

St Joseph's RC Lower School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	109629
Local authority	Bedford Borough
Inspection number	377954
Inspection dates	17–18 May 2012
Lead inspector	David Radomsky

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	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	343
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christopher Donellan
Headteacher	Lisa Sumpter
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2008
School address	Chester Road Bedford MK40 4HN
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Age group	3–9
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Introduction

Inspection team

David Radomsky

Additional Inspector

Margaret Lewis

Additional Inspector

Alwyne Jolly

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 20 lessons taught by 13 teachers. In addition, inspectors made short observations of 17 sessions on the teaching of phonics (letter patterns and the sounds they represent) for a total of 100 minutes. Many of these observations were made jointly with the headteacher of the school. Account was taken of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at school documentation, including teachers' planning, the school and coordinators' development plans, assessment information, safeguarding documentation and samples of pupils' work. In addition, inspectors listened to pupils read and talked with them about their enjoyment of books. Inspectors analysed 129 questionnaires from parents and carers, 89 from pupils and 38 from staff.

Information about the school

St Joseph's RC Lower School is a larger than the average-sized primary school. It is part of a local federation of four catholic schools under the umbrella of one governing body. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language are well above average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average. Most of this group have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school runs a breakfast and after-school club. The school has a number of awards and since the previous inspection has gained the Inclusion Quality Mark and International School accreditation.

The current headteacher, who is the fifth since the time of the previous inspection, took up her post in January 2011. There have been a number of new leadership appointments made since that time, with leaders predominantly taking up their posts in September 2011.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. The school is not good because a sustained pattern of good progress in Years 1 to 4 has not been achieved. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Achievement is satisfactory. From low starting points, pupils make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, but the rates of progress as they continue through the school have only been satisfactory, although more recently progress is accelerating in some subjects. As a result, pupils' attainment in English and mathematics when they leave the school has been below average.
- Most of the teaching is satisfactory and sometimes it is good. Planning does not always take into account the full range of pupils' needs and this slows the rates of progress, especially for the more able. Feedback does not always make clear to pupils what they need to do to improve their work, and pupils do not consistently respond to teachers' comments.
- Pupils' behaviour and safety are satisfactory. Occasionally in lessons, pupils lose interest, do not sustain their effort with the work and get distracted by incidental conversations.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. School leaders and the governing body have successfully identified the areas for development and have begun to bring about important improvements. Systems are in place for tracking pupils' achievement and for supporting those who are not meeting expectations. This information however, is not used rigorously enough by all teachers and leaders to accelerate progress. Leaders are developing teachers' skills well through frequent monitoring, performance management, feedback and training. The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral and social development well. The curriculum provides pupils with many enjoyable and stimulating experiences,

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but there are insufficient opportunities across different subjects to develop good literacy and numeracy skills.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By July 2013, raise attainment at the end of Years 2 and 4 so that it is at least in line with national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - embedding recently introduced strategies to extend and consolidate pupils' reading, writing and spelling skills
 - ensuring all teachers use performance data sharply to plan activities in lessons that meet the needs and challenges of all pupils, especially the more able
 - managing behaviour more consistently and raising expectations to ensure all pupils sustain their concentration throughout lessons
 - improving the quality of feedback that teachers give to pupils, so that they know how to improve their work, and have opportunities to respond to teachers' comments
 - developing the curriculum to ensure that there are opportunities for pupils to extend their literacy and practise their mathematical skills across subjects.

- Develop the expertise of less experienced leaders in analysing pupils' achievement tracking information sharply to identify any underperformance and to use this information to ensure teachers plan lessons to improve learning for all pupils

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are low compared with expectations for their age. They grow in confidence, engage enthusiastically in learning and communicate well with each other and with adults because of the good teaching and well-planned activities. In Reception, for example, the teacher made good use of a computer program to demonstrate the use of numbers when going shopping. Children proceeded to independently initiate their own activities such as pretending to buy muffins from a bakery shop and responded well to the adult's questioning which developed both their speaking and early counting skills.

Pupils move up to Year 1 with skills that are below average. Satisfactory progress in Years 1 to 4 means that attainment at the end of Year 4, over time, has been below average. Attainment in reading by the end of Years 2 and 4 has been below average as teaching has lacked sufficient structure and challenge to ensure that pupils make good progress. Recently, the school has successfully introduced a new systematic scheme for the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make). Pupils are engaging well with this and it is leading to rapid improvements. Inspection evidence

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endorses the view expressed by one parent who said, 'We have really appreciated the new reading scheme and have found it is helping our child enjoy reading and writing so much more than before'.

With more stable staffing, improved teaching and through a wide range of additional support strategies, the school has ensured that gaps in achievement between groups of pupils are narrowing rapidly. As a result, the progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language is now at least in line with that of their peers.

Pupils are excited by and enjoy their work when teaching is good. In a Year 1 mathematics lesson on measuring, pupils excitedly engaged in a carousel of activities which enabled them to make good progress. They weighed various objects, measured lines and estimated measurements on a computer programme.

Mathematical concepts and vocabulary were reinforced at every stage so that pupils learnt to make predictions and estimate results, and learnt the relationship between metres, centimetres and millimetres. This level of engagement in their learning, however, was not always replicated in other lessons seen.

The vast majority of parents and carers feel that their children's progress is good. Inspectors found that, while increasing numbers of pupils are making good progress, overall progress is satisfactory.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall and some good teaching was observed. When teaching is at its best, teachers plan for the learning needs of all pupils. They set a good pace and extend thinking through effective questioning. They ensure that learning is fun and explain clearly to pupils what they will learn and how they will know if they have succeeded. Teachers and skilled teaching assistants provide well-targeted support, especially to disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. This occurs both individually and in small groups in lessons to help them overcome their difficulties.

