



Inspection report

St John Rigby Catholic Lower School

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 109632
LEA Bedfordshire

Inspection number 275267
Inspection dates 25 and 26 May 2005
Reporting inspector Mr R Blatchford HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Type of School	First School	School address	Polhill Avenue
School category	Voluntary Aided <i>Diocese of Northampton</i>		Bedford Bedfordshire MK41 9DQ
Age range of pupils	4 to 9 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01234 401900
Number on roll	321	Fax number	01234 401661
Appropriate Authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr N Willis
Date of previous inspection	January 2004	Headteacher	Ms M Clewlow

Age group	Published	Reference no.
4 to 9 years	28 June 2005	275267

Introduction

When St John Rigby Catholic Lower School was inspected in January 2004, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on two occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in May 2005.

Description of the school

St John Rigby Catholic Lower School is larger than average; there are 321 pupils on roll, with more boys than girls. There is a planned reduction in the school roll during the next few years. The school serves a mainly Catholic population. Very few pupils enter the school other than at age four. The pupils live in a wide variety of housing but socio-economic characteristics are average. The number of pupils who are eligible for free school meals, at 11.5%, is below average. About half the pupils are of white British origin, a quarter come from Italian backgrounds, and there are small numbers of other ethnic groups represented in the school. At 18%, the school has a broadly average proportion of pupils who have special educational needs, and two pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Need. The school has gained Investors in People status and the Healthy School Award.

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Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils.

St John Rigby Catholic Lower School provides a sound education for its pupils, with an increasing number of good features. Most of the pupils achieve satisfactorily, although standards of attainment in Key Stage 1 tests have been below those expected for the pupils' ages. There is a legacy of underachievement which the staff are addressing assiduously. The pupils are well cared for and their behaviour and attitudes to school are good. The pupils' attendance and punctuality are satisfactory. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently satisfactory or better. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and provision for extracurricular activities is good.

The leadership provided by the headteacher is very good, and that provided by the senior team and subject co-ordinators is good overall. All staff have played a positive part in improving the quality of the education for the pupils. Governance is good: the governing body, local education authority (LEA) and the Northampton Diocese have forged a productive partnership to support the school's rapid pace of improvement.

Improvement since the last inspection

At the time of the last inspection in January 2004, the school was required to address key issues concerned with leadership and management, the quality of teaching, the pupils' behaviour, assessment and accommodation. Good progress in leadership and management has markedly improved the learning environment and the pupils' behaviour. Reasonable progress has been made with the teaching and is emerging with assessment.

Capacity to improve

Over the past 12 months, the school has clearly demonstrated, at all levels, the capacity to improve. The issues identified in the inspection of January 2004 have been addressed with determination. The school's self-evaluation has been trenchant and staff have therefore been in a strong position to identify weaknesses and effect sustainable changes. The staff are pulling together strongly to raise the pupils' attainment. There is significant potential in the school to develop good practice in a number of areas.

What the school should do to improve further

The key priorities for the school's development plan, alongside consolidating the gains of recent months, are to:

- raise standards of attainment across the curriculum;

- improve further the quality of teaching;
- improve whole-school procedures for assessment.

Achievement and standards

The school's results in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 1 fell markedly in 2004, particularly in writing and in mathematics, continuing a fluctuating decline since 2000. The overall attainment of the school's pupils was below that in other primary schools, and well below that in other schools in similar contexts. Furthermore, the standards expected by the staff of the school's more capable pupils were too low.

There are encouraging indications that this decline has been arrested and that higher attainment is beginning to emerge. In mathematics in particular the school appears set to meet its target for higher proportions of the pupils in Year 2 to achieve the target Level 2, though attainment at the higher Level 3 remains modest.

Standards in reading and writing are improving and are broadly appropriate for the pupils' ages. There is more consistent use of joined handwriting, but the technical accuracy of the pupils' writing remains variable. The pupils' listening skills are good, and many are able to express their ideas confidently and clearly, using a sophisticated vocabulary. Some of the higher attaining pupils in Year 4 are achieving above the national standards in literacy.

