



Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, Henley-on-Thames

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123204
Local Authority Oxfordshire
Inspection number 281428
Inspection date 2 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	Primary	School address	Greys Hill
School category	Voluntary aided		Henley-on-Thames
Age range of pupils	4-11		RG9 1SL
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01491 572796
Number on roll (school)	180	Fax number	01491 413838
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr G Fielding
		Headteacher	Mr J A McDonald
Date of previous school inspection	10 July 2000		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average school where the vast majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds. Most are from advantaged homes. A very small proportion of pupils have free school meals. Fewer pupils than usual have learning difficulties. Three pupils are at an early stage of learning English and their home languages are Spanish and German.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Following the previous inspection the school went through a period of instability; standards declined substantially, the number of pupils fell and there was significant staff turnover. Under the strong leadership of the headteacher the school has been transformed. The school, which has several excellent features, now provides a good quality of education. One parent, echoing the views of the vast majority, wrote, 'We are absolutely delighted with the improvements made since the appointment of the headteacher. We are very proud to say that our children attend Sacred Heart.'

Pupils make a substantial contribution to the school. Their excellent personal qualities include exemplary behaviour, concern for others and enthusiastic support for charitable fund raising. Sensible and mature attitudes, linked to a determination to do their best, equip the pupils well academically and socially. These skills are enhanced through the exceptional range of sporting, musical and artistic activities. Pupils listen intently and are quick to settle to work responding to the good teaching, even when the pace of lessons is a little slow. Although teachers prepare lessons thoroughly they do not make sufficient and consistent use of marking to guide pupils on how they might improve.

Academic success has become the norm. The school's test results in 2003 were poor. Since then, much has improved and standards are now well above the national average in English, mathematics and science. Children in the Foundation Stage get off to a flying start and most attain the expected goals for their age before starting in Year 1. In the rest of the school, achievement is good. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities make outstanding progress because of the intensive and highly effective support they are given. The parent of a child with severe learning difficulties said, 'Both teachers and pupils are kind and for the very first time in my daughter's life she has real friends and loves going to school.'

The headteacher has played an outstanding part in restoring the confidence of staff, parents and pupils and in raising standards. He has set up excellent systems to ensure the good pastoral care and support of the pupils. The next steps are for subject leaders and governors to keep a more regular and frequent check on pupils' work and to see that links between subjects are developed. There are secure foundations for further success and everyone connected to the school seems determined to make it happen.

What the school should do to improve further

- Lift the pace of some lessons and ensure that marking and targets are used consistently to guide pupils on how to improve.
- Sharpen the skills of subject leaders and governors in monitoring pupils' work and in setting up links between subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children bring a wide range of experiences when they start school. Overall, their skills are in advance of those expected for their age. They achieve well, communicate competently and quickly learn to work and play alongside each other. These qualities equip them well for Year 1. Achievement is good in the rest of the school although the rate of pupils' progress varies between year groups. Those in Years 1 and 2 improve steadily and attain standards in reading, writing and mathematics which are average. Pupils grow in confidence and competence as they tackle increasingly difficult work. By the end of Year 6 standards in English, mathematics and science are well above average. As the pupils' performance has improved over the last three years the school has raised its expectations but still manages to exceed its targets.

The few pupils at an early stage of learning English thrive in an atmosphere where different languages are valued and pupils are encouraged to share their experiences. These pupils attain equally as well as their peers in national tests. The outstanding leadership and management and high quality provision for those with learning difficulties and disabilities contribute substantially to these pupils' academic and personal success.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Stepping into the school there is a sense of calm and orderliness. Conversations with the pupils showed they have a well developed sense of social responsibility. Their generosity in raising substantial funds for charities and finding out about different parts of the world equips them well for citizenship. Pupils are thoughtful and polite; their behaviour is outstanding. They take great pride in their school and in their sporting and musical achievements. Pupils commented that bullying and rough play are rare. They have every confidence that the adults working with them keep them safe. They are also mature enough to make healthy choices at meal times and to participate in lots of exercise to keep fit.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They maturely discuss sensitive issues. Pupils regularly share their views with the headteacher and are pleased that their thoughts are considered and acted upon. As one girl said, 'These meetings are really good because we learn about democracy and how to listen to each other'. Such opportunities and the pupils' successful acquisition of skills in literacy and numeracy prepare them well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are planned well and include a balance between instruction and opportunities for pupils to ask questions. Sometimes the introductions are too long and this limits the time available for pupils to practise and improve their skills. In an outstanding lesson in Year 6 the pupils made rapid gains in their understanding of spreadsheets. The teacher showed a news clip which illustrated how incorrect calculations of the amount of fuel nearly led to an aviation disaster. This stimulus encouraged the pupils to make very accurate use of the data. Pupils enjoy learning in this practical way and quickly grasp new ideas.

