



Saint Cross Roman Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117483
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280093
Inspection dates 17 January 2006 to 18 January 2006
Reporting inspector Mrs. Alison Pangbourne LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Upper Marsh Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		EN11 8BN
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01992 467 309
Number on roll	202	Fax number	01992450362
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs.Kate Daynes
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mr. Sean Curran

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school has close links with the local church. A few pupils come from minority ethnic heritages but about a quarter come from Italian families. A few pupils are from travelling communities. This is a high proportion. About 24 are at an early stage of learning English. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is lower than in most schools. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. The number of pupils entitled to a free school meal is low. The level of knowledge and understanding which pupils enter the school with meets national expectations. The acting headteacher has been in post since September 2005 following a period where there have been several headteachers and numerous staff changes.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. In its self-evaluation, the school was modest in some of its judgements, in particular the quality of teaching and leadership and management. The school is emerging from a difficult period and so it has been understandably cautious in its judgements. Now the position is much improved with a committed acting headteacher and settled teaching staff. When children start school, standards are typical of 4-year-olds. By the time they leave, when they are eleven years old, standards are exceptionally high. Pupils in years 3 to 6 make excellent progress. The quality of teaching is good and teaching for the oldest pupils is excellent. Very supportive parents provide effective help. Interesting activities encourage pupils to work hard and they want to do well. Standards and the quality of the Foundation Stage are good. The youngest children get off to an effective start. The school has begun to help more pupils to exceed the expected level by the end of Year 2. Pupils' behaviour and their enjoyment in school are outstanding. They make an effective contribution to the community. The good curriculum meets their needs. The headteacher and his deputy work well to help pupils do even better. Many things have been introduced recently to help staff fulfil their management roles but these have yet to be fully developed. The way that the governors and the established senior management team have ensured that standards have not been adversely affected during this testing period and the successful initiatives introduced by the headteacher show that there is a good capacity to improve further. The school gives good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue the drive to raise standards for 7-year-olds by improving the proportion that exceeds the level expected for their age in reading, writing, mathematics and science. - Embed the recent developments to enable all staff to fulfil their management roles successfully.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are very good. When children start school, standards are broadly average. In recent years standards have been consistently above average for 7-year-olds and pupils made good progress. In 2005, standards fell sharply. This was due to a combination of circumstances. An unusually high number of pupils had learning difficulties and some had significant needs. The class also had many changes of teacher which disrupted their learning. Boys nationally tend not to do as well as girls and there were twice as many boys as girls in the year group. Few were assessed as exceeding the level expected for their age and this affected standards. This year standards in Year 2 are above those expected for their age and pupils are again making good progress. There is still room for improvement in the proportion of pupils that exceed the level expected for their age to raise standards still further. As pupils move through the school progress accelerates, particularly in Years 5 and 6. Consequently, standards

in Year 6 have been very high in recent years. In 2005, national test results were amongst the highest nationally. The number of pupils exceeding the expected level is very high. Pupils make excellent progress in English, mathematics and science. Those who left last year exceeded the already challenging targets set for them. They do so well because of the additional boost given by the excellent teaching in Year 6. They want to do well and their parents encourage them in this. For example, supporting them with homework. Pupils with learning difficulties, those who speak English as an additional language and those who are gifted and talented also do very well. This is because tasks are well matched to their needs and they are well supported by teachers and teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' enjoyment of school is outstanding. They consider it 'a friendly place', feel safe and secure and know they can turn to anyone for advice when they need help. They say lessons are fun, as well as hard work, and they try their best. Pupils support each other very well and spontaneously applaud others' success. They are exceptionally well behaved, mature and self disciplined. This is reflected in their friendly, polite and courteous manner. All of this is recognised by parents who appreciate what the school does for their children. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their future development through the high standards they achieve and their skills in literacy and numeracy. They take on responsibility through the school council which gives them an active role in bringing forward ideas and suggestions for school improvement. They raise their own funds to help develop these. Safe and healthy lifestyles for pupils are well developed. The good focus on and awareness of healthy lifestyles includes good quality, healthy school lunches. Pupils regularly take part in vigorous physical exercise, including swimming, and the good variety of after school sports activities and clubs contribute well to this. Because they enjoy school so much, attendance is higher than the national average. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and reflects the strong Catholic ethos of the school. The whole school has been actively involved in raising money for a wide range of charities. Through a range of well thought out lessons in personal, social and health education pupils have a good awareness of the local culture within the community and a developing understanding of living in a diverse society.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good with some outstanding teaching and learning in Year 6. Here, pupils are really challenged to do their best, stretching even the most able. As a consequence, pupils are confident and know that they are effective learners. Introductions to lessons are brisk and teachers question pupils well both to check their understanding and extend their thinking. From reception onwards, praise