Standards in mathematics and science vary but are, overall, in line with the national expectations and the pupils make satisfactory progress. In the Foundation Stage, the pupils acquire a broad range of knowledge of shape and number; many of them counted fluently in 5s and in 10s from different starting points, and the more capable could use the relative size of numbers to solve simple puzzles. The pupils' attainment rises across Key Stage 1 and the more able pupils in Year 2 have a satisfactory grasp of, for example, reflective symmetry, quantity, addition and subtraction. Older pupils in Year 3 applied number knowledge well and the more able pupils in Year 4 worked efficiently with three-digit numbers and in presenting data from surveys.

In science lessons, the pupils made sound use of their knowledge to discuss, for example, variation in personal characteristics or magnetism. However, they did not acquire from their study of these phenomena sufficient secure command of basic scientific skills for observation, recording and comparison.

Personal development

The pupils' behaviour is good. During all lessons observed the pupils showed due respect for the teachers and support staff. They worked productively with one another and treated classroom resources with care. The pupils are courteous and welcoming to visitors, they behave responsibly in moving around the buildings, and in the playgrounds enjoy their play equipment and get on well together. The school's ethos is inclusive and the teachers

provide timely and sensitive guidance to pupils when minor misdemeanours occur. There have been just two short fixed-term exclusions this year.

Attendance for the academic year, at 95.3%, is in line with the national figure for primary schools. The school has good procedures for ensuring that any absences are rigorously followed up.

The school makes good provision for the pupils' moral, social and cultural development, and very good provision for their spiritual development. In assemblies, registration sessions and times set aside for prayer at the close of the day, the staff provide opportunities for the pupils to reflect on the values promoted by the school. The pupils acquire a helpful basis for learning about cultural diversity, through, for example, constructing African face masks, and from studying the lives of people in other places and in other times. A strong Christian ethos permeates many aspects of the day-to-day life of the school.

The school builds the pupils' self-esteem and sense of personal worth through a range of activities. The pupils value their tally points rewards system, their certificates and letters home, as well as the school's celebration of 'golden pupils of the week' awards. They enjoy their snack-breaks and mealtimes and the school takes seriously its responsibilities to ensure the pupils eat healthily.

Quality of provision

The school's curriculum is satisfactory. It includes the required range of subjects and pays increasingly sound attention to developing the pupils' basic skills. The balance of subjects has been adjusted, with recently increased time for information and communication technology (ICT). The pattern of the school day does not, however, enable the best use of time, particularly in the morning sessions. A good range of additional provision includes visits related to the subject teaching, games at lunchtime, and a number of activities before and after school that extend both care and stimulating experience, for example of music and sport. A school council, the operation of the library and a buddy arrangement offer engaging opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities and to show initiative. The curriculum is under active review; the school recognises scope for building coherence and effectiveness through better cross-curricular links, such as those promoted through the 'Super Learning Days'. Plans are well advanced for helpful adjustments to the pattern of the school day and to the use of time in the afternoon sessions.

The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the inspection of 2004 and overall it is satisfactory. It was at least satisfactory in each of the lessons observed, and it was good or better in almost half of them. The teaching is strong and effective in the Foundation Stage. Productive lessons were seen also in a number of subjects including literacy, design and technology and geography, and particularly in those year groups across the school with the higher degrees of external accountability.

The more effective teaching was planned in detail, with clear objectives for learning, engaging ideas to stimulate the pupils' interest and check their progress, and sound

variations of approach to help or challenge pupils of different ability. Appropriate resources were selected to illustrate ideas; interactive whiteboards were used with particular enterprise and imagination in some lessons. The better lessons were underpinned by the teachers' good subject knowledge, warm relationships with pupils, clearly established classroom routines and sound control of pace and direction. The teachers and teaching assistants monitored pupils' activities closely and provided helpful support through sensitive and well-judged praise, suggestion or instruction. Learning was enhanced particularly well where time was occasionally spent with the whole class considering what had been achieved, including at the end of some lessons.

