

St Finian's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 110037 |
| Local Authority | West Berkshire |
| Inspection number | 378038 |
| Inspection dates | 16–17 November 2011 |
| Reporting inspector | David Edwards HMI |

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 | 192 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | John Stevens |
| Headteacher | Elizabeth Housden |
| Date of previous school inspection | 25 February 2009 |
| School address | The Ridge Cold Ash Thatcham RG18 9HU |
| Telephone number | 01635 865 925 |
| Fax number | 01635 874 892 |
| Email address | headteacher.stfinians@westberks.org |

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
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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

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 17 lessons, taught by nine teachers and held meetings with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and other representatives of the governing body, staff and pupils, and held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. They observed the school's work and looked at the school documentation, including evidence from the school's self-evaluation process and safeguarding procedures. They also analysed questionnaires completed by 84 parents and carers, 100 pupils and 11 staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The effectiveness with which the school has addressed and secured the necessary improvements to the quality of teaching identified at the time of the previous inspection.
- To what extent teaching challenges as well as supports pupils, throughout the school, to secure and maintain better progress, particularly in Key Stage 2 and in mathematics.
- How well leaders and managers, at all levels, have ensured the quality of provision has not been compromised during the transition of pupils into the new school.
- How confidently leaders demonstrate a strengthened and sustainable capacity for further improvement.

Information about the school

This is a small primary school. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language is low. None is at an early stage of learning English. A slightly lower than average proportion of pupils are identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is also below average. Classes are organised into single ages and children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage in Reception. The school has very recently moved into new purpose-built accommodation adjacent to the old school. Work to complete the final stages of the building was in progress at the time of the inspection.

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Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school which is demonstrating a good capacity to sustain further improvement. Pupils' good achievement and their outstanding personal development mean that their outcomes are also outstanding and hence value for money is excellent. The headteacher, supported by senior leaders and governors, has effectively addressed the area of weakness identified at the time of the previous inspection so that teaching throughout the school is now typically good with much that is outstanding. Consequently, most pupils at each key stage and including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress in their learning. Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage because provision has been carefully planned to engage children's interests and support them in making good progress in their learning. By the time children enter Key Stage 1 they are well prepared to continue with their learning. By the time they leave school at the end of Key Stage 2 most pupils' attainment is above average in English and in line with the national average for mathematics. Pupils develop and maintain a very good attitude to learning throughout their time at St Finian's so that their overall achievement is good. The school is working towards raising standards further, particularly in mathematics. However, strategies to ensure pupils are more closely involved in setting their literacy and numeracy targets are not fully embedded in each class. Pupils appreciate the way teachers work hard to make learning exciting and meaningful. One pupil summed up the views of many by saying, 'Lessons in religious education are excellent in helping us to understand how to run our own lives. We can think deeper as we get older.'

The new, purpose-built school and extensive grounds have already begun to make a significant contribution to the all-round learning experiences enjoyed by pupils and those who work in the school. The school, indeed, provides a good all-round curriculum as well as a wide range of extra-curricular clubs for which the take-up by pupils is high. Despite the challenges associated with the very recent move into the new school, leaders and managers have successfully maintained outstanding care, guidance and support for all pupils. Similarly, the school's strong inclusive ethos, which is firmly grounded in the Christian faith, ensures the school's engagement with parents, carers and other partners remains very secure and a hallmark of this school.

Teachers' subject knowledge, particularly in literacy, is extensive and ensures that all pupils and identifiable groups, such as academically more-able pupils, are appropriately challenged to do their best. The work of the school is rigorously

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monitored by the headteacher, and outcomes are shared regularly with the governing body which helps it to shape the strategic direction of the school. Assessment information is used by teachers to identify pupils' next steps in learning as well as to measure how much progress they are making towards their challenging targets. Teachers' marking is constructive and makes a significant contribution to the progress pupils make, particularly in English. However, strategies to help pupils to identify what they need to do to improve in mathematics do not support pupils' individual progress so well. Support staff who manage the day-to-day work of the school, as well as those who work directly with pupils, are highly valued by the school and all are well trained. They work very closely with teachers to provide support which is carefully tailored to meet the needs of individual pupils and groups.

