

Saint Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School

Bedwell Crescent, Stevenage, SG1 1NJ

Inspection dates 14–15 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Leaders and managers are not using the information gathered from checks made on learning to identify in detail what needs to be done to improve the school, so the older pupils' progress is still affected by some issues identified by the last inspection.
- Although good teaching promotes good progress in English and mathematics in most year groups, the quality varies too much in the important Years 5 and 6 as pupils are preparing for the next stage of their education.
- In particular, inconsistencies in the teaching of mathematics in Years 5 and 6 mean that more-able pupils and those who are at risk of underperforming are not making the progress they are capable of.

The school has the following strengths

- Some improvements have been made since the last inspection, particularly to pupils' progress in mathematics and English in Years 3 and 4.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They behave well and feel safe in school.
- At the end of Year 2 and Year 6, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is above average.
- The school promotes a culture of respect and tolerance, and makes sure that pupils from all backgrounds are treated equally and given the help they need to succeed.
- The themes and topics that link subjects together make a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school has built positive relationships with parents, and this helps to make sure that attendance is above average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 35 lessons or part lessons taught by 16 teachers.
- Joint lesson observations were conducted with senior leaders, and short visits were made to observe teaching in Key Stage 2. In addition, inspectors examined the work in pupils' books with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plan, external evaluations of the school, minutes of meetings of the governing body, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and those relating to safeguarding.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read, met with different groups of pupils, interviewed a sample of staff, and spoke to groups of parents. They also spoke to members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- The views of parents were sought at the start and end of the school day, and through the school's own surveys. There were 33 responses to the online (Parent View) survey. They also considered comments from 25 staff.

Inspection team

Brian Netto, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sue Calvert

Additional Inspector

John Greevy

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is much larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Many speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for looked after children, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, and those from armed service families, is low.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is below average, as is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school runs a breakfast club.
- Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes in staff including the appointment of a deputy headteacher.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By July 2013, ensure that teaching and progress are at least consistently good by:
 - building on the existing good practice in lower year groups to use and apply mathematics and give pupils more opportunities to work on their own
 - providing tasks that closely match the needs of all ability groups, particularly the more-able pupils and those at risk of underperforming
 - providing more detailed feedback in lessons and in marking so that pupils know exactly what they need to do to improve their work, and have regular opportunities to do so.
- Make leaders and managers, including governors, more effective by:
 - making sure that checks on the quality of teaching lead to precise guidance to staff on what needs to improve in their teaching
 - using other information to hold staff fully responsible for the progress of pupils in their classes, for example examining teachers' plans and looking closely at pupils' work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Although by Year 6 standards are above national averages in English and mathematics, pupils have not made the progress that could be expected given their starting points, particularly in mathematics.
- Children get off to a good start. They enter the Nursery with skills that are broadly at the level expected nationally for their age. Staff keep a careful track of all the skills children gain throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage, to make sure they make good progress across all areas of learning. This progress continues into Key Stage 1, and by the end of Year 2 standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above national averages. Progress is also good in Years 3 and 4 but slows in Years 5 and 6, particularly in mathematics.
- The school carefully identifies pupils who are at risk of underperforming and provides help and guidance so they keep up with their classmates. As a consequence, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make progress in line with this group nationally, as do those who speak English as an additional language. Well-trained additional adults usually help to make sure that their work is at the right level of difficulty, and working in small groups helps to make sure they maintain concentration and are actively involved in learning.
- Pupils supported by the pupil premium benefit well from the additional teaching support that the funding buys. The school's analysis of their progress shows that pupils known to be eligible for free school meals have improved their performance, and their attainment compares favourably with their peers.
- Pupils make good progress in reading by developing their understanding of the links between letters and sounds. In a Year 1 session observed, the teacher's skilful questions helped pupils to use their knowledge of double vowel sounds to extend their learning in building simple sentences.
- Overall, achievement requires improvement because not enough pupils, particularly the more-able pupils make good progress over time in mathematics.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is consistently good in the Early Years Foundation Stage, across Key Stage 1 and in Years 3 and 4. However, inconsistencies remain in Years 5 and 6, particularly in the teaching of mathematics.
- The best teaching is characterised by activities which engage and interest pupils, regular checks on learning so that pupils are kept interested and concentrate, and strong purposeful relationships.
- For example, pupils in Year 4 developed a good understanding of the features of instructions in recipes through small group work, quick reviews and reminders of what the tasks required. In another lesson, Year 2 pupils developed a good understanding of writing instructions because the teacher made good use of success criteria during the lesson and at the end, helped them to understand how to be successful writers.
- Year 5 pupils made good progress in understanding different states that liquids take during an

experiment which helped them to come up with a hypothesis. The practical experiment using a carbonated liquid and mints mixed to create a mini-explosion engaged their attention and focused them on discussing reasons why this happened.