The teaching met more modest success in lessons where support was insufficient to correct misunderstandings. The teachers' rising expectations are not always projected as sufficiently high demands, for example for the pupils to make focused use of new vocabulary and language. In a few instances, the quality of teaching was diminished by weaknesses in the teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject.

The school's assessment arrangements vary in quality and despite significant strengths they are, overall, underdeveloped. Good arrangements for the Foundation Stage lead rapidly to comprehensive records of the pupils' step by step achievements and progress towards the nationally set early learning goals. In Key Stages 1 and 2, fresh systems have led to a sound collection of information about the pupils' attainment in English and mathematics. The teachers have good access to this information and their growing awareness of more refined assessment is beginning to help their tracking of the pupils' progress, for example in mathematics, and their planning of lessons, notably in literacy. This is helping the staff to appreciate the extent of pupils' underachievement, and in some instances to set practical targets for pupils. However, too little use is made of the information derived from assessment in the planning of lessons, with the result that often work is not sufficiently demanding for more capable pupils. The marking of pupils' work varies widely in quality: some is outstanding, and some is unsatisfactory. Overall, marking provides too little information for the pupils about their attainment, the quality of their work or how it could be improved.

The school is committed to the inclusion of all pupils from the community it serves. A co-ordinator helps teachers and teaching assistants to plan satisfactory support for those who have special or complex needs, with a suitably graduated approach to the provision of additional help. The impact of plans is reviewed with reasonable frequency, and these pupils usually make progress towards their agreed targets. The school rightly has under review its deployment of teaching assistants and its arrangements for the growing number of pupils for whom English is an additional language.

Accommodation was an identified area for improvement when the school was inspected in January 2004. The parts of the school buildings and environment which militated against effective learning in the past have been radically transformed, in particular the creation of a vibrant and attractive outdoor area for the Foundation Stage. The newly refurbished ICT room affords significant potential.

Leadership and management

Decisive improvements have been made to the quality of leadership and management at all levels within the school during the last year.

The headteacher provides very good leadership, skilfully enabling all staff to believe in their own potential for effective management. She does not accept less than the best from the pupils and staff alike, and her open and determined management style is well respected by colleagues. In a relatively short period of time, she has laid the foundations for rapid improvement, centred around transforming the learning environment and raising expectations of what the pupils can and should achieve, whether in learning or in their behaviour and attitudes. Parents recognise the positive impact the headteacher has had on the school this academic year. They commented positively on the significant improvements to the accommodation and the learning environment, alongside better attitudes and behaviour from all the pupils.

The emerging school development plan thoughtfully addresses those matters which the school most needs to focus on, in particular to raise the teachers' expectations of the pupils and develop improved conditions for learning and assessment. The active involvement of the staff in shaping the plan has fostered a shared enthusiasm for a vision rooted in excellence, enjoyment and spiritual education.

Senior staff and subject leaders bring well informed and increasingly confident leadership to bear in their areas of responsibility. They are well placed to address remaining weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment. Monitoring and evaluation procedures have been developed appropriately in the core subjects, and there are plans to extend these arrangements across the full range of the curriculum.

The governing body is well led, and shares with the headteacher and staff a clear vision about the future direction and distinctive nature of this faith school. The governors' school improvement group has tracked advances on the action plan appropriately, and is well positioned to continue its close monitoring of the pupils' attainment and progress. The governing body's planning for the future includes helpful collaboration within the Federation of Bedford Catholic Schools.

The LEA has provided focused and well judged support for the school during the past 12 months. In view of the planned reduction in the numbers of pupils, the school has sensible financial plans, supported by the LEA, for the next period of its development.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

St John Rigby Catholic Lower School was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in January 2004. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in September 2004 and in February 2005 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of January 2004.

In May 2005, one HMI and an Additional Inspector returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Twenty one lessons, two registration sessions and three assemblies were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, nominated staff, a group of pupils, the chair of governors, a representative from the LEA, and informally with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and areas for improvement in the inspection report of January 2004 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

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