

INSPECTION REPORT

OUR LADY'S RC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Hitchin, Herts

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117476

Headteacher: Mrs Gaynor Eden

Reporting inspector: Gill Jones
1805

Dates of inspection: 4th and 5th July 2000

Inspection number: 186416

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

© Crown copyright 2000

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Infant and Junior school

School category: Voluntary aided

Age range of pupils: 4 to 11

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Old Hale Way
Hitchin
Herts

Postcode: SG5 1XT

Telephone number: 01462 622555

Fax number: 01462 622777

Appropriate authority: Hertfordshire

Name of chair of governors: Mr Ian McBain

Date of previous inspection: 04/12/1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mrs Gillian W Jones	Registered inspector	Under Fives	1. What sort of school is it?
			8. What should the school do to improve further?
Mrs Elizabeth Cooke	Lay inspector		2.2 Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
			5. How well does the school care for its pupils?
			6. How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Mr Clive Mitchell	Team inspector	Equal Opportunities	2.1 The school's results and pupils' achievements
		Special Educational Needs	4. How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?

The inspection contractor was:

Essex County Council
 Learning Services
 Advisory & Inspection Service
 PO Box 47
 Chelmsford
 Essex
 CM2 6WN

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

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

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	10
The school is well managed by the head, deputy and co-ordinators	
The work of the governing body is highly effective	
The school maintains high standards in the core subjects at the end of both key stages	
There is a high proportion of very good teaching	
The quality of learning opportunities is very good for all pupils	
Music is a strength of the school	
The quality of learning opportunities is very good for all pupils	
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	14
Expectations for the younger children	
The monitoring and evaluation of teaching by Senior Management Team	

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Our Lady's RC Primary School is a one-form entry primary school with 218 children on roll between the ages of 4 and 11. The children come from a wide range of social groups with a significant proportion from reasonably privileged homes. Attainment on entry is above the national average. About a fifth of the children have English as an additional language and a small number are at the early stages of learning English. Almost 15% of the children are on the special educational needs register and there are two children with statements. Six per cent of children are entitled to free school meals, which is well below the national average. The school is very popular and is heavily over-subscribed.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Our Lady's is a good school which provides all children with a very good range of learning opportunities. Children enjoy school and work hard. The school is well-led by the headteacher, governors and other staff who are all committed to achieving high standards. There is a large proportion of very good teaching and so children make good progress. The school has improved since the last inspection and is well placed to raise standards further. It provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- The school is well led and managed by the head, deputy and co-ordinators.
- The work of the governing body is highly effective.
- The school sustains high standards in the core subjects at the end of both key stages.
- There is a high proportion of very good teaching.
- The quality of learning opportunities is very good for all pupils.
- Music is a strength of the school.

What could be improved

- Expectations for the younger children.
- The monitoring and evaluation of teaching by the senior management team.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in December 1995. Since that time it has made very good improvement. The key issues identified in the last inspection have been fully addressed and in addition, teaching and standards have improved. Provision for ICT has recently improved through the installation of a suite of computers. This is starting to have an impact on raising standards.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	All schools			similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
English	A	A	B	B	very high A*
Mathematics	A*	A	A	A	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
Science	A	A	A	A	

In the 1999 tests overall standards at the end of both key stages were well above average in relation to all schools and similar schools. The school has broadly sustained these good results over the last three years and has set appropriately challenging targets for future years. Initial indications from the 2000 tests are that standards remain well above average with a significant improvement in writing at the end of Key Stage 2. The standards of work seen during the inspection were above average in English, mathematics and science at the end of both key stages. The standards for the youngest children are average but there has not been sufficient progress made given the children's starting point. Standards in music are high.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good - pupils are keen to learn and enjoy coming to school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good - pupils usually behave well in and out of classrooms and, in assembly, behaviour is exemplary. A minority of pupils show less good attitudes and behaviour where teaching is less effective.
Personal development and relationships	Very good - relationships and personal development are very good. Pupils develop into sensible, caring individuals.
Attendance	Good - the school has effective procedures for maintaining the above average rates of attendance.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Aged up to 5 years	Aged 5-7 years	aged 7-11 years
Lessons seen overall	Satisfactory	Very good	Good

Ninety six percent of teaching is satisfactory or better. There is a high proportion of very

good teaching at both key stages (over half) with some teaching which is excellent. Teachers have high expectations and plan lessons extremely well to meet the needs of all children. The effective teaching contributes significantly to the standards achieved.

