



St Finian's Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110037
LEA West Berkshire LEA
Inspection number 278353
Inspection dates 28 November 2005 to 29 November 2005
Reporting inspector Judith Dawson AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	The Ridge
School category	Voluntary aided		Cold Ash
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Thatcham RG18 9HU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01635 865925
Number on roll	178	Fax number	01635 874892
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs F Thomson
Date of previous inspection	26 June 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Elizabeth Housden

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

St. Finian's is a smaller than average Roman Catholic primary school. Only 1.1% of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is very low. The number of pupils with special educational needs, including statements, is below average. Fewer pupils than average join or leave the school outside the normal entry times. The population is from a predominantly advantaged white British or Irish background with 10% from other ethnic groups. Four pupils do not have English as a first language. Pupils' attainment on entry is above average. There have been significant changes in staffing over the last three years including a new headteacher. The school belongs to the Greater Reading Catholic School's Cluster, the Kennett and Theale Small Schools Federation and the Local Education Authority link group. Achievements include the Silver Artmark, a Chartermark for football, and it has had Beacon School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The senior management and the vast majority of parents see St. Finian's as a good school and inspectors agree. It gives good value for money. Pupils' personal development, attitudes and behaviour are outstanding and attendance is high. The school is based on strong Christian values generating mature, thoughtful and hard-working pupils who enjoy learning. Standards are well above average in English and science and pupils achieve well throughout the school. Standards in mathematics are above average but some more able pupils do not achieve as well as they should because they often are not challenged sufficiently. The school is led and managed well. The accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weakness by the new headteacher and the action already taken to raise standards in English, show that the capacity for improvement is now good. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Teaching and learning are good overall and sometimes outstanding. Pupils of all abilities generally make good progress except in mathematics, where the progress of brighter pupils is inadequate. There is very good provision for children in the Foundation Stage enabling them to build rapidly on their already good knowledge, understanding and skills through very effective independent learning. There is a good curriculum for all pupils supported by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, school visits and visitors, all much appreciated by the pupils. Almost all parents are happy with the school management and pleased with the progress their children are making. The school has appropriate systems to ensure pupils are well-cared-for, but occasionally parents have not been informed of accidents.

What the school should do to improve further

- * Improve the teaching and learning of mathematics, especially for more able pupils.
- * Ensure that procedures for pupils' health and safety are implemented rigorously.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress throughout the school from above average standards on entry to the Reception Class. Pupils achieve well in the Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2 and in the 2005 tests for seven-year-olds all pupils attained the expected Level 2. Fewer than average attained the higher Level 3 in mathematics although standards in reading were very high and well above average in writing. By the end of Year 6 standards in English and science are well above average with a higher than average number of pupils attaining Level 5. Pupils achieve well in these subjects, meeting their challenging targets. Although standards in mathematics are above average, pupils' progress overall is only satisfactory, and some more able pupils' progress is inadequate, because much of their work lacks sufficient challenge and opportunities to select and apply their skills. The school has identified this and is introducing measures to improve pupils' achievements including more challenge for higher attaining pupils. Pupils with special educational needs achieve at least as well as their peers in all subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of pupils are outstanding. Pupils express high levels of enjoyment of school and parents agree. The shared values and beliefs create a strong community with very good relationships and mutual respect. This is reflected in the excellent behaviour and attitudes of pupils across the school. They enjoy learning and realise its importance to their future well-being. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also excellent. As a pupil said, 'We love and care for each other and all our school rules are easy because of this'. A strong feature is the way older pupils support younger pupils and take on responsibilities. Attendance rates are very high including attendance at the wide range of clubs and activities. Pupils know how to keep safe and healthy and understand the importance of healthy eating. They enjoy and participate in a wide range of physical activities. They learn about the responsibilities of citizenship and exercise them through the School Council.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall and occasionally outstanding. Pupils enjoy their learning, are very motivated and behave very well in lessons. Teaching assistants give valuable support particularly for pupils with learning difficulties. Strengths of teaching and learning are relationships between pupils and teachers and the use of a wide range of learning strategies, including very effective use of interactive whiteboards. So pupils are well-motivated and learn in the ways that suit them best. In an outstanding lesson, the teacher's very good knowledge of what her pupils are capable of enabled her to challenge and extend the literacy skills of pupils of all abilities. Learning was rapid and fun. Homework supports learning well. In most subjects the more able pupils are challenged well. However, there is insufficient challenge for them in mathematics. All pupils have too few opportunities to select and apply their mathematical skills within mathematics and in other subjects. Pupils are set personal learning targets in English, mathematics and personal development but there is a lack of consistency in their use across the school, particularly in mathematics. Teachers' marking is often very helpful in English and other subjects, but in mathematics it rarely identifies how work can be improved.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a rich, well-balanced curriculum. In the Foundation Stage this meets the needs of children very well, enabling them to build on their skills and develop independent learning through well-planned activities. Older pupils say how much they enjoy all aspects of the curriculum especially art, religious education and the range of physical activities. The very good provision for enrichment, including the two residential

