

St Philomena's Roman Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101653
Local Authority	Bromley
Inspection number	286139
Inspection dates	6–7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Sheena MacDonald 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	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	212
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr P O'Halloran
Headteacher	Mrs M Riley
Date of previous school inspection	2 July 2001
School address	Chelsfield Road Orpington BR5 4DR
Telephone number	01689 826550
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Philomena's is similar in size to most primary schools. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is average. Just under a quarter of pupils come from minority ethnic communities and a small but increasing number are at the early stages of learning English. Average numbers of pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities. The school has achieved the Basic Skills Quality Mark and Investors in People award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Philomena's is a good school which successfully achieves its ambition, 'to reflect gospel values and educate the whole person, recognising the value and dignity of each person.' Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and one who represents the views of many said, 'Each child is valued and the safe, secure environment allows the children the opportunity to develop academically and personally.' Strong partnerships with parents underline the value placed by the school on the important contribution that parents make to all aspects of school life. This is a happy school where pupils behave well, develop good personal skills, feel safe and are well cared for.

The school places great importance on enabling all pupils to enjoy their education and as a result standards are above average and all pupils make good progress. Children arrive in Reception with skills which are similar to most children of their age in most areas and just below in literacy and mathematics. They settle quickly and make good progress across all areas of learning due to well planned activities and good teaching. Pupils continue to make good progress, particularly in Key Stage 1 and towards the end of Key Stage 2. By the time they leave standards are consistently above average, particularly in mathematics and science. The school knows each child well and carefully analyses assessment information to ensure that good provision is in place so that no child is left behind. Recent changes in the teaching of mathematics and writing are proving successful resulting in further improvements in standards seen in lessons.

Teaching and learning are good due to a majority of lessons where pupils enjoy learning and make good progress. Good team work between teachers and classroom assistants results in well focused additional support to ensure all pupils make good gains in learning. Strengths in teaching include clear learning goals, lively, practical lessons and very well matched activities which provide good challenge for all pupils to stretch themselves just that little bit extra and achieve just a little bit more each time. Good teaching is supported by a well planned curriculum which meets the needs of learners and sparks their interest and enjoyment in learning. Opportunities which enable pupils to show initiative and develop independence both in terms of their own learning and the direction of the school are well established in some areas. However there is scope for improvement as this is inconsistent across the school.

Leadership and management are good. There is a shared commitment across the leadership team, staff and governors to live up to the mission statement and strive for continuous improvement in all areas. The school has accurately identified those areas which could be even better however, the objectives in the improvement plan are not sharp enough for the school to accurately measure the impact of its actions on pupils' attainment. The school has successfully addressed the key areas for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection. In particular high standards have been maintained and there have been major improvements to the quality of the building and learning environment. This track record and the lack of complacency in the leadership team demonstrate good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the opportunities for pupils to develop independence and use their initiative
- Sharpen the targets in the school improvement plan so that the impact of actions on pupils' attainment can be more easily measured.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are above average and pupils make good progress. When children start school most are working at levels which are appropriate for their age in most areas and just below in literacy and mathematical development. They make good progress and develop positive attitudes to learning in the Reception class. By the end of their first year, most are working at levels which are just above those expected for their age in all areas of learning. Throughout Key Stage 1 pupils continue to make good progress and standards are above average by the time they move into Year 3. Progress slows at the beginning of Key Stage 2 but then speeds up again in the older age groups so that by the time they leave, pupils achieve above average standards, particularly in mathematics and science. Good assessment systems, careful tracking of progress, well focused support and effective intervention programmes ensure that all groups achieve well regardless of ability, gender or ethnicity. The school sets and generally meets challenging targets. Strategies employed to address areas identified for improvement such as raising the standards of a group of pupils who were making slow progress in mathematics have proved very effective. A whole school focus on raising standards still further in writing and mathematics are leading to high quality work in lessons and pupils' books.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

A strong emphasis on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development results in good outcomes in all aspects. Children settle quickly into the Reception class and develop good attitudes to learning and to each other. Pupils of all ages show kindness and respect for each other and usually get on well together regardless of age, gender or ethnicity. They show good understanding of different cultures and faiths. The school has sought and acted on pupils' suggestions as to how learning could be made more enjoyable by integrating opportunities for visits, cooking and creativity into the curriculum. As a result, pupils enjoy school, attendance is good, and exclusions exceptionally rare. Pupils feel safe in school and confident that when problems arise they will be dealt with promptly.

Pupils demonstrate an excellent understanding of how to stay healthy. They participate enthusiastically in many physical activities at playtimes, in lessons and in the many after school clubs. Many proudly wear their 'walk to school' badges and make sensible choices from the excellent healthy school lunches. The school council is proud of its contribution to promoting healthy lifestyles, such as improved school meals and playtime activities.

