INSPECTION REPORT

ST. FINIAN'S ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Cold Ash, Thatcham

LEA area: Berkshire

Unique reference number: 110037

Headteacher: Miss M Knight

Reporting inspector: Mrs J Morley 25470

Dates of inspection: June 26-27th 2000

Inspection number: 182388

Inspection carried out under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Primary
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	4 - 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	The Ridge Cold Ash Thatcham Berkshire
Postcode:	RG18 9HU
Telephone number:	01635 865925
Fax number:	01635 874892
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr F Quinn
Date of previous inspection:	June 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		
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The Registrar Inspection Quality Division The Office for Standards in Education Alexandra House 33 Kingsway London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St. Finian's Roman Catholic Primary School, Cold Ash, is a voluntary aided school. It occupies a three-storey building in grounds that are particularly attractive. The sports field is 200 metres away from the school, down a quiet lane. Few pupils live close to the school. Most come from Thatcham, but some from as far as 12 miles away. The school serves a mobile community. With 165 pupils on roll, it is a smaller than average school. Pupil numbers have grown significantly over the last three years. Pupils come from a range of backgrounds but, for the majority, their socio-economic circumstances are favourable. Parents have high expectations of the school. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs, 21 per cent, is broadly average. At 1 per cent, the proportion of pupils is an additional language. The attainment of pupils entering the reception class is consistently above average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school in which there is an exceptionally strong sense of community, family and purpose. It builds on the above average standards with which the children enter. By age 11, the standards pupils achieve in English, mathematics and science are very high. Their standards of behaviour, attitudes to work, and general conduct both in and out of the classroom are exemplary. The quality of teaching throughout the school is consistently good, and the headteacher, deputy headteacher and key staff provide leadership of a very high quality. The school has an income that is broadly average. It provides very good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Standards in English, mathematics and science are very high;
- The quality of leadership by the headteacher is outstanding, and she is ably supported by all staff;
- Teaching is consistently good throughout the school;
- The school provides a very rich curriculum for its pupils;
- Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are exemplary. The maturity they show is outstanding;
- Provision for spiritual, moral and social development is exceptional;
- The school shows genuine care for its pupils.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

• The school's efforts to provide each parent with a full and regularly updated picture of the very high quality of academic and personal education it provides for their child.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the action plan prepared by the appropriate authority

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Overall, the school has made very good progress on the four key issues reported at its last inspection in June 1995. There have also been significant improvements in a number of other areas. Key examples are standards in English, mathematics and science, the quality of teaching, and pupils' behaviour, attitudes and personal development.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 11 year olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

	Compared with				
Performance in:		similar schools			
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
English	A*	А	A*	А	
Mathematics	А	А	В	С	
Science	А	А	A*	А	

Key	
very high	A*
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Over three years, the standards achieved in national tests have been consistently above average or well above average when compared with those of all schools nationally, and average or above average in comparison with those of similar schools. In 1999 the school's performance in both English and science placed it in the top 5 per cent nationally. Inspection findings indicate that the school is maintaining these high standards. The proportions of pupils likely to achieve the national target of Level 4 and the higher level, Level 5, in all three subjects tested is well above the national average. There are no significantly weak areas in pupils' work. The school is very likely to meet the targets it has set for the current year. The year-on-year improvement in the average points score for the school is broadly in line with the national trend.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Attitudes are exemplary.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is of the highest possible quality, and this is not dependent on direct supervision by members of staff.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are delightfully warm and caring. Pupils' personal development is a real strength.
Attendance	Very good. Pupils enjoy coming to school.

Pupils' eagerness to learn is a real strength of the school. Pupils care for each other and relate extremely well to their teachers and to other adults who work in school. Pupils take a pride in the school and in their contribution to it. Attendance is very good. There is very little evidence of late arrival. Where it occurs it is almost entirely due to unpredictable traffic conditions.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Aged up to 5 years	ed up to 5 years aged 5-7 years	
Lessons seen overall	essons seen overall Good		Good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

The quality of teaching is good overall and often very good. Of the teaching observed, 6 per cent was of the highest quality, 12 per cent very good, 76 per cent good and 6 per cent sound. There are no significant weaknesses, and there are several strengths. The consistency of good quality teaching throughout the school is a particularly strong feature, as is the probing nature of teachers' questioning. The school caters well for the needs of pupils of all abilities. It teaches the basic skills of literacy and numeracy very well.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides a rich and varied curriculum, with a very good range of additional activities, particularly for pupils in Key Stage 2.
Provision for pupils with special needs	Support for these pupils is good and is based on a very good understanding of their particular difficulties.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Spiritual, moral and social provision is a real strength of the school. It is difficult to see how the school could do more than it does. Provision for cultural development is good overall. It is very strong in music, art and drama, but weaker in its multi-cultural dimension
How well the school cares for its pupils	All teachers know pupils very well and show genuine care for them, both through formal systems and through informal support and guidance.

