



St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117436
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280078
Inspection dates 16 May 2006 to 16 May 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Grahame Boyce LI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to inspect any school in England. The inspection is to be treated as a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary	School address	North Road
School category	Voluntary aided		SG14 2BY
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01992 583148
Number on roll	237	Fax number	01992 550503
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr. Matthew Jones
Date of previous inspection	24 May 2000	Headteacher	Miss. Sheila McGee

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3 to 11	16 May 2006 - 16 May 2006	280078

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector in one day. During the inspection all classes were visited, many with the headteacher, and several discussions were had with pupils of all ages. The inspector met with parents, governors and members of staff, and had numerous discussions with the headteacher during the day. 110 parental responses were analysed and their content informed the inspection.

Description of the school

This is an average sized voluntary aided primary school that largely serves the Catholic population of Hertford and the locality near the school. The school has fewer pupils from minority ethnic groups than is usually found and almost all pupils speak English at home. The school has a lower than average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Pupil mobility is usually low, and in most years very few pupils move in and out of the school except at the beginning and end of each year. The majority of pupils come from relatively favoured homes and a lower than average number are entitled to free school meals. There are no looked after pupils. Attainment on entry varies from year to year, but is generally above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school with many significant strengths and a small number of minor areas for improvement. It serves its pupils and the community well and turns out polite and mature young adults who are a credit to their parents and the school. The secret of the school's success is down to the planning, care, pastoral support, dedication and high expectations of the headteacher, who leads her team with consummate skill and manages to strike that critical balance between academic excellence and the outstanding personal development of the pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The achievement of the pupils is outstanding and they generally attain very high standards. One parent commented 'I could not be happier with the school and my child's progress.' Most children enter the nursery with skills that are higher than are usually found, although the school has noted a gradual deterioration over the past few years in their personal and social skills and in the quality of their speech and language. They make good and sometimes outstanding progress through the nursery class and the reception, mainly because the teaching is so good and the school has such excellent facilities and resources for young children. As a result, almost all meet the expected standard by the time they enter Year 1, with a significant proportion exceeding that level. Parents are delighted with this progress and are also so glad that their children are settled and happy. One mother of a nursery class child wrote: 'My daughter loves nursery so much. Her only complaint is that she cannot come on Saturdays and Sundays.' The good and sometimes outstanding progress found in the nursery and the reception classes continues through Years 1 and 2, and pupils attained high standards in the national assessments given in Year 2. Standards in 2005 were exceptionally high in reading, high in writing and above average in mathematics. The children do so well in reading because the parents are very good at supplementing at home the good work that goes on in school. The school has responded swiftly to the slight dip in mathematics by modifying its approach so that pupils now experience much more problem solving and investigative work. This is already paying dividends and standards are rising quickly. The school is also seeking to involve parents more so that they can help out with the development of mathematical skills at home. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are also very high and even the youngest pupils are very confident and adept when using computers. This was demonstrated to very good effect when a pupil in Year 1 'rescued' the inspector when he carelessly knocked the 'mouse' and activated a talking story program. She quickly saved his blushes by leaping up, turning down the volume control on the computer and returning to her place without a single word being spoken. Good and sometimes outstanding progress continues throughout Years 3 to 6, and by the end of Year 6 pupils generally achieve very high standards. In 2005 standards, whilst lower than in the previous two years, were exceptionally high in science, and high in English and mathematics. The slight dip in performance over the last two years has been

investigated thoroughly and was due to a small number of pupils joining the top two classes, and one child not achieving the expected grades in English and mathematics. The current Year 6 group is achieving very well and, based on assessments, the school has raised their targets for this group as they expect them to do even better than originally predicted. In addition to high standards in English, mathematics and science, the work sampled and the quality of display show that standards throughout the school are well above average in ICT, design and technology, and art and design. All pupils make similarly outstanding progress. Pupils with learning difficulties are well supported and achieve very well because their work is presented in easily understood and achievable sections. In addition to the individual education plans produced for each pupil with significant learning difficulties, the school tracks the progress of every pupil and produces an improvement plan for any pupil that does not make the expected progress. One parent of an older child wrote: 'My child had some difficulties at school, but with the help of the headteacher and the teachers in Years 5 and 6, he is now doing really well.'