There is a very small percentage of unsatisfactory teaching. Where teaching is weaker, expectations are too low and behaviour is not so well managed.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good - the school provides a very good range of learning opportunities for the pupils because the curriculum is well-balanced and enriched by visits, visitors and other events. The school meets statutory requirements for the curriculum.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good - pupils with special educational needs are well supported and make good progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good - specialist teachers provide focused support in close liaison with class teachers.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good - the school makes good overall provision for children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are given opportunity to exercise responsibility, for example, through the School Council and have a clear understanding of what is right and wrong.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good - the school provides good care for all pupils. Effective steps are taken to monitor all aspects of school life. The good care ensures that pupils feel secure and ready to learn.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good - the headteacher provides strong leadership and clear purpose and direction for the work of the school. She is well supported by an able deputy and subject co-ordinators.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good - the work of the governors is highly effective. They are well organised and clear about the strengths of the school and priorities for improvement.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good overall - there are very effective systems in place for the analysis of results and the monitoring of the curriculum. The quality of teaching needs to be more rigorously monitored by the senior management team.
The strategic use of resources	Good - the school makes effective use of available resources and the principles of best value are applied in decision making.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The standards achieved by children. • Children's behaviour and attitudes. • The quality of the teaching. • The school's ethos. • The dedication of the staff. • The quality of assemblies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrangements for homework. • Playground supervision at lunchtime. • The range of extra-curricular activities. • Partnership with parents.

The inspection team agrees with the positive views expressed by parents. The school has a clear homework policy and makes effective use of homework but sometimes, particularly where there is more than one child in a family, there can be heavy demands on parents for support.

Lunchtime supervision is good in the dining room and is satisfactory outside. The school actively promotes the partnership with parents and their response to parental concerns is thorough and systematic. The range of extra-curricular activities, including visits, competitive sports and visitors, is reasonable.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The school is well managed by the head, deputy and co-ordinators

The headteacher provides strong leadership and a clear sense of purpose and direction for the work of the school. She is well supported by an able deputy and subject co-ordinators. Between them they form a very strong team that promotes a positive ethos with a clear focus on high achievement. This ensures that the children enjoy school, make good progress and achieve well.

The school has a good set of aims that state a commitment to a strong faith community and to the equal importance and value of every individual. These aims are apparent in the day-to-day life of the school and through the relationships between all members of the community. The way in which children and parents are valued is apparent in the way that the school seeks their views about aspects of school life, for example, through the homework survey.

Co-ordinators understand fully their roles and responsibilities and provide clear leadership in their subject areas. They are fully involved in school self-evaluation and take an active role in monitoring standards and the curriculum.

Very good systems are in place for the analysis of data relating to children's performance and the outcomes of this analysis are used well to plan for further improvement. An example of this is that the school has identified that although their results are well above average for science, children's skills in scientific investigation are not as strong and so this has become a development priority for the forthcoming year. Thorough monitoring of the curriculum is also undertaken and particular attention has been to the implementation of the national strategies for numeracy and literacy by given co-ordinators and governors.

The work of the governing body is highly effective

The governing body is well led and organised and fully meets its statutory responsibilities. Governors are clear about their roles and carry them out with enthusiasm and commitment.

There is a governor linked to each subject who ensures that they keep up-to-date with developments in that area. They meet with co-ordinators and also undertake classroom observations in order to have a clear view of the work in the school. These observations result in reports that are shared with the head and co-ordinator and are also presented to the governing body. In addition, there is a governor of the month scheme. This means governors will visit the school and attend events such as assembly during this period. These activities ensure that governors understand how the school works and what it does well on a day-to-day basis.

Governors are fully involved in strategic planning and are committed to continuous improvement. They are involved in the analysis of the school's results and understand where performance is good and where it needs to be improved. They allocate finances appropriately to support improvement priorities and apply the principles of best value to spending decisions. Their work clearly contributes to the school's strong commitment to raising standards.

