

St Bede's Catholic Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100631
Local Authority	Lambeth
Inspection number	276355
Inspection date	28 November 2006
Reporting inspector	Sean O'Toole

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	222
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Christopher Basden
Headteacher	Ms A Henshaw
Date of previous school inspection	10 July 2000
School address	Thornton Road London SW12 0LF
Telephone number	02086747292
Fax number	02086747886

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school admits pupils from a wide range of social backgrounds and the large majority come from low income families. An above average proportion has free school meals. Most are from minority ethnic backgrounds and a substantial and growing proportion is at an early stage of learning English. An average percentage of pupils has learning difficulties. The school admits children shortly after their third birthday and most spend five terms in the Nursery. There has been a high staff turnover in recent years.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

'The children at St Bede's are deeply valued and respected, with their achievements celebrated and their difficulties tackled,' was one of the many positive comments written about the school. The exemplary pastoral care and strong focus on helping pupils to achieve their potential contribute much to making this a good school with several outstanding features.

At the heart of the school's work is the belief that every child is important. Most children start in the Nursery with low levels of skill and knowledge but they thrive on the good provision in the Foundation Stage. They quickly grow in confidence, willingly tackle work and improve rapidly. Achievement throughout the school is good. By the end of Year 2 standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above average and rising steeply. One of the main reasons for this is the drive of the leadership team to ensure consistent teaching. Pupils have a wide range of skills which prepare them for the future. One Year 2 girl said, 'I learn a lot because my teachers help me to do my best.'

Teaching and learning are good and are underpinned by an excellent system of assessing the pupils' progress. This information is used to plan lessons and to identify any pupils with specific needs. There is outstanding provision for those with learning difficulties. As a result, these pupils are given work which is matched to their needs and support which enables them to make excellent progress. An area for development in teaching is to provide more opportunities for the pupils to explain their ideas and ways of working.

The visionary headteacher is an inspirational leader who is never satisfied with second best. Senior staff are perceptive and highly ambitious for the pupils. Their determination to succeed has resulted in rising standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Robust support to eliminate any shortcomings in teaching is bearing fruit. Leaders have the skills to ensure that the school continues to improve. Governors back the school wholeheartedly but most are inexperienced in checking on how well the school is doing.

The pupils say they enjoy school and it is obvious from their very positive attitudes and high standards of behaviour that they feel secure. The school's outstanding care, support and guidance contribute substantially to pupils' well-being and achievement. As one parent of a child with a specific difficulty wrote, 'I credit the school's caring attitude in making what could have been a challenge, an easy task.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that pupils are given more opportunities to discuss their work.
- Sharpen up the skills of the governors in monitoring and evaluating the school's work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Most children start school with low levels of skill and knowledge. Progress in the Foundation Stage is good. By the time they start in Year 1 most are still working at levels which are below those expected for their age. Since the introduction of a programme to develop children's knowledge of the sounds that letters make their progress in communication, language and literacy has accelerated rapidly.

Pupils in Years 1 and 2 make good progress and their achievement is good. By the time they leave the school, they are working at levels which are above average in reading, writing and mathematics. With the exception of 2005 when they dipped to below average, the standards at the end of Year 2 have been above average in reading, writing and mathematics. More able pupils achieve well, and in 2006 the percentage attaining above average levels in national assessments doubled. This was because of the school's sharp focus on setting challenging work and providing additional support. Those with statements of special educational need and with learning difficulties achieve exceptionally well because work is matched accurately to their needs and staff are creative in finding ways to reinforce their understanding. Pupils from minority ethnic groups work hard and achieve well. Those with little English when starting school soon learn to communicate competently.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The pupils have excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural qualities. They respond with great enthusiasm to all the school offers and are attentive and hard working. Right from starting school they eagerly join in and develop highly positive attitudes to learning. The pupils say that they feel safe and happy and particularly enjoy finding out about the different languages and cultures found in the school. Behaviour is exemplary and the pupils say that if they have a problem they feel that the adults working with them will sort it out. Bullying or rough play are rare. Even the youngest children have a strong awareness of the part they play in the school. All pupils are keen to raise funds to support charities and respond with kindness to those around them. One girl said, 'I have got lots of friends and everyone is kind to me.' The pupils' good standards in reading, writing and mathematics, excellent relationships and skills in working together prepare them excellently for the next stage of their education. They also have a good awareness of how to eat and live healthily and are eager participants in all of the school's physical activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Children in the Foundation Stage are taught well. There is a good balance between practical work and the development of skills such as learning the sounds that letters make. The school's innovative approach is very effective and the children grow daily in confidence in recognising and using new words. Throughout the school, the ways that staff identify the gifts and talents of pupils and then provide well matched work means that learning moves on at a brisk pace. Those with learning difficulties receive high quality support and this enables them to make excellent progress. Another strength is the approach to planning work for those at an early stage of learning English. One parent said, 'My son was very frustrated at first but now he can speak English very well, because the teachers make learning interesting.'