- In contrast, where pupils made more limited progress, the teaching did not encourage them to develop their independent skills, or work in pairs or small groups. Pace slowed down as the teacher spoke for too long, giving pupils little chance to be active in their learning.
- The quality of teaching in mathematics varies too much in Years 5 and 6. Pupils are placed in ability groups for mathematics from Year 2, and this initially works well. But the teaching seen in Years 5 and 6 lacked pace, and often the same task was given to all groups of pupils, regardless of their ability levels. This particularly means that more-able pupils are not always given work that is hard enough to stretch them, and it is sometimes too difficult for the least able.
- Marking and feedback are also more inconsistent in Years 5 and 6. Comments by the teacher do not always show the pupils clearly how to improve their work, and are not set against success criteria the pupils can use to check their own learning. Pupils do not have enough regular opportunities to correct their work in response to teachers' comments, especially in mathematics.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils respond well to their teachers' consistent expectations of good behaviour, and are eager to take part in lessons. Their positive attitudes are a strong feature of all classrooms. They are caring and considerate towards each other, and willingly work with each other in small groups.
- Parents are mostly positive about the school. They agree that staff keep their children safe, and that behaviour is typically good.
- The breakfast club gives the pupils who attend a good and enjoyable start to the day. This reflects the care and consideration the school provides for its pupils.
- Pupils say that bullying is rare, and any minor incidents are dealt with swiftly and fairly by staff. Playground buddies and peer mediators help to ensure that there is a positive climate for learning. Adults and play leaders help to make social times fun occasions for play, and as a result pupils show a great deal of care and respect for each other.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to use the internet safely, and different forms of bullying such as racist and homophobic language. They know why this is not acceptable and why the school treats these matters very seriously. As one pupil said, 'No one is the odd one out.'
- Attendance is above average. Procedures for following up absence have resulted in a reduction in the number of regular absences, and the school works well in partnership with parents to ensure good attendance.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have successfully tackled some of the weaknesses identified in the last inspection, although they have been less successful in improving the quality of teaching and pupils' progress in mathematics in Years 5 and 6. The school has suffered a number of changes of staff, including the appointment of a new deputy headteacher, and some long-term illnesses.

- Subject leaders and teachers responsible for different age groups are given accurate information about how well the pupils are doing. However, they do not use it to focus their work on areas of weakness, and classroom teachers are also not making best use of it in their planning, particularly in Years 5 and 6. Regular checks on learning are not resulting in precise enough areas for improvement.
- The school's own analysis of its strengths and weaknesses is accurate and realistic. Leaders recognise that the quality of teaching is not yet consistently good enough to promote good progress throughout the school. They are holding teachers more effectively to account for pupils' progress, though this has not been done systematically to raise achievement by the end of Key Stage 2.
- The linking of themes and topics across a number of different subjects ensures that pupils experience a range of memorable learning activities. During the inspection, pupils across the school took part in a 'pyjama day.' This fund-raising event focused on reading and writing around the theme of bedtime stories, and encouraged pupils to mix and work with each other across all age groups. Careful planning and interesting and engaging activities ensured that pupils learnt in a fun and safe atmosphere. In such ways, the school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- Local authority support is bought in by the school, and much of it has resulted in improvements. For example, the focus on writing has helped to sustain good standards in this area. However, the support for mathematics has not yet led to sustained improvements in the quality of teaching in Years 5 and 6.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors use their expertise and knowledge from a wide range of backgrounds to help and support the school. They have good systems to evaluate the school's performance, including how well pupils are doing compared to others in similar schools nationally, and have increased their capacity to challenge the school and check the quality of its work. They make informed decisions about how funding should be spent, though they are not fully involved in the decisions about financial incentives for staff. They are provided with information on how well pupils do at the end of Year 2 and Year 6, as well as regular reports on progress across the school. However, they are not yet making full use of this data, such as the impact of additional funding, or on the quality of teaching to be able to hold the school to account for the lack of sufficient progress made in Years 5 and 6. Governors ensure that procedures for safeguarding are secure and up to date. They are suitably trained in how to recruit staff, and have regular opportunities to update their skills in other areas.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	117498
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	401669

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	473
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Penny Perschky
Headteacher	Diann Ross
Date of previous school inspection	10 November 2009
Telephone number	01438 729555
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