



Saint Bernadette's Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117489
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 285557
Inspection dates 17 May 2006 to 18 May 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. John Paull LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Walsingham Way
School category	Voluntary aided		AL2 1NL
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01727822489
Number on roll	238	Fax number	01727 823328
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr. Colin hull
Date of previous inspection	24 May 2004	Headteacher	Mrs. Ann Cassidy

Age group 4 to 11	Inspection dates 17 May 2006 - 18 May 2006	Inspection number 285557
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Bernadette Catholic Primary School is situated in a large village. Its pupils are drawn mainly from two parishes that are close to the school although other pupils, from further afield, are admitted. Nearly all pupils are of White British backgrounds, although several speak a European language other than English as their mother tongue. The proportion identified with learning difficulties and disabilities is a little lower than in most other schools. Attainment on entry is broadly average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Inspectors confirm the school's own evaluation that it provides a satisfactory education. Under a new leadership and management team it has improved strongly since its last inspection (2004) when serious weaknesses were found. These weaknesses have been eradicated owing to effective leadership, realistic and accurate self-evaluation and good teamwork, so that further effective improvement is now secure. The school has a good capacity to improve in the future. Satisfactory value for money is being achieved. More time is needed for the good leadership of the school to have a greater effect on standards and pupils' progress. Standards of work and pupils' achievements are satisfactory overall - a significant improvement from below average performance in the 2004 national tests. Assessment procedures are satisfactory but the tracking of pupils' attainment and progress is at an early stage of development. However, it indicates improving achievement by the time pupils leave the school in Year 6. Overall, standards meet expectations by the start of Year 1 and pupils make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage. However, the standard of work and quality of provision in the Reception class does not sufficiently build on the excellence of the Nursery. Such inconsistency is also evident in other key stages where the teaching ranges from satisfactory to outstanding. This variation is reflected in the findings of the school's own monitoring and evaluation. Arrangements for pupils' care, support and guidance are good, including procedures for checking that pupils are safe, happy and secure. This is leading to good behaviour, attendance and attitudes to work. Pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is a further good feature and reflects the school's Catholic religious character. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the community taking their responsibilities in exceptionally mature ways.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of teaching by sharing good practice and thereby increasing further pupils' rates of progress and achievement. - Ensure that the quality of provision in the Reception year more nearly matches that in the Nursery. - Continue to build up information about pupils' work and progress, using the school's recently introduced procedures, so the latter become fully effective.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The results of Year 6 national tests have improved considerably since the last inspection. These results indicate that standards have risen from below average, which was too low, to broadly average. Whereas pupils' achievement was unsatisfactory in 2004, especially in mathematics and science, it is now satisfactory. Parents' questionnaires and letters indicate that they are pleased with this improved picture and inspectors feel that they are correct to be so. Good leadership is producing strong teamwork, and effective procedures to produce improvement have been introduced. Assessment and

monitoring are being used with increasing effectiveness to show up weaknesses, for example in boys' writing, and to identify ways of rectifying them. Challenging targets are being set, and increasingly met. Records indicate that the rate of pupils' progress is picking up, partly because of more focused teaching for pupils with learning difficulties, for those of above-average ability, or those whose first language is not English. National assessments towards the end of Year 2 reflect work seen in classrooms and indicate that here too standards are broadly average with satisfactory achievement. Overall, progress is satisfactory in the Reception and Nursery classes. At the end of the Foundation Stage, most pupils attain the expected goals for their age, although progress is much faster in the outstanding Nursery than in Reception. The school is aware of this inconsistency and steps are under way to improve teaching and learning in the Reception class.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. It links strongly to the school's caring Catholic ethos. Despite a high turnover of staff following the last inspection, teachers know the pupils well, so very good relationships are built. Pupils speak highly of their teachers: 'All the teachers try to make lessons fun,' was a typical comment. Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in enthusiasm for learning and good behaviour. All those pupils asked felt that bullying is rare and that the school is a calm, happy place. Attendance is good and has been above average for the last three years. Through worship, lessons and discussions, pupils learn about other cultures satisfactorily and are able to reflect openly about their feelings and actions. Nearly all pupils show respect for others, including adults. During lessons, pupils respond sensibly to plenty of opportunities to work co-operatively. Through the house system, they willingly organise charitable fund-raising events, which reflects their strong moral and social awareness. Sound basic skills in numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology, along with good time-keeping and politeness, equip pupils well for life beyond school. Pupils have a good understanding of safe and healthy lifestyles and are involved in a range of sports. Pupils contribute exceptionally well to community life. Striking examples are their seriousness and enjoyment when acting as 'buddies' to Reception children, and when taking turns to be yellow-capped 'play pals' during breaks.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Both have clearly improved since 2004. Monitoring records indicate far fewer unsatisfactory lessons and, indeed, inspectors observed none. However, what was seen was variable. For example, outstanding teaching in the Nursery is not sufficiently built on in the Reception class and other year groups, so pupil's progress is inconsistent. Pupils' overall progress could be