Pupils of all ages enthusiastically take on a wide range of responsibilities such as being school council members, playground friends and lunchtime helpers. There are good links with the local church, the local and wider communities and pupils are generous with their time and money in participating in many fundraising events. Pupils respond well to activities where they can develop independence and show initiative such as organising this year's Lent fundraising events. This sort of opportunity is not yet integrated into the normal activity of the school and therefore these skills are underdeveloped. High standards in key academic skills and good personal skills such as team working show that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

It is clear from the work in pupils' books and their response in lessons that teaching and learning are usually of good quality. Most teaching seen during the inspection was good with some that was excellent. In the Reception class, teachers and assistants use well planned activities and careful questioning to move the children's learning on, such as in a group session on using tally marks in preparation for a traffic count. Relationships are good, teachers manage their classes well and children are keen to learn. Most lessons are well planned, interesting and move along briskly with sometimes breathtaking pace, and there are high levels of pupil participation. This is particularly the case in mathematics lessons which demonstrates the positive impact of a whole school focus for improvement. Teachers skilfully match work to all abilities and aptitudes with good challenge for all pupils. Excellent support is provided by teaching assistants for those who find the work more difficult. When teaching is of this quality, pupils of all abilities are keen to rise to the challenge and in some cases do not want to stop even when it is the end of the lesson. The few lessons where the teaching and learning are less than good are characterised by slower pace, too much teacher talk, and few opportunities for pupils to get involved in problem solving and independent learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and meets the needs and interests of all learners well. It is well balanced across all subjects including modern foreign languages and specialist music provision. The curriculum for personal, social, health and emotional (PSHE) development is strong and contributes to the good personal development and well-being of pupils. Teaching staff in the Foundation Stage create an exciting environment where the areas of learning are successfully linked using themes such as 'Journeys' to enable children to learn in practical and meaningful ways. Across the whole school there are some good examples of links between subjects, such as in the Friendship Books which combine art, literacy and PSHE, or in a lesson when Year 4 pupils used ICT skills to develop their understanding in geography. There are many opportunities for pupils to work independently and show initiative in mathematics lessons but this is less evident in other subjects. The school has used pupils' views on what aspects of learning they enjoy most and as a result regular visits, visitors, theme days such as 'European Day' and cookery have been fully integrated into the curriculum. These, and focused events such as regular creativity afternoons increase enjoyment and accelerate learning. A good range of popular clubs, especially the sports clubs, provide many opportunities for pupils to develop their talents and celebrate achievements.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school ethos is one of care and inclusion and this is underpinned by effective policies, whole staff training and well designed systems for ensuring the care, safety and health of pupils. Parents are confident that their children are very well cared for, happy in school and make good progress. The partnership between school and home is strong and the school makes good use of outside agencies to provide specialist support. A well targeted range of additional support for physical, emotional and learning needs is in place so that all needs are catered for

and all pupils are fully included. Systems for monitoring and supporting pupils with additional learning needs are thorough and well managed and ensure that these pupils make good progress. Teaching assistants play an important part in this process and provide well focused support.

Marking of pupils work is thorough and there are some very good examples of marking which helps the pupils know how to improve their work. Some teachers successfully involve pupils in evaluating and assessing their own learning particularly through the use of writing targets. Overall these developments are at an early stage and practice across the school is inconsistent.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and senior leadership team know the school very well and have a clear vision of good primary education. Their good leadership and management has resulted in a harmonious climate within which pupils achieve well socially and academically. The school is at the centre of its community and has established very valuable partnerships with parents, the church, and the local and wider community, including international links. There is a very strong focus on ensuring that these partnerships are cultivated for the benefit of the pupils and as a result they have a positive impact on achievement. For example, a link with Dulwich gallery provides a good on-going art link to many aspects of the curriculum.

School leaders at all levels work well together and the introduction of curriculum teams is resulting in significant improvements as responsibility for the development of different subjects is shared across the school. They use a range of strategies including demonstration, observation, work scrutiny, feedback and provide good quality support for each other and their colleagues. Improvements stemming from this work are evident in the high quality mathematics lessons and above average attainment of pupils. Pupils' individual achievements and needs are regularly assessed and intervention programmes or changes in teaching strategies carefully trialled and their impact evaluated.

The school has a clear understanding of its own strengths and areas for development. The improvement plan is well focused on the achievement of pupils, however, it is not always clear how the success of actions will be measured or evaluated. Governors are enthusiastic, fulfil their duties well, and provide good support. Their visits to school and detailed information provided by the headteacher help them to know the school well. Their involvement in the school's evaluation and improvement process is underdeveloped and is an aspect identified by the school for further improvement.

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?	2
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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
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	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

19 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Philomena's Roman Catholic Primary School, Orpington, BR5 4DR

As you know two inspectors visited your school recently to find out how well you are doing. We really enjoyed our time at your school, particularly spending time in lessons and having the chance to talk to so many of you. You and your parents told us that St Philomena's is a good school and we agree. Here are some of the main things we liked about your school.

- Your school tries hard to make learning enjoyable so that you achieve above average standards and make good progress.
- You really know how to stay fit and healthy. I was exhausted just watching you at playtime!
- You are kind towards each other and behave well in and out of lessons.
- Your teachers and assistants plan lively, interesting lessons which help you to do your best. We thought some of your mathematics lessons were really exciting.
- Your teachers plan lots of interesting activities. They asked you what helps you enjoy learning and they are using your replies to make the curriculum even better.
- Your headteacher and the other school leaders are doing a good job. They want the very best for you and are determined that you will all enjoy school and become successful well rounded individuals.

Because I know that Mrs Riley and the other school leaders want the school to be even better, here are two things we've asked them to do.

- Give you more opportunities to use your initiative and develop independent learning skills.
- Make the targets in the school's improvement plan easier to measure and make sure the systems for checking on improvements are clear. Then the school will have a better idea of how well different activities are working and making a difference to your achievement.

Thank you for making our visit to your school so enjoyable. Keep up the good work!

Yours faithfully,

Sheena MacDonald HMI