The carefully managed accountability and professional development of all staff underpin this good provision and the high level of morale that is evident within the school. Self-evaluation is appropriately focused on improving outcomes for pupils. However, senior leaders and managers acknowledge further work is required to produce succinct and insightful self-evaluation that in turn will help the school to focus with greater accuracy on areas for improvement. The governing body holds the school effectively to account and ensures the work of the school is reviewed regularly.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure leaders and managers, at all levels, produce regular and succinct evaluation of their work which will help drive and secure improved attainment for all pupils.
- Ensure marking in mathematics focuses closely on what pupils need to do next to improve, and that pupils are guided to regularly review their work and set their own targets to improve their work further.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and they enjoy very positive relationships with adults. They are proud of their new school and regard it as a community. In most lessons pupils are highly motivated and engage enthusiastically in activities, demonstrating a sense of enjoyment and fascination in learning about themselves, others and the world around them. Pupils say they feel very safe in school. They play well together, and say that incidents of bullying are rare and they know who to talk to if they have concerns. Pupils' understanding of how to use information and communication technology safely is well developed. They speak confidently about what constitutes a healthy diet and lifestyle. Strategies to support pupils in attending school are thoroughly implemented so that attendance remains above average.

Children enter the Reception class displaying skills and abilities that are in line with those expected for their age. However, through the excellent care, attention and

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good communication with parents and carers, the school is able to identify and provide for all pupils’ individual learning needs. By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils’ attainment is above average, especially in English, although it is more variable in mathematics. This is because targets to improve in mathematics are not focused closely enough on what pupils need to do next to improve. Lesson observations and a scrutiny of pupils’ work confirm that pupils’ attainment currently in all other year groups is at least in line with age-related expectations overall and continues to improve. Achievement is also good for pupils currently in the school.

Pupils demonstrate excellent concentration in lessons and the majority are committed to succeeding in all areas of learning. The early identification of pupils’ learning needs and the consistent support for all groups of learners are notable strengths of the school. More-able pupils, those with particular gifts and talents, and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make securely good progress because support is very well organised and matched to their individual learning needs. Pupils are enabled to contribute very positively to the school and wider community. Through the creative engagement with the church, local community, and visits to places of interest, pupils gain an excellent, first-hand appreciation of the United Kingdom as a culturally diverse society.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

| | |
|---|----------|
| Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning | 2 |
| Taking into account: | |
| Pupils’ attainment ¹ | 2 |
| The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress | 2 |
| The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress | 2 |
| The extent to which pupils feel safe | 1 |
| Pupils’ behaviour | 1 |
| The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community | 1 |
| The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 2 |
| Taking into account: | |
| Pupils’ attendance ¹ | 2 |
| The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 |

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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How effective is the provision?

Additional training has enhanced teachers' good subject knowledge, particularly to support improvements in the attainment of writing throughout the school. Time is used well throughout the school day. Pupils experience a wide range of good quality learning opportunities and frequently work together in small groups and pairs. They have regular time to reflect on their work and teachers' marking. However, pupils' personal targets in mathematics are not focused closely enough on what they need to do next to improve and strategies to support them provided by the school are undeveloped.

In good and outstanding lessons teachers' excellent subject knowledge is applied effectively to challenge and inspire pupils. Pupils demonstrate excellent concentration and are rarely off task. For example, in a Key Stage 2 lesson pupils showed engagement and enthusiasm in developing their measuring skills and resilience as they rose to the challenge of working collaboratively in a carousel of small groups to practise plotting coordinates on a grid. Furthermore, resources, including new technologies, are used most effectively to support teaching and enhance learning. Where teaching was no better than satisfactory, work provided for pupils did not match their learning needs sufficiently, a lack of resources hindered pupils' engagement with the task and opportunities were missed throughout the lessons to question pupils or extend their thinking further. As a result, in these lessons pupils' learning and their progress slowed.