improved by increasing the proportions of good and outstanding teaching. This should be possible because much good teaching already exists on which to model practice and the school has plans to remedy inconsistencies. The school's recent emphasis on writing is reflected well in pupils' work and thorough marking ensures that pupils understand their strengths and weaknesses. Newly acquired interactive whiteboards are used effectively to support different ways of learning. The teaching of those with learning difficulties is now good. However, in some of the otherwise satisfactory lessons, either the pace of teaching wavers at times; or there are moments when time is not used effectively. Recently introduced systems for assessment are helping to track pupils' learning closely. It is, however, early days and insufficient time has passed to establish enough information to have a significant impact on pupils' performance.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It contains all the subjects of the National Curriculum, planned logically to include activities that pupils enjoy. It is enriched by many examples of visits to places of interest including museums and the cathedral in the nearby city of St Albans. A number of innovative ideas, such as One World Week and The Big Sing are also employed to ensure relevance and enrichment. Sports are enhanced by the specialist knowledge of visiting coaches and after-school clubs. The introduction of French provides further enrichment in Years 5 and 6. In the early years, thorough planning overall includes all areas of learning. Further work is planned to improve transition between the Reception and Year 1. Adaptation of lessons for pupils with learning difficulties is good, and improved planning for gifted and talented pupils is under way.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. All staff share a whole-hearted commitment to pupils' welfare, based on strong teamwork and good communication. Teachers recognise when pupils have ups and downs and close links with external agencies ensure that specialist help is sought if needed. Procedures for child protection and first-aid are well organised and include regular training. Pupils feel well looked after and, as a result, they are confident, which contributes much to their learning. 'This school is good, because everyone is friendly' is a typical Year 6 comment. Pupils feel that their school council provides an effective channel to communicate ideas to senior staff. The pupils are informed adequately about how they are getting on with their work and are set satisfactory targets in English and mathematics. Parents also feel involved in such matters, as indicated in their very positive responses to questionnaires.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good overall, although some systems of management are too recent to demonstrate their full effectiveness at this stage. Leadership at all levels from headteacher to subject leadership is good, demonstrating a zeal for self-evaluation and a willingness to work with all stakeholders to seek their views and to acquire expertise. All elements of serious weakness in 2004 have been addressed vigorously because of good quality self-evaluation which has been used well. A particularly striking example is how the appointment of a very knowledgeable co-ordinator for special educational need has ensured that provision in this aspect is now good, whereas previously it was unsatisfactory. This strong leadership is the main reason that the school has improved so well. It has become infectious and the whole staff works hard as a strong team, suggesting that its capacity to improve further is good. While the recently introduced systems are beginning to prove their worth, they are too new to be fully established, or to have produced sufficient information to demonstrate full effectiveness. The present school improvement plan is a draft document, as not enough time has elapsed for governors to ratify it. Nevertheless, it is clear and concise indicating how further improvement can be achieved. A knowledgeable chair leads the school's governors well, so governors provide effective support and are beginning to steer the school strategically.

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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?	3	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	3	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?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	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	2	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	1	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?	3	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

Thank you for being so polite and helpful when Mrs Smith and I visited your school. We thought that your work is satisfactory and improving, especially your writing. We particularly enjoyed our chats with you at lunchtime and Mrs Smith found that the school councillors were very interesting and helpful. We were very pleased to hear so many of you say that you like your school. What we thought is best about your school: - it is getting better fast - your behaviour and attitudes to school are good and you co-operate exceptionally well with your teachers and other children to make it a happy place - your teachers work hard as a team to make sure that your school gets better - visits to places of interest, visitors and the school clubs that you attend help to enrich and strengthen your learning - your school is led well. What we have asked your headteacher, the staff and the school's governors to do next: - make sure that as many of your lessons as possible are as good as the best ones, so you make even faster progress - make sure that the good start you get in the Nursery continues in the reception class and onwards throughout the whole school - make sure that the new ways of checking how well you are getting on in your work are used as effectively as possible. We hope that you will always be proud of your school.