Staff are knowledgeable about every individual. By thoroughly planning each lesson with the support of senior staff, the tasks set are challenging and practical and this makes learning fun. Although staff are good at asking questions they do not always give the pupils sufficient time to answer and miss opportunities to extend the pupils' speaking skills. Parents are especially pleased with the regular homework and the ways in which they are involved in their children's learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum reflects a commitment to enriching the pupils' learning. Children in the Foundation Stage enjoy the opportunities to explore and investigate and thrive on the rich vein of opportunities to learn outside. In Years 1 and 2 the pupils' basic skills in English and mathematics receive much attention and the new system of teaching phonics is highly effective. There are opportunities for the pupils to study a range of subjects and the school is using English in other areas of the curriculum to extend pupils' creativity. There are several good extra activities at lunchtime although parents would like to see more opportunities after school. A strength in the curriculum is the focus on personal development. Pupils are encouraged to care for themselves and others. Through these lessons they learn how to keep themselves safe and to respect the feelings and beliefs of others.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

These aspects are outstanding. There are robust procedures to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils. Staff are especially knowledgeable of the social and academic needs of the pupils. The extensive use of assessment ensures that work is set at the right level for all. Those with learning difficulties thrive because of intensive support. There is well focused intervention for those at the early stages of learning English and as a result most of these pupils communicate competently by the time they leave the school. The pupils say that they feel well cared for and obviously are very fond of the adults working with them. Parents are fulsome in their praise about these aspects of the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school has faced several problems in recruitment but the leadership and management have coped exceptionally well in maintaining the quality of education. The headteacher and senior staff are a high performing team who tackle any dip in standards with determination and rigour. They are always looking for ways to improve the school. A real success has been in building a good team of teachers and support staff who share common values and who are ambitious for the pupils' success. This is reflected in their enthusiasm to respond to advice and has led to high quality planning for lessons and steeply rising standards.

The headteacher and senior staff make exceptional use of data to set challenges for staff and pupils. They have accurately evaluated the school's work and produced a well crafted development plan to guide improvement. Rigorous monitoring keeps track of what is happening in the school. As a result of this robust approach they have introduced a new system for developing pupils' word building skills. It has made a substantial impact on pupils' learning. The majority of governors are new and inexperienced. They are strong advocates of the school and fully support its actions but are at an early stage of setting up systems to track and measure the school's performance.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for helping me on my recent visit to your school. I enjoyed watching you at work. When you spoke to me I could see how much you enjoy coming to school. Along with your parents, I think that you go to a good school and some things about it are excellent.

It was obvious from talking to you that you really enjoy lessons and have great fun in the playground. You get on very well together and I was impressed by how you care for each other. You were all very polite and I could see that your behaviour is excellent. It was lovely to read some of your poems and stories. You are really good at building words. It was good to see how quickly you learn new things. You are good at reading, writing and mathematics because you work hard and the teachers give you lots of help.

All of the adults in the school care for you very much and help you to be successful. Your headteacher always wants the best for all of you. I have asked the headteacher and staff to give you even more opportunities to talk about and explain your work. You can help by thinking very carefully about what you say when the teachers ask you questions and doing your best to answer in sentences. Many of the governors who look after the school are new and I have asked them to find ways of checking on how the school is doing. I know from talking to them that they are keen to do this.

I hope that you continue to be happy and hard working at school and wish you well for the future.

Yours truly,

Sean O'Toole

Lead inspector