

St Helen's Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100623
Local Authority	Lambeth
Inspection number	285830
Inspection date	22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Kathryn Taylor

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	315
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Bernard Heaphy
Headteacher	Mr William O'Doherty
Date of previous school inspection	10 September 2001
School address	Knowle Close Brixton London SW9 0TQ
Telephone number	020 7274 4343
Fax number	020 7274 6588

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school with an ethnically diverse intake. The largest groups are Black African, Caribbean and pupils from Portugal, Madeira and South America. A very high proportion of pupils are from homes where English is believed not be the first language. The proportion identified as having learning difficulties and disabilities is below average. Pupil mobility is low. Socio economic circumstances are very mixed, but free school meals entitlement is above average. The school has gained the Quality Mark and Healthy Schools Status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Helen's is a good school with a very strong Christian, family atmosphere. Parents and carers are very happy with the school. They appreciate the way the staff work closely with them and take care of their children. As one parent commented, 'A big thank you to all staff for their tireless hard work. I would recommend the school to anyone! It's like home!'

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Staff ensure that pupils are very safe, happy and well cared for. Achievement is good. Although standards by the end of Year 2 remain well below average, pupils' progress speeds up as they move through the school and standards are well above average by the end of Year 6, especially those in mathematics. Teaching and learning are good. Staff have high expectations of pupils and share their expertise so as to improve pupils' learning.

Foundation Stage provision is satisfactory and improving with strengths in Nursery provision. This enables children to quickly settle into school and make good progress in their personal and social development. The curriculum in Years 1 to 6 is good, with strong emphasis on developing pupils' basic skills, and good provision for music and physical education. The school is developing the curriculum further, for example, to make it even more relevant and enjoyable, to strengthen links between subjects, and to ensure greater continuity between the Nursery and Reception curriculum.

Pupils' personal development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Pupils develop self-confidence, maturity and a clear understanding of right and wrong.

Leadership and management are good, providing the school with a good capacity to continue to improve. The headteacher and senior leaders have high expectations of themselves and others and the school's evaluation of its own performance is generally accurate. Senior leaders regularly monitor pupils' progress and teaching, and subject leaders have recently become more involved in this process. However, the way responsibilities are allocated means that few of the senior leaders or subject leaders evaluate provision, standards and progress across the whole school. This makes it more difficult to obtain a clear picture of pupils' progress from entry to Year 6, and determine precisely why standards at the end of Year 2 are not higher.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop a clearer picture of pupils' progress throughout the whole school so as to determine if standards at the end of Year 2 are high enough
- Strengthen the curriculum to further promote enjoyment, develop links between subjects and ensure continuity in Nursery and Reception provision.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school does not have a precise overview of any trends or strengths and weaknesses in children's attainments when they join the school, but indications are that overall attainment is below that usually found, especially children's skills in communication language and literacy. The school's evidence shows that the opening of the school Nursery in 2005 is helping to improve children's personal and social development by the time they join Reception. This has not yet had time to impact on improving standards at the end of Year 2, which have remained significantly below average since the last inspection. All pupils, including those from different

ethnic groups and pupils who learn English as an additional language, nevertheless make good progress during their time at the school. Their progress accelerates at Key Stage 2, where value added is consistently high and is in the top two per cent of schools nationally.

By the end of Year 6 English standards are generally above average. Science and mathematics standards are well above average and exceptionally high in some years. A large proportion of pupils attain the higher levels of attainment. Most pupils at least meet the challenging targets set for them, and the majority exceed them. Factors that contribute to pupils' rapid progress at Key Stage 2 are the smaller English and mathematics teaching groups, very strong teaching at the top of the school, and the use of computer programmes that enable pupils to work regularly on their weaknesses.

Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities make good progress. They often reach the expected level by the time they leave. This is because provision is well led, pupils' needs are identified quickly and they are well supported in class and through specialist teaching and help if appropriate.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' enjoyment of school is evidenced in their very high attendance rates and enthusiasm for learning. Behaviour has improved since the last inspection and is now good in most classes. Pupils are friendly and polite and keen to talk about their work, homework and learning. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Racial harmony is very good. Pupils benefit from learning about and celebrating the diverse range of cultural traditions among the school community. They understand how to stay safe and feel confident to approach an adult if they need help. Regular physical education, swimming lessons, healthy school meals and snacks, along with work towards healthy schools' status, means that pupils develop an outstanding understanding of how to stay fit and healthy. Pupils regularly participate in parish activities and contribute to charities. Older pupils help around the school and act as peer mediators. The recently established school council is providing opportunities for pupils to influence decisions.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. General strengths include good planning, subject knowledge and expectations of pupils. Most teachers manage their pupils well. Staff use information and communication technology (ICT) well, both to enhance lesson delivery and to provide opportunities for individualised learning. Questioning is often good, which challenges pupils to think and contribute their ideas. Teaching assistants contribute well to pupils' learning. Bilingual staff provide good support to those pupils whose knowledge of English is limited, but the school recognises that some support of this kind needs to be provided in the Nursery. Much of the teaching is at least good, and some is outstanding. Nevertheless the school works to address the weaknesses they have identified, for example in the pace of some lessons, the use of time and the provision of too few visual clues and prompts for learning. Assessment is used very well to check pupils' learning and to plan for the next steps. Marking is regular and informative in most, if not all, instances.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Since the Nursery opened 18 months ago, the staff have been working to develop a distinct Foundation Stage curriculum which ensures that work in Reception builds progressively on that in the Nursery. The curriculum in Years 1 to 6 meets requirements, caters well for pupils of different abilities and has a strong focus on developing the basic skills, religious education, physical education and music. Weaknesses in geography and ICT provision found at the last inspection have been addressed. Good use of visits and visitors and after school clubs promote pupils' enjoyment and extends their cultural development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils are extremely well cared for. As one parent said, 'I feel very comfortable dropping off my children at St Helen's because I know that they are in safe hands.' Very good induction and transfer arrangements help children in Nursery to settle quickly, and pupils in Year 6 to approach confidently the move to secondary school. Staff know pupils' individual needs very well, develop their self-esteem and treat them with great care and kindness. Pupils really appreciate the stickers and rewards they are given, which also encourage them to try hard and to aim high. The staff are quick to notice pupils who need extra support, and ensure they receive it. Very good links with health professionals and external agencies help support pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Pupils are very well supervised, and there are good procedures for checking staff and other risks. Academic guidance is very good, enabling pupils to become effective learners and ensuring that they are very well prepared for the academic demands of secondary school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher's dedicated leadership, with good support from other senior leaders, has helped to maintain the school's very positive ethos, strong teamwork, and high standards at the end of Year 6. Senior leaders have the confidence and respect of parents and the local community. The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and finances are well managed. Senior leaders use data well to set targets and to group pupils into ability sets. They do not, however, have a really clear overview of the strengths and weaknesses in children's attainment and progress throughout the school, that would help them to assess precisely the impact of developments to provision. Governors are supportive of the school and bring a range of expertise to it. In recent times they have become much more involved and proactive, particularly in monitoring provision and holding the school to account.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	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?	1

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

Thank you very much for making me welcome when I visited your school. I enjoyed talking with you. I think that your school is a good school.

These are the things that work very well in your school:

- Standards in English, mathematics and science are higher than in many schools and your achievement in these subjects is good.
- You are very friendly and polite, behave well and get on very well together. You really want to learn and do well, and therefore work hard.
- The staff take very good care of you and teach you well. They encourage you to try hard, and they tell you how you can improve your work.
- Good teaching helps you to reach good standards in English, mathematics and science. Good music and physical education lessons as well as chances to go out on trips help you to enjoy school, and to get fit and healthy.
- The headteacher and senior leaders lead the school well.

This is what I have asked the school to do next:

- To make further improvements to what you are taught by making work even more enjoyable, and making good links between work in Nursery and Reception
- To try to find out if standards at the end of Year 2 are as high as they might be

With very best wishes

Kathryn Taylor - Lead Inspector