The curriculum is adjusted effectively to meet the various needs of pupils with a wealth of good quality learning experiences, both indoors and out. Pupils particularly appreciate how lessons and learning are enjoyable when there is a practical element to develop and exercise new skills. New technologies are used well throughout the curriculum. Excellent attention is given to all aspects of care, guidance and support. Child protection procedures are exemplary. Teaching assistants work very closely with small groups or individuals and contribute most effectively to the assessment of pupils' learning. The school has worked effectively to develop and strengthen transition arrangements at each stage of pupils' movement between classes and key stages. Transfer onto the next stage of their education is made as seamless as possible for pupils and so they remain confident about the future.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

| | |
|--|----------|
| The quality of teaching | 2 |
| Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning | 2 |
| The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships | 2 |
| The effectiveness of care, guidance and support | 1 |

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How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher of the school is held in high regard by all who work in the school and the local authority. Parents’ and carers’ confidence in the headteacher has been further strengthened as a result of her carefully managing the smooth transition of pupils from the old to the new school while maintaining a high quality education for pupils. Leaders promote equality and tackle discrimination effectively. They are committed to providing child-centred learning and hold high expectations of all staff. As a result, the headteacher has gathered around her a cohesive team of enthusiastic and highly aspirational professionals who are demonstrating the ability to provide a good and strongly improving learning experience for all pupils.

All adults are appropriately trained and regularly updated in the procedures for safeguarding pupils and the school is exceptionally vigilant in keeping records and so cares and provides very well for the safety of pupils. Although the monitoring of all aspects of the school’s work is extensive, further work is required to secure a culture of searching analysis and self-challenge that will enable leaders to devise succinct, well-focused plans for further improvement.

Working closely with the church, the school's actions have a markedly beneficial impact on community cohesion within its local community and beyond. There is good access to equal opportunities for all pupils and any barriers to achievement are being systematically addressed. Consequently, pupils and their families are made to feel very welcome and encouraged to contribute in any way they can.

The governing body possess a very clear understanding and experience of cultural diversity at a local, national and international level. It plays a significant role in the life of the school because it is kept well informed by the headteacher through her detailed reports. This ensures the school’s unique vision and purpose is maintained in a respectful and supportive way. However, governors are aware of the need to strengthen links with middle leaders in order to hold the school more rigorously to account and to ensure self-evaluation becomes more sharply focused on raising pupils’ attainment.

These are the grades for leadership and management

| | |
|--|----------|
| The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement | 2 |
| Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers | 1 |
| The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being | 1 |

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| | |
|--|----------|
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination | 2 |
| The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures | 1 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion | 1 |
| The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money | 1 |

Early Years Foundation Stage

Most children start school with skills and abilities that are broadly in line with those expected for their age. Currently, children are weaker in communication and literacy skills. However, children make good progress, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development so that they are well prepared to continue their learning at the start of Key Stage 1. This is because trusting and supportive relationships are quickly established between the school, children and their parents and carers. Good communication ensures high levels of satisfaction and regular opportunities for parents and carers to be involved in their children’s learning; for example, through contributing to the smooth transition of children to the new school and regular opportunities to engage in home-learning tasks.

Teaching and learning are good and appropriately centred on the needs of the individual child, ensuring the learning environment both inside and outside is well planned to provide for children’s interests and learning needs. All activities are carefully thought through to engage and support the development of children’s all-round skills both indoors and outdoors. For example, children showed growing personal independence in putting on their coats and wellington boots as they prepared to visit their imaginary town of ‘Finian’ and to feed the community pigs. The detailed monitoring of children’s skills development and progress result in teachers developing a comprehensive understanding of children’s strengths and next steps in learning.

The leaders of the Early Years Foundation Stage have shown willingness and commitment in addressing areas for further development. They have been well supported by senior leaders in order to build upon their knowledge of how children learn best. As result, staff work well together. They are reflective and ambitious to further develop the spacious, purpose-built learning environment, both indoors and out. All adults are good role models and work confidently together as a team and this is having a positive impact on the rates of children’s learning and progress. The children’s welfare is a high priority. Robust safeguarding ensures all policies and risk assessments are in place and regularly monitored. All staff work well together and are confident in working with children because of the high quality training they receive on a regular basis.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

| | |
|--|----------|
| Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage | 2 |
| Taking into account: | |
| Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage | 2 |
| The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage | 2 |
| The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage | 2 |

Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of the 109 parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire were very positive about the school. In particular, parents and carers have confidence in the school’s leadership and how much their children enjoy school. One parent summed up the views of the majority by writing, ‘We think St Finian’s is a wonderful environment for our child and expect the school to go from strength to strength in the gorgeous new school building.’ Another satisfied parent wrote, ‘There is a sound family-like caring ethos at St Finian’s which we parents deeply value.’