trips, generates good opportunities for personal and social development, learning in arts and humanities and challenging adventure activities. There is good provision and support for bi-lingual pupils and those with learning difficulties. Over the last two years the school has improved its provision for writing. There are good links across the curriculum particularly for information and communication technology and writing. However in mathematics there are too few opportunities for pupils to apply their learning to solve problems. The school is conscientious in ensuring that the whole curriculum is linked to the aspects of learning identified in the government guidance 'Every Child Matters'.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good overall with some significant strengths. Pupils feel very strongly that the school is a welcoming and safe place and there are many systems to ensure that this is so. For example, older pupils support Reception children very effectively through the buddy system. The school's strong sense of community ensures that this is a very inclusive school, where every individual is known and respected. Guidance and support systems reflect this, based on the staff's very good knowledge of individual pupils. However, the setting of pupils' individual targets, especially for mathematics has, quite rightly, been identified as needing improvement. The school also needs to make sure that its accident procedures are strictly followed and ensure that parents are informed of incidents.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is led and managed well. The new headteacher has put in place efficient systems for evaluating the effectiveness of the school's work. She and the senior management team have a clear understanding of what needs to be improved and have, for example, been successful in raising the achievements of more able pupils in English. This contributes strongly to the school's capacity to improve. The school is developing an effective and purposeful team of managers. Accurate tracking of pupils' progress enables the school to identify strengths and weaknesses in learning and provide additional support where necessary. Information from the monitoring of lessons is used effectively to improve aspects of teaching. Resources to support learning are managed well and careful management of the very tight budget is reducing the deficit of recent years. Leaders' commitment to the strong Christian ethos of the school and the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development permeates through all aspects of school life, resulting in a caring, mature and orderly community where all are valued. The school is successful in making sure that all pupils have equal opportunities and has identified the weaknesses in the teaching of mathematics that result in some lack of challenge. The school makes good use of external agencies to support school improvement and individual pupils. The governing body fulfils its statutory responsibilities and is becoming increasingly involved in school development. Governors support the senior management team well and are beginning to evaluate

and challenge school initiatives. Parents are kept well informed about school activities and their children's progress. The headteacher has recognised the need to ensure that procedures for informing parents of accidents are carried out rigorously and has planned training for all staff. The vast majority of parents feel the school is led and managed well.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you very much indeed for your friendliness and help during our visit to your school. You showed us how proud you are of the school, your teachers and each other and how much you enjoy being at school. You told us that St. Finian's is a good school and we agree with you. Many thanks to the School Council members, who provided us with such comprehensive minutes of the meeting with Mr. Scola.

I should like to tell you some of the things that are so good about your school. * your behaviour, care for each other and willingness to take responsibility are excellent and you hardly ever miss school * your school is a happy place because you are taught interesting things well, you work hard and understand how learning helps you to make the most of your lives* the headteacher and other leaders run the school well, helping your teachers to provide you with the skills you need.

There are one or two things your school could do to make it even better, with your help. * some of you do not have enough challenge in mathematics and are not sure how to become even better mathematicians by choosing and using your skills to investigate and solve problems* your teachers need to make sure that, if you have an accident in school, they remember to tell your parents.