



St Dominic Roman Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117478
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280091
Inspection dates 1 February 2006 to 2 February 2006
Reporting inspector Mrs. Jackie Cousins LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Southdown Road
School category	Voluntary aided		AL5 1PF
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01582760047
Number on roll	238	Fax number	01582760424
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr.Dave Hartnett
Date of previous inspection	2 October 2000	Headteacher	Mrs. Elizabeth O'Brien

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average sized primary and nursery school is in Harpenden. Pupils come from a range of backgrounds. Levels of free school meals are below average. Year groups usually have thirty pupils. When the youngest pupils start school their levels of knowledge and understanding are above those expected for 3-year-olds. Overall the school has a well below average proportion of pupils with special educational needs. Nine out of ten pupils are from White British families. A few pupils are from minority ethnic groups or speak English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St. Dominic Roman Catholic Primary School is a good school. The inspection agrees with the school's judgements. This is a popular and over-subscribed school. During recent months the lack of a permanent headteacher and deputy headteacher has caused some instability. However, the school is more stable now and the new headteacher's leadership is effective. One parent said, 'It is a credit to the all the staff that the school appears to maintain its high standards.' Most pupils make effective progress at the school because of good teaching. Teachers and teaching assistants are dedicated and care well for pupils. The school works effectively with parents. Comments raised by parents during the inspection have been shared with the headteacher and she is already thoughtfully sorting out some of the concerns. The pupils are given a good start in the nursery and reception classes because of effective teaching and leadership. Standards by the beginning of Year 1 are significantly above average. In 2005 Year 6 test results were exceptionally high in English, mathematics and science. Pupils' enjoyment in their work is outstanding and they behave particularly well. Several pupils said that they really enjoyed English, writing and mathematics. Exciting activities are planned, pupils go out on many trips and most take part in drama performances every year. Assessment activities are used satisfactorily. However, pupil targets are not always used effectively in lessons. New computers and information and communication technology (ICT) mean that the school is now well equipped, but its use in all subjects is rather limited. The role of subject coordinators and governors is satisfactory but could be more developed to help the school maintain its momentum for improvement. Strategies to bring about improvement since the last inspection have been effective. For example, very high standards in English, mathematics and science have been maintained in Year 6. Throughout the school, work to develop pupils' thinking skills and raise standards for more able pupils has been successful. The inspection confirms the school's judgement that it is in a good position to improve in the future. This is because of the well founded school development plan and strong leadership of the headteacher. The school offers good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- develop the use of ICT in all subjects so that standards are further improved - continue to develop the use of specific targets with pupils throughout the school so that they are even clearer about what they need to do to improve their work - develop the role of co-ordinators and governors to ensure that high standards are maintained in all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' standards and achievement are good. When pupils enter the school their levels of knowledge and understanding are above expectations in the key skills of reading, writing, speech and communication. They get off to a good start in the nursery and