and encouragement are used very well and there are high expectations of pupils' behaviour and performance. This is achieved through the very good relationships that have been established. Teachers plan work, including homework, in great detail. With good support from teaching assistants, pupils' work is carefully evaluated to ensure learning activities are well matched to meet the needs of all pupils in most classes. The work in pupils' books shows how well targeted this is in building successfully on what they already know. This is seen through the progress pupils make and reflects effective teaching across the school and over a long time. The good leadership and management of the school at all levels have contributed strongly to an ethos that promotes high quality learning. Good assessment procedures are used to set challenging targets and track pupils' progress. Although only more recently introduced, the system has become established quickly and enables teachers to set very accurate targets for improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and enhanced by links between subjects. However, some subject policies do not yet reflect more recent national initiatives. The school uses national guidance for many subjects but this has not yet been tailored to meet the needs of the school. Children in the reception class thoroughly enjoy the wide range of stimulating activities that provide excellent opportunities for them to learn and practise early skills of reading, writing and number. The well organised provision for pupils with learning difficulties is very good and enables these pupils to achieve as well as others in the school. All have clear education plans and are helpfully supported by teaching assistants. Very good support and guidance is provided for those pupils who are at the early stages of learning English. Planning for all subjects is detailed and provides a clear structure for the teaching of the full range of skills. Information and communication technology (ICT) is suitably planned to develop pupils' skills and good use is made of the technology suite. Planning for the use of ICT in the classroom provides additional opportunities for pupils and makes this a regular, integral part of their day-to-day learning. The curriculum is made interesting through a good range of well-supported after-school activities. Along with a good personal, social and health education policy, these encourage pupils to be safe, active and healthy and develop an interest in music and the arts.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There are very good systems to ensure the safety, health and well-being of the pupils. Child protection procedures are in place and staff training is kept up to date. The school actively promotes personal development and well being in both the pastoral and spiritual sense and has very effective strategies to improve academic achievement through close monitoring of progress. All pupils have clear and demanding targets that help them to understand how they can improve their work in literacy and numeracy. They are discussed with pupils and reviewed regularly. The sharpness of these targets

helps them to make excellent progress in some year groups. Those who show particular gifts or talents are as well supported as those who have learning difficulties. There is very good provision for those pupils newly into school, particularly where they are at the early stages of learning English, and for those from traveller families.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher leads the school with energy and dedication. He is open and honest about what needs to be done to bring the necessary stability and to provide the very best for its pupils. He has identified the right areas for development in the good school development plan. This shows that the school's self-evaluation is effective. It has rightly identified that more pupils in Year 2 could reach higher levels and is working towards this. The school works very effectively to include pupils from all backgrounds and this contributes to the family ethos. The views of all members of the community are welcomed and parents are very positive about the school. One parent said 'The school has managed to keep its firm control on teaching and discipline and carries on with its head held high!' The governors are committed to making the right appointment for the school to lead the school onwards. They have worked hard to establish a clear vision for the school based on very high expectations in all aspects of its work. The headteacher has introduced several good initiatives to establish a firm base for future development. For example, he has re-organised subject leadership into teams, where less experienced staff can learn from more experienced colleagues. However, these developments are not yet firmly embedded. The deputy headteacher and senior staff have showed commitment and loyalty during this difficult period where there has been considerable staff turnover and a succession of headteachers. Together with the governors they have ensured that the quality of education has remained high in many aspects of the school. This strong sense of teamwork is helping to drive the school forward. The school has a good capacity to improve further.

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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	1	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	1	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	2	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

Following our visit to your school, we would like to thank you for helping us. We enjoyed talking to you and watching you learn. What was best: - you made us feel very welcome and greeted us with a friendly smile - you really enjoy your work and join in your lessons well - your behaviour is excellent and you are polite to your teachers and visitors - all the grown-ups work hard to make sure that you get the right sort of assistance to help you learn - your headteacher is working hard to make your school even better - you have lots of interesting and exciting things to do in lessons - you and your parents are right in thinking that you go to a good school. What we have asked your school to do now to make it even better: - help more of you in Year 2 to do even better - help the teachers to have an even better understanding of all the new things that the headteacher has introduced.