

St Vincent's Catholic Primary School

Hammersmith Gardens, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, LU5 5RG

Inspection dates 26–27 September 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Most pupils, including minority ethnic pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, make good progress through each key stage because teaching is good, especially for reading.
- Children in the Nursery and Reception classes make good progress, particularly when learning phonics (linking letters and sounds) and to speak English.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. They feel safe, are well looked after by staff and enjoy school.
- Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is ably supported by the senior leadership team. Together they are effectively improving teaching and pupils' performance.
- The governing body is helping the school to improve. Governors' regular visits mean that they know how well the school is performing.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Lower ability pupils are not making sufficient progress in mathematics because teaching in some lessons is not always appropriate for them.
- There is not the same emphasis in classroom displays to promote learning in mathematics as there is for English.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 16 lessons taught by eight teachers. Two lessons were seen together with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with a group of six Year 6 pupils and the pupil council, the Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor, the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior leaders.
- A discussion took place with a representative from the local authority.
- There were 12 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) by the end of the inspection. The inspectors took account of these, and also sought the views of parents as they arrived at school with their children.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents, including the school's own information on pupils' recent and current progress, planning for school improvement, and checks on teaching, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Joseph Peacock, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Matthew Klimcke

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is a slightly smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- It has a Nursery class which children attend on a part time basis in the morning or afternoon and one class in each year from Reception to Year 6. Numbers in school are fairly static.
- Almost half of all pupils are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Most speak English fluently but just over 10 per cent of all pupils have English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported by additional government funding through the pupil premium is well below the national average but is increasing year on year. In this school, the pupil premium almost entirely applies to pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion who are supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in mathematics in all classes to enable more lower attaining pupils to achieve expected standards by;
 - raising the profile of mathematics in classroom displays to support learning
 - ensuring teachers match work more closely to the ability of lower attainers to enable them to make faster progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start in the Nursery with skills and understanding that are usually well below those typical for their age. Many are at the early stages of learning to speak English. Teaching is consistently good, helping all to achieve well.
- Good teaching continues in Reception. All staff in the Nursery and Reception classes promote speaking and listening skills well, encouraging children to ask and respond to questions. Nursery children talk excitedly to one another and to adults when using the climbing frame. Most make good progress in learning letters and the sounds they make (phonics). This is because of the effective daily sessions, stories, opportunities to write words and sentences and individual support for those who speak English as an additional language.
- Staff carefully assess children's progress as they tackle activities indoors and outside in the well-resourced learning areas. There are plenty of opportunities for children to gain early reading and writing skills. Planning usually makes good links between indoor and outdoor activities, ensuring a good progression in learning new skills. Children have time to work and play independently and gain new skills working in small groups with adults.
- Staff are continuing to develop the format of the Early Years Foundation Stage planning, ensuring a good balance between the different areas of learning. Information shows that children are well prepared for Key Stage 1, as most attain the levels expected, and some exceed expectations in each area. Learning English remains a priority for some and mathematics skills are generally lower for many than in other areas.
- Pupils' make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics in each year in Key Stages 1 and 2 because teaching is consistently effective. Attainment in reading has risen the fastest because improving reading skills has been a school priority for the past year.
- Attainment varies from year to year because some year groups are relatively small and there are significant proportions of pupils learning English or disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Recent information shows that there is an upward trend in attainment. Attainment by Year 2 is average and by Year 6 it is usually above average. Information about the current Year 6 shows that they are on track to attain above average standards by the time they leave school. More-able pupils invariably achieve their potential. However, attainment in mathematics throughout the school is below the levels reached in reading and writing as not enough lower ability pupils are achieving the expected standard.
- Pupils make good progress in reading because of the strong emphasis on teaching phonics and the special sessions such as guided reading to advance reading skills. Those who speak English as an additional language make rapid progress because of the opportunities to discuss learning with 'talk partners' and the individual help they have from supportive teaching assistants.
- Effective links are made between different subjects and these give pupils good opportunities to practise writing skills. Year 2 used a list of words to write descriptions of mathematical shapes, for example.
- Additional funding is providing more opportunities for pupils to participate in physical education and sport. These are helping pupils to develop healthy lifestyles and promoting positive attitudes towards school and their learning. Standards are rising, as a result.

- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are provided with appropriate tasks and supported closely in lessons by teachers and teaching assistants. They make good progress from their starting points.
- In mathematics, tasks are usually challenging and fun. Year 5 teacher made deliberate mistakes when solving subtraction problems and these were spotted immediately by pupils. Reception children enjoyed counting to the beat of a drum. Most pupils, especially the more able, are achieving the standards expected by the end of Year 6. A scrutiny of pupils' progress data, however, shows that a significant proportion of lower attaining pupils are not making sufficient progress and are achieving below the level expected in mathematics.
- Although pupils known to be eligible for free school meals make good progress, in 2012 some Year 6 pupils were almost a year behind their classmates in English and mathematics. Unvalidated data shows that they are closing the gap in 2013. Teaching assistants provide effective individual help for pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium. School records show that this is helping to improve their attainment in English and mathematics and is closing the gap in learning between them and other pupils. However, some are not making the same good progress in mathematics as they are in English by Year 6.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has improved significantly over the past two years and is consistently good and occasionally outstanding. The strong emphasis on teaching reading has raised attainment in reading and in writing. There is not the same emphasis in class displays to promote skills in mathematics.
- In the Nursery, adults support children well, giving them all the encouragement necessary to learn English and effectively develop new skills in reading, writing and counting. The learning environment is particularly vibrant, stimulating and attractive.
- In Reception, the emphasis on learning to speak and understand English continues. Children work well together, both indoors and out, supported closely by adults who encourage speaking and listening through conversation and questioning. Children make particularly good progress in phonics, and this prepares them well for reading and writing when they move into Year 1. Learning new mathematics skills in some sessions is not always tailored closely enough to individual needs and skills in mathematics are below those in other areas.
- Teachers accurately assess pupils' rates of progress in reading, writing and mathematics over time, so any pupils who are falling behind are quickly identified and supported, often individually. Teachers and teaching assistants ensure that pupils who speak English as an additional language are supported closely and these pupils make the same good progress as other pupils.
- Staff manage behaviour consistently well, and normally deal with any rare incidents of inappropriate behaviour immediately and effectively.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress because their individual learning needs are recognised and planning ensures that they have tasks relevant to their ability level. Well-trained and attentive teaching assistants support these pupils learning effectively in lessons.