reception classes and attain significantly above average standards by the beginning of Year 1 in most areas of learning. This is due to the effective use of play and practical activities. The majority of pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 1 to 2. Standards in writing, reading, mathematics and science are above average in Year 2. Standards in Year 6 were well above average in 2005 tests. These pupils achieved well from an above average level of knowledge in Year 2. This is because teachers have particularly high expectations of pupils and key skills are taught effectively. Standards of writing are very strong. A more able Year 6 pupil used adjectives very effectively to write a thrilling horror story. She opened her story with, 'The night was scary and frightening. I approached the gloomy haunted house which stood upon a steep terrifying hill. I had a strange feeling inside me as I opened the creepy door.' Standards in mathematics are similarly high. For example, many pupils in Year 6 solve complex mathematical problems using a variety of methods. The school met its challenging targets in 2005. Standards for boys and girls are similar. School data demonstrate that pupils from minority ethnic groups make satisfactory progress and those who speak English as an additional language achieve well. The majority of pupils with special educational needs make effective progress and some attain average standards.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils have excellent attitudes to school and show obvious pride in the good reputation the school has for achieving high standards. The very positive atmosphere and well above average attendance levels illustrate this. Behaviour in the classroom is very good and contributes strongly to learning, and pupils work particularly hard. Behaviour elsewhere is usually good but in the upper playground, some boys are occasionally rather boisterous. Pupils feel safe and say there is no bullying or racial tension. Pupils commented that the school is 'like a big, happy family.' Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good. Even the youngest children are able to reflect on and understand feelings and emotions explored in their learning. Pupils have a very strong sense of right and wrong and this helps them to be kind and considerate to others. They have good social skills and show increasing maturity and growing independence as they move up through the school. The school's work provides a good start for pupils to learn basic skills associated with economic well-being. Although cultural development is satisfactory overall, multi-cultural awareness is less well developed. Pupils are effectively encouraged to adopt a safe and healthy lifestyle and the school council has been instrumental in getting healthier lunch options and a playground apparatus rota. Pupils make a good contribution to the community, for example, when they raise money for good causes.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good, allowing pupils to learn basic and more complex skills effectively. Good teaching methods are used consistently to make learning memorable. Nursery children were motivated and inspired by the teacher's use of ribbons in a lesson focused on length and as a result children learnt how to compare lengths effectively. Teachers explain and demonstrate clearly what pupils should do. For example, in a good Year 5 gymnastics lesson, the teacher very skilfully explained and showed pupils how to improve their movements. This enabled them to learn to control their bodies more effectively when creating gymnastics sequences. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities receive a good level of support from effective teaching assistants in the middle part of lessons. Teachers sometimes provide constructive feedback in spoken and written comments, which gives pupils clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work. However, this good practice is not established in all classes. Furthermore, some teachers do not use the time at the end of lessons to involve pupils in evaluating their own work and that of others. This means that they are not developing the skills quickly enough that will assist them to improve their own work and make faster progress. Assessment activities are used satisfactorily. Pupils' achievement is tracked adequately in reading, writing, mathematics and science from the nursery to Year 6. However, not all targets set for pupils in Years 1 to 6 are clearly understood by pupils. This means that they do not know specifically how to attain higher levels of knowledge.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum and other activities are good and serve the needs of learners well. Work is suitably matched to the needs of the more able pupils and those with learning difficulties alike. The school includes all pupils in all its activities and provides good opportunities for pupils to progress and develop skills effectively. There is good provision for the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. ICT, however, is not used well enough across the curriculum. This means that pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their ICT skills or practice basic skills using ICT tools in many subjects. All legal requirements are met and a good range of visits to places of interest enriches the curriculum. In addition, the many visitors to the school give pupils new insights into the local community and the wider world. A good range of clubs is offered to older pupils to extend their involvement and enjoyment of sports and the arts. These are very popular and younger pupils expressed a desire to have more opportunities to take part in similar extra-curricular activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and support for pupils and the guidance given to them in their personal development are good. Academic guidance is satisfactory and target-setting is at an early stage of development. Pupils are valued as individuals within a supportive and strongly Catholic environment. Pupils strongly affirmed that if ever they were troubled they would have no hesitation in seeking help from staff, with whom they have close and trusting relationships. Child protection and health and safety procedures are clear and understood by all staff. They make sure that pupils are kept safe during lessons and at playtimes, although some boys engage in good natured horseplay and bump into others at times. Kindness is evident in this close-knit school community when older pupils look after their younger ones. Parents are pleased about how happy their children are. The school is beginning to take note of pupils' ideas through the school council, and healthier school lunches and playtime rotas came about in this way. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. It helps them to progress well and feel good about their success.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good overall. The school has gone through a period of instability. A temporary headteacher was in post last term. The school has appointed a new permanent headteacher and she recently took up her post. Already she has gained the confidence of staff, pupils and parents. She has improved channels of communication. In addition, she has made some major decisions on buying new resources, improving the building and re-decorating the school. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The leadership continues to be successfully focused on maintaining high standards and promoting the personal development and well-being of pupils with a common-sense approach. Staff work as a team and their morale is high. The capacity to improve in the future is good. Although all subjects are managed satisfactorily, subject co-ordinators could be more effective in maintaining and improving standards throughout the school. Staff have insufficient time to study and analyse the subject they have responsibility for. Through effective self-evaluation, the school has a good sense of its strengths and of areas for improvement. It has identified the latter in a good school improvement plan. The views of parents and pupils have been sought and they are starting to contribute to school improvement. The integration of pupils from all backgrounds is central to the school's vision and any barriers to learning are tackled and removed to ensure that all have opportunities to succeed and do their best. The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and has good control of its finances and spending. The school had a considerable amount of money saved from last year but this has now been spent, mostly on ICT equipment. The governance of the school is satisfactory. A new committee structure is in place, roles have been agreed and a programme of visits arranged to improve governor involvement. All the legal requirements are met and the governors have carried out their responsibilities well in this regard.

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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	1	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?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	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	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	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	3	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 for helping us find out about your school. We enjoyed watching lessons and talking to you. It was interesting to talk to your teachers and watch one assembly. We really enjoyed your super singing. Good things about your school include the fact that: - you work incredibly hard in lessons - behaviour is really good - you do really good work in English, mathematics and science by Year 6 - your headteacher has good ideas about ways to improve the school - teachers work hard to make lessons interesting - teachers and teaching assistants care for you well - productions and trips out make school life more interesting - you are encouraged effectively to lead healthy and safe lives - nearly all of you attend school every day. I have asked your school to look at how staff can make things even better. I hope that you will help teachers by listening to them carefully. The most important things are: - improving the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in all subjects so that you get better at using computers and ICT equipment - developing the use of personal targets which will help you to improve your work - developing the way that senior teachers and governors work in the school to maintain good standards in all subjects. Keep up the terrific work at St Dominic Roman Catholic Primary School.