The school maintains high standards in the core subjects at the end of both key stages

The school's overall results in the national tests for seven year olds and eleven year olds have been well above average over the past three years. There was much evidence of these very good standards during the inspection. In English most seven year olds can write well and at some length, with grammar and punctuation which is usually correct. Most children's handwriting is in a clear, legible, cursive style. By the age of eleven many children can produce a range of well-structured and thoughtful writing. For example, the year six class were learning about persuasive writing through examining the arguments for and against genetically modified crops. In their own writing, many children demonstrated a good grasp of the issues and a good command of the language of persuasion.

In science pupils cover the full range of topics in the national curriculum very thoroughly. The work of the seven year olds is generally well presented and children are learning to organise their work in a variety of ways, such as through annotated drawings and diagrams. Similar good standards are evident in the work of the eleven year olds, which again is well presented and thorough.

Standards in mathematics are similarly high. During the inspection, for example, many children aged seven could read the time to five minutes on an analogue clock and a 12 hour digital clock and were beginning to understand 24 hour notation. In year six, the children demonstrated good skills when investigating number sequences and developing generalised statements about them as the basis of simple formulae.

There is a high proportion of very good teaching

Over half of the teaching was very good with two lessons judged to be excellent. The very good teaching was apparent in both key stages 1 and 2. Teachers' planning is very good, is pitched at an appropriate level and learning objectives are clearly identified and shared with the children throughout the school. This means that everyone understands what is to be taught and learned. Teachers use an interesting range of teaching approaches, which ensures that the children enjoy their lessons and want to learn. Lessons proceed at a good pace and efficient and well managed routines, such as the change-over for mathematics sets, ensure that little teaching time is lost.

Teachers know the children well; relationships are warm and caring and are based on mutual respect. They cater well for all the children in their classes including those with special educational needs and with English as an additional language. Work is carefully and sensitively matched to children's needs and additional support is provided by specialist teachers and classroom assistants to ensure that everyone makes good progress.

Classrooms are attractive and well organised and good quality and interesting resources are used to support the children's learning and engage their interest. Very good use is made of ICT with computers based in classrooms and also in the ICT suite. Each class is timetabled for two one-hour subject lessons a week in the computer suite. In a Year 3 Literacy hour session children were writing informal letters and importing illustrations from Clip Art and in a science lesson they were using the Internet to find out about the Water Cycle. This had a clear impact on progress in ICT skills and also their application within the curriculum.

Mathematics is well taught and the National Numeracy Strategy has brought about clear improvements in children's attitudes and attainment in the subject. Mental and oral

sessions are used very effectively at the start of lessons to sharpen children's skills and speed and to help them to be able to explain their methods in good mathematical language.

The very good teaching in the school has a significant impact on the quality of children's learning and the standards they achieve.

The quality of learning opportunities is very good for all pupils

The school provides a very good range of learning opportunities for the pupils. There has been a thorough response to the key issue in the last inspection about improving the balance and phasing of the curriculum. The school now has a clear curriculum framework, which ensures that all pupils receive a well-balanced curriculum. This is enhanced by a variety of events, which provide breadth and enrichment. For example, the science week, during the autumn term, provided children with a range of opportunities to enrich their understanding of science. A poetry workshop, with the poet Brain Moses, gave children opportunities to extend their understanding and writing of poetry. A whole school trip to see the Nativity at the Young Vic, and the Key Stage 2 trip to the Millennium Dome are further examples of a wide range of visits, visitors and other events which serve to extend children's learning.

The Governing Body has recently had an extension built to house a suite of computers. This excellent provision is very well used and is having a marked impact on raising standards in ICT. The suite is used to teach the use of ICT across the curriculum, and so the provision is having a broad impact.

The school's provision for pupils with special educational need is very good. The administration and organisation of the special needs programme is very effective. Pupils with special needs receive well-targeted support and most make very good progress. The school's support for pupils learning English as an additional language is similarly well organised and effective. Pupils receive good support in enriching their language skills and attain well in the national tests.

The school has effectively implemented the national strategies for literacy and numeracy. This is having a positive impact on standards and the quality of learning.

The school has a clear programme for children's personal and social development and all staff place a strong emphasis on this aspect. Children are given a range of opportunities to develop initiative and responsibility, from organisational tasks within their own classrooms to serving on the School Council. There is a strong emphasis within the school on ensuring equality of access and opportunity for all children.