Although staff are conscientious in marking work the teachers are inconsistent in how they use comments to guide the pupils. Conversely, the timely and skilful intervention of staff working with those with learning difficulties does much to foster confidence among these pupils. Basic skills are taught well and this contributes much to pupils' success in English and mathematics. In the Foundation Stage, the good emphasis on practical work which links with the children's experiences stimulates effective learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's good curriculum is enriched with an outstanding range of additional activities which pupils thoroughly enjoy. A particular strength is the provision for sport, and pupils achieve good success in competition against other schools. Opportunities to join a club to learn a modern foreign language, sing in the choir and participate in visits all add to the excitement of learning. There is a strong focus on equipping pupils with the skills they need to cope with the next stage of education although links between subjects are underdeveloped.

Pupils' personal development is promoted very well through a programme of teaching about relationships and the benefits and potentially damaging effects of drugs. The school draws on the expertise of outside agencies to support this work. Excellent links with the parish and opportunities for pupils to participate in community activities, such as singing to residents in an old people's home, enhance pupils' social awareness.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

One parent wrote, 'I appreciate that teachers make time to get to know each child and are always available to parents.' Parents speak highly of the support given to their children especially if they have learning difficulties or are new to learning English. All requirements regarding the safety and well being of pupils are robustly met. Care, guidance and support are good although the way that pupils are treated as individuals and nurtured are outstanding. Another parent said, 'This school is extremely caring.'

It is like a family and the stakeholders all work as part of this special community.' More work needs to be done to improve the consistency of academic guidance so that pupils are clear about their targets for improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. A robust process of self evaluation from his appointment has enabled the headteacher to focus on the most important areas for development. As a result, underachievement has been eradicated, standards have improved and there is greater consistency in teaching. There is a strong team of staff and governors who have the potential to move the school forward. The school is good at identifying its strengths and weaknesses and in devising creative ways of tackling them. Governors, parents and staff work together and have achieved much in improving the building and the provision in the Foundation Stage through raising funds and establishing partnerships with business. The governors provide high quality support in practical ways although their role in monitoring the school's performance is underdeveloped. Leadership of some subjects, notably English and mathematics, has led to much improved standards. However, more remains to be done by leaders in linking subjects and in monitoring pupils' progress.

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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?	1
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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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?	2

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
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	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making me so welcome on my visit this week. I enjoyed having lunch with you and listening to your views about the school. You go to a good school and some things about it are outstanding.

It was very clear from what you said that you love all of the clubs and activities and are especially proud of how well you do in sports. One of the things I will remember about the school is your excellent behaviour. You are very good at listening to other people's views and also pay very careful attention in lessons. I thought that the poetry lesson in Year 4 was particularly good and you obviously enjoyed the poem which mixed up the starting letters of words. Because you work hard and your teachers are good at explaining things you are very successful in tests. It was lovely to see that children who sometimes struggle with learning also do very well.

Your headteacher and the staff work hard and have done much to improve the school in the last two years. Even in good schools there are things to do. I have asked the staff and governors to keep a better check on your work and to give you more advice about how you might improve. Your teachers are also going to find ways of linking together the work in different subjects. I know you will help with all the changes at the school and continue to do your best.

I hope that you will always be as happy at school as you obviously are at Sacred Heart.

Yours truly,

Sean O'Toole

Lead inspector