to improve, pupils do not routinely follow up their teachers' suggestions or carry out corrections to inaccurate work to check that they have understood the advice given.

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Quality of teaching

A key strength of teaching lies in its consistency across the school, recognised by the overwhelmingly majority of parents and carers. All pupils completing the questionnaire indicated their belief that teaching is good. Teachers engage pupils well in their learning by making tasks relevant to pupils' experiences and interests. For example, in a Year 5 mathematics lesson to develop pupils' skills of addition and understanding of the weights of everyday objects, their tasks were effectively based on sending parcels to India; this linked well with their current study of India and developed their understanding of others less fortunate than themselves. However, pupils' books show that they still have relatively few opportunities to practise numeracy and writing skills in other subjects, where the recording of new information is mainly in note form or in short sentences. The broad curriculum supports teachers well in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, in a literacy activity based on the idea of a house break-in by Goldilocks and the wolf's behaviour in Red Riding Hood, Year 6 pupils showed a reflective approach to crime sentencing in their reports as journalists.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this well in their teaching of basic literacy and numeracy skills. Work is set at levels which match pupils' earlier understanding well. Teachers have high expectations and are effectively ensuring that almost all pupils achieve at nationally expected levels. However, occasionally teachers underestimate what pupils can do for themselves which slows the progress they are capable of making within the lesson, particularly for the most able pupils. Teaching assistants and adult volunteers make a valuable contribution to learning, often supporting the work of less able pupils. Teachers and other adults question and probe pupils' understanding, encouraging them to do things for themselves. The high levels of adult support mean that pupils regularly articulate their thinking which helps them to clarify their ideas before engaging in written work. In particular, children in Reception benefit from a very high adult–pupil ratio, effectively developing children's confidence and positive attitude to school. Teachers use computers and software well to illustrate learning and to provide opportunities for catch-up when a pupil's progress slows. This also develops pupils' information and communication technology skills well. Teachers routinely ensure that pupils reflect on their learning and review pupils' targets regularly. The opportunities to reflect on achievement through the lesson and to learn through peer- and self-evaluation results in pupils having a good understanding of the quality of their work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils respond well to the school's high expectations for behaviour and have positive attitudes to learning. They have good learning skills, developed from the time they join the school, although occasionally they need reminding to refocus on their work. Pupils' behaviour around the school is friendly and considerate of others. The school's incident log and discussion with pupils indicate that bullying and harassment, for example in the form of racist or prejudice-based behaviour, are extremely rare. Pupils say that occasionally pupils make unkind remarks to one

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another, but that this is generally resolved among themselves. When pupils feel the need to report it to an adult, it is dealt with well so that conflict is short-lived. Consequently, pupils feel safe in school and the range of playground facilities enables many different types of play to be undertaken safely at the same time. Older pupils appreciate the opportunity to develop their own understanding of how to look after themselves and others, for example by being trained in basic first aid, and some have run information sessions to promote awareness of how to deal with potential cyber-bullying. Pupils appreciate that their views are listened to, such as when the school council helped to develop and raise awareness of the school's values, particularly as they relate to the school's Catholic status. Many pupils contribute well to school life and develop their own leadership skills by organising lunchtime clubs for others. Pupils and their parents and carers are extremely confident that the school is a safe environment. Attendance has improved well since the last inspection and is now well above the national average.

Leadership and management

The success of the headteacher's leadership is evident in strong teamwork and the accurate understanding staff have of the effectiveness of the school's work. Its caring ethos is reflected in clear structures to ensure that any barriers to learning, personal or academic, are identified and addressed quickly. The effectiveness of the school's approach is seen in the consistently good and improving progress made by pupils during a time when a high proportion of new teachers were being inducted into the school. Teachers are given good support to develop their practice, seen in the school's monitoring documentation which shows an increasing proportion of good and better teaching, resulting in a steady improvement in pupils' attainment. Professional development is carefully planned to meet individual and whole-school priorities. The school has a good track record of improvement, most particularly in provision in Reception, which has improved children's starting points in Year 1, attendance and a steady improvement in attainment and progress through the school. Together with its accurate targeting of action for development, this shows a good capacity for further improvement.

The governing body has reviewed the way in which it carries out its responsibilities, and members are knowledgeable and hold the school to account well for its performance. The good strategies the school uses to engage parents and carers and help them to be involved in their child's learning begins in Reception with very clear information about the school's approaches to teaching, in particular to reading and numeracy. Teachers holding curriculum responsibilities are enthusiastic and carefully prioritise actions which will make the greatest contribution to improving pupils' achievement. Consequently, the curriculum is interesting for pupils and promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. The attention given to ensuring equality of opportunity and tackling any form of discrimination effectively ensures that all groups of pupils, whatever their background and abilities, make good progress from their starting points. A high priority is given to ensuring that pupils are safe, including arrangements relating to child protection.

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.



27 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Our Lady's Catholic Primary School, Dartford DA1 2HX

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We thoroughly enjoyed meeting you and speaking to you about your work and the things that happen in the school. This letter is to explain to you what we found out.

We judge that your school is good and these things it does particularly well.

- Your behaviour is good and you are considerate of one another which makes the school a pleasant place for you to learn.
- You are safe and secure in school because adults take good care of you and take any concerns you have seriously.
- Teachers make learning interesting and help you to know what to do to improve further.
- Your regular attendance helps you to make good progress because you do not have gaps in your learning.
- Your headteacher leads the school well and all the staff are keen to make it even better.

We have asked the headteacher and your teachers to work at three things which should help you to make even faster progress.

- Sometimes you could manage even harder work and try more things out for yourselves.
- We have asked teachers to make sure that you respond to their suggestions for how your work could be improved to check out that you have fully understood their advice.
- We think that you could be given more opportunities to practise your writing and numeracy skills in other subjects.

We are glad that you enjoy school and know that you will continue to work hard.

Thank you again for your help.

Yours sincerely

Helen Hutchings
Lead inspector

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