Music is strength of the school

There is a part-time music specialist who teaches music to all classes in the school. The quality of teaching in these music lessons is excellent. Lessons are very well planned and structured and are clearly based on the national curriculum programmes of study. Expectations of the children's performance are high, lessons proceed at a fast pace and children are provided with a high level of challenge. An example of this was a Year 1 lesson with a theme of water. The children experimented with instruments that made 'watery sounds' and learned to sing a song about the sea. They responded well to the mood and rhythm of the music and accompanied the singing with tuned and untuned instruments. They contributed ideas about the composition and then listened to their

performance on tape and made evaluative comments. The quality of their learning and performance was very good and progress was rapid.

Children listen to music attentively and are able to appraise it in a mature and knowledgeable way. Children sing with energy and enthusiasm and the quality of their performance in assembly is very good. The older children have the opportunity to join the choir and a large number of children play the recorder. Many of the recorder players go on to learn other instruments while they are still in the school.

Recently, a group of children were part of a Hertfordshire children's musical performance in the Royal Albert Hall. This was a highly successful event, which was much appreciated by the children, staff and parents. Parents think highly of the music provision in the school and the standards achieved by the children.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Expectations for the younger children

Although the younger children achieve average standards in English and mathematics, expectations of their progress in these subjects could be higher. During the inspection, for example, the more able children were able to write one or two sentences independently and other children were becoming independent with support from adults. The children have a good knowledge of basic letter sounds but did not use this sufficiently to help them write, or begin to write, unknown words. In this case, higher expectations of the children in using their knowledge of sounds to help them write, would increase their independence in writing. Similarly in mathematics, through talking to the children, some demonstrated a sound grasp of numbers to a hundred and beyond and needed work which challenged their thinking and extended their understanding.

There also need to be higher expectations of the children's social skills so that they learn to work together co-operatively, to show respect for others and that you can learn from making mistakes.

The monitoring and evaluation of teaching by the Senior Management Team

Although the school has very good systems in place for monitoring and evaluating standards and the curriculum, procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching are not yet secure. This means that the senior management team is not always clear about the strengths and weaknesses of individual teachers and the teachers are not always aware of what they are doing well and what they need to do in order to improve.

The headteacher and deputy have undertaken training in school self-evaluation which included a clear focus on monitoring the quality of teaching. They have plans to put in place a more rigorous system for monitoring teaching at the beginning of the new academic year. Teachers will be observed reasonably frequently and will be provided with focused feedback on how well they are doing. This should strengthen the very good systems and procedures that are already in place in relation to the curriculum and standards and ensure that the school is secure in its self-improvement programme.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	30
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	6

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	13	2	12	1	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	Nursery	YR-Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)		218
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals		13

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR-Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs		2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register		32

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	53

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	9
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	14

Attendance

Authorised absence	Unauthorised absence
	%
School data	4.42
National comparative data	5.7
	%
School data	0
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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	14	18	32

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	12	11	14
	Girls	18	17	18
	Total	30	28	32
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	94 (97)	88 (97)	100 (100)
	National	82 (80)	83 (81)	87 (84)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	12	13	14
	Girls	18	18	18
	Total	30	31	32
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	94 (100)	97 (100)	100 (100)
	National	82 (81)	86 (85)	87 (86)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	16	15	31

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	13	12	15
	Girls	15	14	15
	Total	28	26	30
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	87 (91)	84 (85)	94 (97)
	National	70 (65)	69 (58)	78 (69)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	12	13	13
	Girls	15	13	13
	Total	27	26	26
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	88 (82)	84 (84)	90 (88)
	National	68 (65)	69 (65)	75 (72)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	176
Any other minority ethnic group	11

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

	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 of pupils of compulsory school age, 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)	9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	27.1
Average class size	27.1

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	105

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	27
Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	105
Number of pupils per FTE adult	18

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1998-1999
	£
Total income	413150
Total expenditure	399568
Expenditure per pupil	1833
Balance brought forward from previous year	13582
Balance carried forward to next year	13582

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	218
Number of questionnaires returned	76

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	30	39	7	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	25	41	5	5	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	24	49	2	1	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	12	44	15	4	1
The teaching is good.	28	41	1	2	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	14	46	11	4	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	23	37	9	5	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	36	38	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	10	42	14	10	0
The school is well led and managed.	27	41	3	4	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	21	48	5	1	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	13	27	18	11	6