- Reading and writing are taught well to most pupils, so they build effectively on their phonic knowledge to read accurately, spell simple words correctly and punctuate sentences appropriately. In mathematics, teachers usually plan challenging, problem-solving tasks to engage and interest most pupils.
- Occasionally, the learning needs of lower attaining pupils' are not effectively met in mathematics lessons. Overly long lesson introductions cause this group of pupils to lose concentration and, sometimes, tasks are not matched closely to their level of ability. Pupils' progress slows in these lessons and, over time, this group of pupils do not make the same amount of progress in mathematics as they do in reading and writing.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- 'Jesus, be the centre of our lives' is a mission statement that pupils relate to and the message is reflected in their positive attitudes to school and their learning. 'You get a good education here' is a commonly held view amongst pupils.
- Behaviour is good in lessons and around school. Only occasionally, when learning or long lesson introductions are not relevant for some, do pupils lose concentration. School records show that there have been no exclusions since the previous inspection. This reflects how well most behave.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and that 'adults make us feel unique and special'. This correctly reflects the impressive level of care and support that pupils receive.
- Pupils have a good understanding of different types of bullying. They know that name-calling and hitting others are wrong. All were clear about internet safety. School records show that incidents of bullying or racist behaviour are rare.
- Attendance is broadly average. It was improving over time but dipped last year due to an outbreak of chicken pox. Currently it is above average. There is very little persistent absence
- Parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire had, justifiably, very positive views about the school. They fully agreed with almost every question and most said that they would recommend the school to others. Those spoken to during the inspection were equally positive about the school. 'Behaviour is noteworthy and so is the friendliness of staff' was a typical view.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is the driving force behind much of the improvement that has occurred over the past two years. With the help and support of senior leaders, weak teaching has been eliminated and all leaders share the same strong determination to tackle areas still to be improved. Responsibility for assessing how well pupils are doing and analysing data to measure progress is a team effort. Leaders have already identified the underperformance of lower attaining pupils in mathematics.
- The leadership of the teaching in the Nursery and Reception classes, and for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is good. The school makes good use of outside specialists to support those who have special educational needs.

- There are well-established procedures for the headteacher and the governing body to make sure that teachers' pay rises are closely linked to their performance. National standards are used effectively to judge the quality of teaching, so accurate judgements are made on how well teachers are doing their jobs.
- The headteacher and leadership team check teaching in termly lesson observations. These checks have succeeded in ensuring that all teaching is at least good and some outstanding. Matching tasks to pupils' abilities in all parts of lessons and raising the profile of learning in mathematics are aspects identified for improvement.
- The curriculum is well planned and generally meets the learning needs and abilities of pupils. There is currently, however, a stronger emphasis on developing literacy skills than numeracy skills. Learning opportunities beyond the normal timetable, such as learning to play the guitar or clarinet, a simpler form of the clarinet, and sport, contribute well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Staff regularly share their Hindu and Muslim faiths with pupils, giving them a rich firsthand knowledge. Links with children in Sierra Leone further help pupils to understand different cultures and values, such as tolerance and respect.
- The additional funding allocated to increase sporting opportunities has already been used to further enhance the quality and breadth of physical education and sport provision. It has significantly increased participation by enabling professional coaches to teach pupils skills in a diverse range of sports.
- The welfare and safety of pupils has a high profile. All parents and carers hold positive views about the school. They rightly endorse that staff treat every pupil equally, their children are safe and looked after well, and that discrimination is not tolerated in any form. Pupils are well prepared for life in Britain and a global society.
- The local authority has supported staff effectively over time. Support since the arrival of the new headteacher in 2011 has helped to significantly improve the quality of teaching. This has resulted in most pupils making good progress in each year group and being well prepared for the next stage in their education. Governors have also benefited from the wide range of training programmes provided for them and these have helped them to develop their skills and expertise. As a result, governors have the knowledge and confidence to analyse data and hold the school to account for the performance of different groups of pupils, increasing their effectiveness.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The regular visits by governors give them a good understanding of the quality of teaching and how well pupils are achieving. They are able to compare how well pupils are doing in comparison to others nationally. Governors are beginning to focus much more on helping the school to check how well it is tackling its identified priorities for improvement and to evaluate the impact of their own work. The performance of the headteacher and other teachers is reviewed each year to determine pay and promotion. Governors' personal expertise is used to good effect to support their work. All current national requirements relating to employment and safeguarding are met. Governors carefully check the impact of the pupil premium and the funds allocated to provide additional sporting opportunities on the achievement and behaviour of pupils.

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	109631
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	425195

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	222
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Leo Fitzgerald
Headteacher	Christine Lake
Date of previous school inspection	1-2 March 2012
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