The school provides pupils with every opportunity to reach very high standards in work, behaviour, attitudes and personal development. The opportunity to take part in an annual production of very high quality is a particularly rich opportunity. Pupils benefit from a good variety of additional activities, considering the relatively small number of teaching staff available to organise and run them. The school monitors pupils' performance extremely carefully and is successful in providing a curriculum which offers an impressive level of challenge to pupils of all abilities.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The school is superbly led and managed by the headteacher, who is very well supported by experienced, committed and talented key staff.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	The governing body has a particularly accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and works very hard to complement the efforts of the headteacher.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school knows its strengths but is modest about them. It identifies weaker areas and continually strives to improve.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes very good use of its material and financial resources.

Management and leadership by the headteacher is outstanding. The governing body is becoming increasingly effective as new committee structures establish themselves fully. Administrative procedures are strong despite some disruption resulting from changes of finance officer.

Relationships amongst the staff are very good and there is a very clear commitment to continued improvement. There are fair and rigorous systems in place for the headteacher and senior staff to monitor the quality of teaching. There is no complacency, even though standards are very high. The school provides very good value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved		
 Their children like school; Behaviour is good; The quality of teaching is good; Pupils are expected to work hard and to achieve as well as they can; The school is well led and managed; The school helps pupils to become mature and responsible. 	 The quantity of information they receive about how their child is getting on; The closeness of the working partnership between home and school; The sporting opportunities offered by the school. 		

The inspection team shares the positive views of parents, all of which were expressed by more than 90 per cent of those who responded. The quality of information to parents is very good and the opportunities for a close working partnership are readily available, though not fully used. The school offers an adequate range of sport both during and outside the school day. However, the school is not sufficiently proactive in demonstrating its high quality provision or its genuine wish to work in partnership with parents. Consequently, there is a difference between parents' perceptions of the school's provision and the reality of it.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards in English, mathematics and science are very high.

1. Pupils achieve standards in English, mathematics and science which are well above the national average. By the end of Key Stage 2, a very large proportion of pupils achieves the higher level, Level 5, in each subject. This is a particularly strong feature.

2. Pupils enter the school with standards which are above average, and the school builds systematically on these from the Reception Year to Year 6. Basic skills of literacy and numeracy are very well taught through English and mathematics lessons.

3. Speaking and listening skills are very well developed. Pupils are confident speakers, keen to express themselves and articulate when they do so. Relative to their age, they have a wide vocabulary, including subject-specific, technical vocabulary. A particular strength is the thoughtfulness with which they respond to questions. For example, a Year 5 pupil, having read the poem 'The Boy Without a Name', said of Alan Ahlberg, 'He pushes the words to the limit'.

4. Skills in reading are also very good. By the time they reach Year 6, most pupils read with fluency and good expression. They are used to responding to challenging questions about what they have read, and all exhibit good levels of understanding, relative to their potential.

5. The standard of pupils' writing is very good. Children make a very early start to writing in the reception class and clearly enjoy these early efforts. Pupils of all ages and abilities present their work neatly. This is a visible confirmation of the pride pupils take in everything they do in school. Spelling standards are good, and often very good, but the school is not satisfied with them and is actively seeking to improve them further. Pupils have a 'sense of sentence' from an early age, and their confident use of an increasing range of punctuation is evident in all their written work. A noticeable strength in pupils' writing is the sensitivity of it and a particular capacity to express empathy. For example, a Year 6 pupil wrote 'The expressionless look on his face was like a mask to cover his hopelessness'. Another wrote, 'Claire left her to it. She knew when it was best not to interfere with Victoria', and, 'She knew how hard it was for her to find time for her children.'

6. Pupils' skills in numeracy are very good. The introduction of the national numeracy initiative has resulted in additional emphasis on mental agility, quick mental recall, and the ability to explain a range of ways in which it is possible to solve a problem. Pupils in this school are encouraged to be thinkers. The habit is fostered right from the Reception Year where children 'feel' three dimensional shapes and describe them very accurately. For example, 'It has two circles. They are faces. It can roll. It feels a bit like a steamroller,' and 'It's got one circle. It's got a point,' leave the listeners in little doubt as to the identity of the two shapes. This skill serves them well when solving mathematical problems.