In essence, the findings of the inspectors endorse these positive views. Overall there were three areas of concern raised through the questionnaires. A few parents and carers would like more regular information about the progress their children make and how they could better support their children in school. A few others feel their concerns are not always listened to or acted upon. A very small minority of parents are concerned about the standards of behaviour within the school. The inspectors discussed all these issues with the school. For behaviour, inspectors observed behaviour in lessons and around the school, held discussions with staff and pupils and scrutinised behavioural records. The findings are in the report.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Finian’s Catholic Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 109 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 192 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements | Strongly agree | | Agree | | Disagree | | Strongly disagree | |
|---|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|----|-------------------|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| My child enjoys school | 68 | 61 | 35 | 32 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| The school keeps my child safe | 67 | 60 | 41 | 37 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| The school informs me about my child’s progress | 37 | 33 | 59 | 53 | 13 | 12 | 0 | 0 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school | 32 | 29 | 68 | 61 | 8 | 7 | 1 | 1 |
| The teaching is good at this school | 41 | 37 | 59 | 53 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps me to support my child’s learning | 39 | 35 | 57 | 51 | 10 | 9 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle | 57 | 51 | 49 | 44 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment) | 38 | 34 | 58 | 52 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| The school meets my child’s particular needs | 39 | 35 | 50 | 45 | 12 | 11 | 2 | 2 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour | 31 | 28 | 55 | 50 | 15 | 14 | 1 | 1 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns | 28 | 25 | 54 | 49 | 14 | 13 | 4 | 4 |
| The school is led and managed effectively | 36 | 32 | 61 | 55 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school | 56 | 50 | 47 | 42 | 6 | 5 | 0 | 0 |

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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 | 43 | 47 | 10 | 0 |
| Primary schools | 6 | 46 | 42 | 6 |
| Secondary schools | 14 | 36 | 41 | 9 |
| Sixth forms | 15 | 42 | 41 | 3 |
| Special schools | 30 | 48 | 19 | 3 |
| Pupil referral units | 14 | 50 | 31 | 5 |
| All schools | 10 | 44 | 39 | 6 |

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and 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.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Achievement: | the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training. |
| Attainment: | the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons. |
| Capacity to improve: | the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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: | <p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support. |
| 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. |

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.

18 November 2011

Dear Pupils



Inspection of St Finian's Catholic Primary School, Thatcham, RG18 9HU

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited you in your new school recently. We were particularly impressed with how quickly you have settled to your new surroundings. Your very good behaviour and your enthusiasm to learn in lessons were very noticeable. We have decided that yours is a good school. Your headteacher, governors and all those who work in the school care for you very well. They ensure the support and guidance you enjoy from all the adults who work in your school is exceptional because your headteacher, staff and governors work very closely together to provide you with good learning experiences. I was not surprised therefore to find that your attendance is above the national average. Well done!

You make good progress and achieve above average standards in English and are in line with the national average in mathematics by the time you leave school at the end of Year 6. Those of you we spoke with told us the school is a very safe place, and that you learn a lot about staying healthy through regular exercise and eating a healthy diet. We noticed that you work well together in lessons and have plenty of opportunities to extend your learning through clubs, trips out and good use of the school grounds, which have been carefully filled with activities and experiences to support and extend your learning. (I was particularly impressed with the colourful 'pig bins' to collect your left over fruit and vegetables!) Those of you who sometimes find learning challenging are also given good support to make good progress in all you do.

Even though much in your school, such as your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding, there are a few things to improve upon, so we have asked your headteacher to make sure that you are provided with more opportunities to set your own improvement targets in English and mathematics; also, that school leaders develop a clearer understanding of how well you are progressing so that they might provide the very best support for you all to improve even further in your work.

Finally, I would like to say how much I enjoyed visiting your school and seeing you working in your new surroundings. I wish you well for your futures.

Yours sincerely

David Edwards
Her Majesty's Inspector

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