

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Thame

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123209
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	281430
Inspection date	6 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Christopher Schenk HMI

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	189
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Tess Green
Headteacher	Mrs Claire Kerr
Date of previous school inspection	2 October 2000
School address	Brook Lane Thame OX9 2AB
Telephone number	01844 214278
Fax number	01844 217682

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Joseph's is an average sized primary school. Its pupils come mainly from Catholic families in the town and in surrounding villages. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average and includes some travellers' children of Irish heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities is around average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

'I feel that I am in partnership with the school regarding my children's progress.' This comment from a parent, typical of many received in the overwhelmingly positive response to a questionnaire sent out at the time of the inspection, demonstrates a particular strength of the school. The close partnership with parents makes an important contribution to the school's overall effectiveness, which is good.

When children first come to the school, at around the age of four, they generally have the skills expected for their age. By the time they leave at 11 they are attaining above average standards in English, mathematics and science, demonstrating good progress and achievement in terms of their starting points. Achievement in English is particularly good and the school has rightly set itself the goal of bringing the achievement in mathematics up to that of English. There is good teaching throughout the school which, combined with the pupils' positive attitudes to learning, results in steady progress in most respects. However, the results of assessments at the end of Year 2 over the last couple of years indicate that higher attaining pupils should make better progress during Key Stage 1.

The school is successful in its mission of giving all its pupils confidence and respect for each other. As one Year 6 pupil commented, 'It's a brilliant school where everyone is treated with respect and as an equal, even if they are different.' Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are given effective support that enables them to take part in all areas of learning and to make good progress.

This is not a school that stands still or rests on its laurels. The high standards in English have not resulted in complacency. A careful analysis of test results showed that standards in writing were lower than those in reading. Improvements have been brought about by making closer links between writing, reading and speaking and listening and by using other subjects to provide reasons for writing.

There is an appropriate focus on literacy and numeracy, but this is not done at the expense of other subjects of the curriculum. Nearly all the teachers have responsibility for at least one subject and they are enthusiastic advocates, who are given time to monitor and influence their subject throughout the age range. They benefit from the strong links which the school has with other primary schools in the local partnership, and with the secondary school. In particular, physical education receives valuable support from the secondary school, which is a sports' college. Pupils also benefit from the partnership, for example when members of the school council meet their opposite numbers in the other schools. The schools in the partnership share an Inclusion Officer whose support is greatly valued.

The headteacher encourages and enables all the teachers to make a contribution to the continuing improvement of the school. She also sets a tone of openness and welcoming in which partnership with parents can flourish and the strong governing body can further develop the support and challenge that it offers to the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Bring achievement in mathematics up to the same high level as in English.
- Improve the progress of higher attaining pupils in Key Stage 1.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

There is some variation from year to year in the children's attainment when they first start school. Whatever their starting points, they make good progress in the Foundation Stage because of the exciting and stimulating range of activities and the skilled teaching they receive. Most of them reach their early learning goals by the time that they start in Year 1. In 2006, results of National Curriculum assessments at the end of Year 2 were average in reading, writing and mathematics, a decline from previous years. This year the school's tracking shows that the progress of pupils in Year 2 has been good. Nevertheless, as last year, only a few of them are reaching the higher level.

Throughout Key Stage 2 pupils continue to make steady progress and the results of National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6 show that standards have been consistently well above average in English and generally above average in mathematics and science. High standards are evident in other subjects as well, for example information and communication technology (ICT), physical education and music. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities make good progress because the support they are given is tailored to their diverse needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The pupils' personal development is good. They know how to stay healthy and through physical education lessons, as well as sporting clubs, they have frequent opportunities to be active. They feel safe in school, respect each other and value their differences. Behaviour is good. Attendance is well above average. New pupils are rapidly helped to settle in. As a pupil said, 'We always welcome everyone, like a family, like it says in our school prayer.' In an assembly observed during the inspection, this prayer was said with fervour and the whole occasion gave good opportunities for reflection and spiritual development. Moral and social development is good, underpinned by the strong and consistent ethos in which everyone is valued. Cultural development is also good, and pupils are encouraged to have respect for cultures other than their own. However, they do not have many opportunities to meet people who represent the diversity of culture in Britain today. The pupils make a good contribution to the community of the school. They all have an opportunity every year to take part in one of the four or five dramatic and musical productions that take place. Pupils take the lead in organising a variety of fund-raising events and this helps them to develop enterprise skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The teaching is consistently good throughout the school. Lessons are carefully planned and the teachers' clear learning objectives are shared with the pupils so that they know what is expected of them. Good use is made of ICT. The pace of the lessons is usually brisk, although on occasions the pupils sit and listen for too long. The planning takes account of the different levels of attainment within the class. As a result, pupils are generally given work that is at the right level of difficulty for them and is not too hard or too easy. In the Foundation Stage, there is a good balance between activities which are led by adults and those which are initiated by the children themselves, using the materials that have been imaginatively provided by the