7. Pupils' skills in scientific investigation are well developed, and their technical vocabulary is very good. As they progress through the school, pupils develop their understanding of the principles of fair testing and scientific thinking. Again, the process starts early. As a Year 1 pupil told his classmates about 'materials': 'Materials are everything that everything is made of!' Pupils achieve very good standards in all areas of the science curriculum.

8. The quality of leadership by the head teacher is outstanding and she is ably supported by all staff.

9. The headteacher and all staff, particularly the co-ordinators of core subjects, have a very accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. Although the school achieves very high standards and has done so consistently over the last three years, there is no sign of complacency. The school rigorously pursues perfection in everything it does.

10. The ethos of the school is outstanding. It has been fostered by the headteacher, is sustained by the staff, and is deeply embedded in the school. The chair of governors described it with accuracy when he said, 'The school has an emotional ethos that is second to none. It is almost palpable at times.'

11. The headteacher recognises the need to equip key co-ordinators with the skills to carry out monitoring activities for their subject in a manner which is likely to raise standards of pupils' work. This includes monitoring the quality of teaching. The system of monitoring works very well because the teachers in this school are a team. They share a willingness and ability to reflect critically on their practice. Hence, although the quality of teaching is monitored with rigour, the process is accepted by staff as a helpful and necessary part of the drive to improve. The school has very good capacity for further improvement, not least because nothing less than perfection will do.

12. Teaching is consistently good throughout the school.

13. The overall quality of teaching in the school is good. Of the 17 lessons observed, 6 per cent were excellent, 12 per cent very good, 74 per cent good, and 6 per cent sound. The particularly strong feature of teaching is its consistent quality throughout the school. There are no classes in which the overall quality of teaching falls below this standard.

14. A second major strength is the probing quality of teachers' questioning. From first entering the school the pupils are encouraged to think, and this tool is used with great skill to bring about that result. Throughout the school the basic skills of numeracy are very well taught. They are then developed through other areas of the curriculum.

15. The quality of teachers' planning is exceptionally good. Teachers make clear to pupils what it is they are going to learn. At the end of lessons, teachersuse a range of methods to check on how much pupils have learned. Through this consistent pattern, pupils develop a very good understanding of how well they are doing.

16. Expectations are very high, but teachers are skilled at matching work to ability. The least able pupils are well supported by other adults in addition to the support they receive from their teachers. The school is successful in helping pupils to achieve success and to feel good about themselves.

17. Teachers expect from their pupils' behaviour, concentration, and contribution of the highest quality. This is always easily achieved because the school has been so successful in fostering an excellent work ethos. Pupils are so eager to learn and have such a mature and sensible approach to their work that they always learn well. The teachers in this school are particularly well rewarded for the quality of teaching they offer.

18. The school provides a very rich curriculum for its pupils.

19. The school offers a wide range of worthwhile opportunities which meet the needs of all pupils. The school plans carefully to ensure that pupils in mixed-age classes are all taught the full curriculum. For example, arrangements are made for science to be taught to discrete year groups, and the school has already made arrangements for this to be extended to include English and mathematics from September.

20. A very good range of additional activities enhances the breadth of the curriculum, including some opportunities for competitive and recreational sport and residential visits for older pupils. Links between subjects are used effectively to promote the key skills in literacy, numeracy and information technology.

21. Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are exemplary. The maturity they show is outstanding.

22. There was no evidence during the inspection of pupils being asked to be quiet, work hard, sit still, pay attention, contribute to a lesson, or be more thoughtful. There was no need, because all these things happen naturally. Pupils throughout the school are very eager to learn. They enter the classroom ready for the activities of the day and sustain their interest and motivation until they go home. Their attitudes and behaviour are exemplary and are not dependent on close supervision by adults. Pupils know how they should behave, and there is no suggestion of them wanting to do otherwise. Their levels of maturity are impressive.