Inspection evidence confirms that teaching is more typically satisfactory. Work is not always well matched to the abilities of individual pupils and does not offer sufficient challenge or pace to enable pupils to make the accelerated progress necessary. This is particularly true for more-able pupils. Additionally, pupils do not always settle quickly and get on with their work at a good pace. For example, following the teacher's effective introduction to a Year 3 class about writing formal letters, many pupils spent the next fifteen minutes writing a lot less than they are capable of. As a result, pupils' learning and progress was slower than in the more successful lessons. Marking does not consistently make explicit what pupils need to do to improve their work and teachers do not always ensure that pupils follow up on their comments and correct their mistakes.

Teaching of early reading skills through the newly introduced scheme is systematic and thorough. It is based on a structured scheme fully adopted by teachers and

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teaching assistants, who are skilled in the correct articulation of sounds when teaching reading. Pupils are beginning to make better progress and are showing an interest in reading and a desire to succeed. The school has correctly identified the need to establish stronger links between home and school to embed reading for pleasure.

In many lessons, teachers promote pupils' personal development well. Whether creating art for their own art gallery, participating in a 'mind, body and soul day' or reflecting in lessons on issues such as friendship, such activities have a positive impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Most parents and carers believe that their children are taught well. Inspectors found that teaching is satisfactory overall.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Almost all parents and carers believe that their children are safe. A few, however, expressed concerns about behaviour in lessons and about the way in which the school deals with bullying. Inspectors talked to many pupils in the playground and more formally in group discussions. Pupils told inspectors that since the arrival of the new headteacher, behaviour has improved and that there has been a marked reduction in inappropriate name-calling. They feel that poor behaviour and the attitude of a few people in some of their lessons do disrupt their learning occasionally. Inspectors found that the large majority of pupils displayed positive attitudes to their learning and responded promptly to their teachers' directions. Leaders have identified that even more needs to be done to improve pupils' attitudes to learning.

Pupils are aware that there are different types of bullying such as physical, name-calling and prejudicial behaviour, and that such occurrences do occur occasionally. Pupils, however, said that they feel happy and safe and know that the teachers and other adults in school will help with any problems if they arise. The school works hard to include those pupils with identified behavioural difficulties by enabling them to improve and manage their behaviour through the dedicated support of the nurture provision. Pupils are well aware of fire and road safety. They are fully aware of the school's rules for behaviour and say that they value the positive rewards for good work, behaviour and consistently high attendance.

Leadership and management

The school is successfully emerging with renewed strength from a period of very challenging staffing issues. The headteacher, staff and the governing body have a clear, ambitious vision and drive for the future. The improvements already made by the new leadership team demonstrate that there is the capacity to move forward in raising achievement and strengthening the quality of teaching further. The school's improvement planning, based on robust systems for self-evaluation, focus on the right priorities. All leaders and teachers are benefiting from excellent mentoring and

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are learning from best practice at the outstanding schools in the federation and from the federation's Executive Principal. The governing body, which is well equipped with expertise, insight and up-to-date information about the school's performance, supports and challenges effectively. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust and fully meet statutory requirements.

All teachers are monitored twice termly through lesson observations and termly pupil progress meetings hold them to account and contribute to the management of their performance. The tracking of pupils' progress is sharply focused on outcomes for individuals and groups. Teachers scrutinise and discuss this information with the headteacher, but not all teachers and less experienced leaders use this information effectively enough in their lesson planning and monitoring to identify and stretch the more able. The recently appointed inclusion leader gives clear direction to improving provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Effective action is taken should any underachievement be identified. The school promotes equality of opportunity satisfactorily through for example, ensuring those pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable have opportunities to experience a range of extra-curricular activities that are targeted to meet their needs. Leaders tackle discrimination rigorously.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and the impact of the planned curriculum in terms of basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics is satisfactory. However, there are insufficient planned opportunities for pupils to practise and apply the literacy and numeracy skills they learn in English and mathematics lessons in other subjects. The curriculum is enriched through a range of visits to places of interest and pupils benefit from the presentations made by frequent visitors to their assemblies. Good attention is paid to promoting spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For instance, pupils work hard to support different charities and have penpal links with pupils in overseas schools.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.



21 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Joseph's RC Lower School, Bedford, MK40 4HN

Thank you for the warm welcome that you gave us when we visited your school. We greatly enjoyed talking to many of you and listening to some of you read. We found that your school is satisfactory, which means some things are done well and others could be better.

Here are some of the good things we found out. Your headteacher, staff and governing body ensure that you are well cared for and supported, and they want to help you to achieve the best you can. You clearly enjoy school and we were very impressed with some of your work displayed in the school, such as your artwork, and by your lovely singing in assembly. Your parents and carers must be very proud of you. You understand how to stay safe and most of you enjoy working with other pupils in your lessons but you do not always get on with your work quickly and quietly enough. The school provides you with many enjoyable and fun learning opportunities including many trips and visitors.

The leaders of your school want you to achieve well and do your very best. They know what needs to be done next and, from our findings, we have asked them to do some things to improve your school. We have asked them to:

- make sure your lessons are even more exciting and plan activities that will help you to do your best and always behave well
- make sure that you know how to improve your work when teachers mark your books, and give you time to correct your mistakes and learn from them
- continue to help you improve your reading and give you more opportunities to practise writing and mathematics during your topic work
- check that the school is doing its very best to make sure that you are successful in all that you do.

All of you can contribute to these improvements by working hard, behaving well in lessons and around the school and responding well to all that the teachers ask you to do. We wish you all the best for the future and thank you again for your help.

Yours sincerely

David Radomsky
Lead inspector

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