teachers. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution, sometimes giving extra support to pupils who need help, and sometimes giving further challenge to pupils who are getting on particularly well. The teachers' marking of their pupils' work gives encouragement, and sometimes tells the pupils why their work is good, or how they can improve it further.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is imaginatively planned to give the pupils a good range of activities and things to learn about, so that they can develop their key skills in interesting contexts. About three times a year, the normal timetable is suspended for a week in order to concentrate on a particular subject, topic or theme. For example, shortly before the inspection, a week on the Americas highlighted geography, history and art. These weeks are an effective way of raising levels of interest and enabling work in depth to take place. However, they are not currently planned carefully enough to ensure that an appropriate balance of subjects and aspects benefit over a period of time. French is taught throughout Key Stage 2 and in some other classes. There is a good range of sporting, musical and other clubs. Teams from the school take part in matches and tournaments and do well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are well cared for and given effective academic guidance. They receive good support in their school work and in their personal development, both from the school and from outside agencies, where appropriate. For example, there are strong links with the Travellers' Education Service and very good ways of encouraging travellers' children to come to school as often as possible and to feel valued and included. There are effective procedures for regular assessment and for tracking the pupils' progress, which are shared with the pupils and with their parents so that they know what they are working towards. Parents are invited to formal meetings three times a year, but the real strength of the partnership with parents comes from the daily opportunities that most of them have to talk to their children's teachers. In particular, pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, and their parents, are fully involved in the setting and tracking of targets through their individual education plan. The school is continuing to improve its procedures for the identification and diagnosis of pupils' needs so that appropriate support can be provided as early as possible. For example, an early intervention programme has recently been introduced in the Foundation Stage for children with difficulties in listening and discriminating between sounds, and has improved their phonic skills.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The strong leadership of the headteacher has brought about a common sense of purpose among all staff. The senior leadership team work well together, sharing their expertise that covers the whole age range. Subject leaders are regularly relieved of some of their class teaching duties by the headteacher. As a result, they are able to see how their subject is taught in other classes and to make an informed contribution to its development. The frequent monitoring of planning, teaching and pupils' work results in a high degree of consistency, without dull uniformity.

The self-evaluation is thorough and helpful, though often too modest in its judgements. The school is always on the look out for ways to improve further, and when an area for improvement has been identified, it is carried through. As one Year 6 pupil perceptively remarked, 'If there is a target, the school will go for it and won't stop until it gets there!' Good use is made of the resources available. In particular, the limitations of the accommodation are not allowed to restrict the curriculum.

The governors are actively involved in all aspects of the life of the school and give very good support and some challenge. The chair of governors is keen to develop their role further and has rightly identified the need to simplify the school improvement plan and take a more strategic view of the future of the school.

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Annex A

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	2

Personal development and well-being

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

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.

Annex A

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

18 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Thame, Thame, OX9 2AB

Thank you for your welcome when I came to visit your school. I am particularly grateful to the Year 6 pupils who came to talk to me in the library at lunch-time and told me that they think it is a good school. Here are some of the things they said: 'It doesn't matter what religion you are, you are accepted.' 'You will never feel left out.' 'It's a kind place with lots of nice teachers and you don't feel unwanted.' 'Everyone looks out for each other'.

I agree with them that your school is good. One particularly good thing about it was very well expressed by a pupil when she said: 'Everyone is treated with respect and is treated as an equal even if they are different.' I am impressed by the way you respect each other and you respect your teachers.

I also met some of your parents. They told me that they really like being able to talk to your teachers after school every day and this means that they know how you are getting on and how they can help you at home. I am aware that some of you come by bus so I have asked the school to make sure that parents who don't come to pick you up are also able to keep in close touch.

I am pleased that you have interesting things to learn about in school time, as well as clubs and sports teams after school. I think you are doing pretty well in your learning and making good progress in most things but there are some ways in which you could do even better.

Your headteacher is always on the look out for ways to improve the school. I talked to her, and to some of the other teachers and governors, about what the school should do next. I agreed with her that you do particularly well in English and that the school should aim to get your achievement in mathematics to be as good as it is in English. We also agreed that some of the younger ones who are doing well in their reading, writing and mathematics should be helped to get even better.

Best wishes

Christopher Schenk

Her Majesty's Inspector