23. Provision for spiritual, moral and social development is exceptional.

24. There is outstanding provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development, and this has a powerful impact on pupils' attitudes and behaviour. It is difficult to envisage any more that the school could do. There is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' skills as thinking human beings. A sense of community is promoted strongly. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of the reasons behind some decisions, so that as they get older they see beyond their own self-interest and happily accept that some things are right because they are best for the community as a whole. Older pupils take on responsibilities and understand that more is expected of them in terms of setting a good example. This is not a token gesture by the school, but an important part of its provision in helping pupils to become responsible

young people. Pupils learn a wealth of social skills through residential visits, and through the very good opportunities in extra-curricular activities and dramatic productions. They are delightful to engage in conversation; they have views to express and are well mannered. They speak with self-assurance but without arrogance. Cultural provision is very well developed in the school through art, music and drama. The multi-cultural dimension is a weaker – although not weak – element.

25. The school shows genuine care for its pupils.

26. The school is an outstandingly caring environment. Pupils are well known by teachers, who are responsive to them and who value them as individuals. They are well supported throughout the day, and the tidy, well kept environment indicates a well-considered level of care. Teachers use assessment very well to help them understand what pupils can do and they use this information skilfully to plan and teach lessons which take full account of pupils of all abilities. The school also takes a broader view of assessment to help it focus sharply on the strengths and weaknesses that affect pupils' work in the school as a whole. It is vigilant in this process and skilfully uses the information that assessments generate to plan strategies for improvement.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?

27. The schools' efforts to provide each parent with a full and regularly updated picture of the very high quality of academic and personal education it provides for their child.

28. Overall, parents show good levels of satisfaction with the school, but there are areas of dissatisfaction. Firstly, a significant proportion of parents are unhappy about the amount of homework their child receives. Some parents think the amount too much and some would like more. Inspectors feel that, beyond a few isolated incidents, the amount of homework is well judged by the school. It encourages parents to support the work of the school by helping their child, but does not encroach excessively on other activities.

29. Parents also feel that they do not have sufficiently regular information on the progress their child is making, and that the partnership between home and school is not as strong as they would like. Parking facilities at the school are problematic, and they do limit the informal conversations between parents and teachers at the beginning and end of a school day which typify most primary schools. The school is a welcoming and open community, but parents are not sufficiently aware of that. Neither are they as aware as they should be of the very high quality of education provided at the school.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- 30. Working together, the headteacher, teachers and governors should:
 - ensure that there are adequate opportunities for parents to talk informally with teachers about the progress of their child, and encourage parents to take full advantage of these;
 - give parents as much prior notice as is possible of all school activities;
 - seek ways to represent to parents the very considerable strengths of the school, and to present it in a better light.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	13	
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	11	

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
6	12	74	6	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	165
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	34

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	5
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	25

Attendance

Authorised absence

Unauthorised absence

	%		%
School data	3.9	School data	0.1
National comparative data	5.7	National comparative data	0.5

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	1999	8	11	19

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
	Boys	7	8	8
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 2 and above	Girls	11	11	11
	Total	18	19	19
Percentage of pupils	School	95	100	100
at NC Level 2 or above	National	82	83	87

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
	Boys	7	8	8
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 2 and above	Girls	11	11	11
	Total	18	19	19
Percentage of pupils	School	95	100	100
at NC Level 2 or above	National	82	86	87

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	1999	9	10	19

National Curriculum	ional Curriculum Test/Task Results		Mathematics	Science
	Boys	8	7	9
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 4 and above	Girls	9	9	9
	Total	17	16	18
Percentage of pupils	School	89	84	95
at NC Level 4 or above	National	70 (65)	69 (59)	78 (69)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
	Boys	8	7	9
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 4 and above	Girls	9	9	10
	Total	17	16	19
Percentage of pupils	School	89	84	100
at NC Level 4 or above	National	68 (65)	69 (65)	75 (72)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black– African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	0
Any other minority ethnic group	0

	Fixed period	Permanent		
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0		
Black – African heritage	0	0		
Black – other	0	0		
Indian	0	0		
Pakistani	0	0		
Bangladeshi	0	0		
Chinese	0	0		
White	0	0		
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0		

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	7		
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	23.5 : 1		
Average class size	27.5		

Education support staff: YR - Y6

Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	80

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000

	£
Total income	285825.00
Total expenditure	281618.00
Expenditure per pupil	1916.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	963.00
Balance carried forward to next year	5170.00

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

Number of questionnaires returned

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	49	45	5	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	35	52	8	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	48	51	0	0	1
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	44	25	2	3
The teaching is good.	45	45	2	1	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	18	38	34	7	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	29	47	15	5	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	52	41	5	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	17	47	30	4	1
The school is well led and managed.	40	54	3	2	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	36	60	1	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	25	4	13	9	3

165

78