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of the pupils are outstanding because they are provided with such exemplary role models by the headteacher and staff, and because they are provided with many excellent opportunities to develop self-confidence and independence. The school works hard to give pupils an appreciation of different cultures and to prepare pupils for life in a multicultural society, but is aware that since there is little ethnic diversity in the local area it will have to work even harder to extend the pupils' knowledge and experience. Pupils are exceedingly well mannered and polite and could not be more welcoming to visitors. They have a very wide range of social skills and quickly become self assured young adults. Parents are delighted with these outcomes and the parent of a pupil in Year 6 commented: 'my daughter was a timid child on entering St Joseph's. As she leaves this year we are happy to report that she is now happy, self assured and has a very strong sense of fair-play; frequently supporting the 'under-dog'.' Behaviour is excellent as are relationships between pupils and staff. Pupils work hard for their teachers because they like and respect them. These positive attitudes also extend to the playground at lunchtime, and as one pupil maturely identified 'while you can get round many of the dinner ladies, others are quite strict. They have to be like that or some of us would try to get away with all sorts of things.' Pupils understand the need to stay safe and healthy and the younger ones grow vegetables in the school garden which are prepared and served as part of school lunches. Pupils are very active in the local community and raise considerable sums for charity, having a good understanding of the need to help others. They are given many opportunities to work in teams on enterprise projects and have a well developed appreciation of the value of money and the independence it can bring. Pupils enjoy school greatly and this is shown very clearly by the well above average attendance and punctuality.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Learning is so effective because teachers have such high expectations. Since pupils are always expected to do their best at all times, they do. Pupils also have such excellent relationships with their teachers, and respect them so much, that they want to work hard to please them. Learning is also effective because teachers have such a good knowledge of the subject material. This enables them to prepare exciting lessons which capture the imagination of the pupils and bring learning alive. They also make sure that these lessons provide really good opportunities to use and develop their skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. Teachers make excellent use of resources, including ICT, to illustrate their lessons and make them more accessible and enhance programmes of study with well considered educational visits and practical activities. The parent of a pupil on Year 4 commented 'My son's learning has been enhanced this year by the use of novel ways to present old material, for example, the inclusion of a visit to the Imperial War Museum, where they did role play as evacuees brought alive what it was like to be a child during the Second World War.' Assessment is exceedingly effective and teachers track the progress of each pupil really carefully and are constantly adjusting their planning to meet their changing needs. Since there are so many highly skilled teaching assistants and parent volunteers available, teachers can split their class into much smaller groups, according to ability, and then organise pupils into small focused groups each working on a relevant and interesting activity. This really effective use of support staff means that learning is really good in these small groups because the work is so well matched to their individual needs and because they get so much adult attention. Good use is also made of specialist teaching to share expertise in art and design, design and technology, and physical education.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding overall since in addition to the subjects of the national curriculum the school has a well considered PSHE programme and teaches French in Years 5 and 6. Teachers are always looking for new and interesting ways of presenting course materials and often group subjects together into topics to make learning more accessible for the pupils. The school also organises numerous theme days and on occasions turns a whole week over to a detailed study. Pupils still remember with great pleasure the art week on the theme 'Take One Picture' that took place in September. In addition to the numerous educational visits and visitors into school, the curriculum is greatly enhanced by various clubs and activities which take place before and after school. These are exceedingly well supported by the pupils and greatly appreciated by the parents. The school has excellent links with the local church and a parent explained the importance of this relationship when she said 'The school masses, class liturgies etc give a very balanced and respectful contribution to school life.'

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care guidance and support is outstanding overall, mainly because the school has such a very positive and caring ethos based on well established Christian values. There is an amazing consistency to the approach adopted by all staff. They all work together as a very effective team and know the pupils well. Because of this detailed knowledge clear targets are set and all pupils know exactly how well they are doing; Pupils report that they feel very safe and well looked after in school and that they could approach any adult if they felt unwell or had any concerns about anything. The level of care is outstanding and the commitment to the on-going welfare of the pupils is illustrated very effectively in the school's response to the small number of pupils with reduced hearing. To ensure that they can be heard in all parts of the room at all times, even by the hard of hearing, teachers in four classes wear microphone headsets. A sound field system is also employed at assembly. There are effective procedures to ensure the health and safety of pupils and procedures for child protection are very robust and are known to all.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The quality of leadership and management in the school is outstanding. This is because under the outstanding leadership of the headteacher all members of the staff team have a shared vision and know exactly what they have to do to deliver it. The quality of self-evaluation is good despite the fact that the school identified itself modestly as being good overall and not outstanding. Monitoring is done with great care and the school is excellent at evaluating the data it gathers and taking swift action. Resources are deployed very effectively and the value for money is outstanding. Improvement since the last inspection has been good and the school has good capacity for further improvement. The senior management team are exceedingly capable and manage their areas of responsibility with great care and consideration. Governors are very active in the school, understand its strengths and weaknesses and conscientiously hold the headteacher and staff accountable for the school's performance. Parents are consulted regularly and all but a small minority hold very positive views about the links they have with the school. The school consults pupils' views through the house captains but is now aware of the need for the pupils to have a clearer voice and be better represented through the form of some sort of school council.

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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?	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	1	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?	1	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	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	1	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	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	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

I am writing to thank all those children I met during my recent visit to your school for being so friendly and polite, and for answering all my questions so carefully. You have an excellent school and it is helping you all to do really well in a lot of different ways. It is super to see you all getting on so well together and to watch you working so hard to please your teachers in the lessons. Almost everything in the school is working really well and there are only one or two tiny things that could make things even better. The school needs to do a bit more to help you to understand the beliefs and values of people from other countries so that you will be even better prepared to mix with other peoples when you start to explore the world. It would also be a good idea if the school had some sort of school council, so that the ideas that you have for improving the school can be shared with staff and other children on a regular basis. Apart from that, everything is great. I wish you well for the future and hope the older children really enjoy their trip to Kingswood.