



St John The Baptist RC School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114540
Local Authority Brighton and Hove
Inspection number 289958
Inspection date 17 January 2007
Reporting inspector Helen Hutchings

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Whitehawk Hill Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Brighton
Age range of pupils	4-11		BN2 0AH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01273 607924
Number on roll (school)	210	Fax number	01273 603450
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	David Muscato
		Headteacher	Maria Rimmer
Date of previous school inspection	22 April 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is an average-sized primary school for pupils within the parish, although only a proportion of families using the school actively practise the Catholic faith. Most children are from White British backgrounds but about a tenth of pupils are from Asian backgrounds and an increasing number from Eastern Europe join the school at an early stage of speaking English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is in line with most schools. The school is part of a neighbourhood renewal scheme and offers before and after school care. At the time of the inspection the school had an interim headteacher and acting deputy headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school and its provision of education, care and extended services meets the needs of the pupils well. The school successfully places a strong emphasis on its Catholic and family ethos and the importance of developing individual talent. Parents are very supportive of the school. One comment reflects the views of many: 'The school is such a lovely place. The staff are good at making the children's time in school fun, engaging and challenging.' The school has a good record of taking account of parents' views. For example, many parents are appreciative of the school's before- and after-school provision and there is now consideration of how this can be extended further in response to parental requests. However, some parents also expressed their concerns that a substantive headteacher had not yet been appointed and were worried that the school might lose its focus. This was not found to be the case. Leadership and management are good and the school is developing effectively. Staff and governors have a good awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are actively working on areas to bring about further improvements. Children develop very positive attitudes from the time they join the Reception class and the good provision in that class gives children a strong foundation for their future learning. Effective teaching and a good curriculum engage pupils well throughout the school so that they work hard and learn well. They make good progress from a below average starting level to reach standards that are just above expected levels by the end of Year 6. Achievement between Years 2 and 6 has been above national averages for many years and all groups of pupils make similar rates of progress. The school recognised that its system for tracking pupils' progress was not strong enough and has introduced a new system this year to make more frequent assessments of pupils' attainment, in order to target support more quickly for any pupil falling behind. It is rightly the school's key priority for development.

The school is rightly proud of its calm working atmosphere and the excellent relationships between all groups in its community. As a parent wrote, 'We feel that the school is very caring and shows that it values every child and parent as an individual.' Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils understand how to live healthy lives and the importance of taking exercise. The school council has effectively led an initiative to change the snacks sold in the school to fruit only. Their management of the tuck shop and organising charity events are some of the good ways in which they develop their economic awareness.

What the school should do to improve further

- Embed the developments in tracking pupils' progress to make sure that help is provided quickly for any pupil falling behind.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children enter the school in the Reception class with a broad range of experiences but generally lower levels of skills than normally found in children of their age, particularly in their language and personal and social development. The good start they receive means that they develop the confidence and basis for more formal learning in Year 1, although their overall levels across the areas of learning are still below those expected for their age. Pupils build well on this foundation through the school and develop a momentum in their learning, so that by the time they reach Year 6, standards in the national tests are slightly above average. This represents above average achievement for pupils between Years 2 and 6 and the school has successfully met or exceeded the targets set for pupils' performance. Standards at the end of Year 2 have been variable, partly because changes in staffing have led to some lack of continuity in their learning. The school recognises that results in the Year 2 tests could be better and has introduced a number of strategies, such as using national catch-up learning programmes for small groups of pupils not making the expected rate of progress, to improve pupils' attainment. These are proving successful and the school has already shown its capacity to bring about improvements when it identifies a need. Last year a focus on improving writing was particularly successful in increasing the proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels in both Years 2 and 6.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school's very positive and happy environment has an impact on ensuring pupils' good personal development and well-being. This was reflected in pupils' good behaviour and approach to a wet playtime during the inspection. They played very happily with good quality games and on computers, some enjoying computer games while some others chose to use educational programs and shared these with adults. There is an atmosphere of genuine enjoyment of one another's company. Pupils know how to stay safe and enjoy helping others, for example by acting as 'buddies' for younger pupils. They know that there is an adult to talk to if there are any problems and say that when there are occasional incidents of bullying, they are dealt with well by the school. The school recognises that pupils could still develop more confidence to take initiative and has recently increased the responsibilities given to the school council as one of its strategies to achieve this. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have a good understanding of those less fortunate than themselves and show their growing awareness of the needs of their school and the wider community in their participation in the gardening project with local residents or in raising funds for earthquake victims.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils' enjoyment of learning is evident in the calm and purposeful atmosphere in classrooms. Pupils recognise that learning has its serious side but say that teachers try hard to make it fun. As one parent wrote, 'My children often talk about the interesting lessons – sometimes I think I would like to be there!' Teachers' planning has clear learning intentions and this is shared well with pupils, who respond by concentrating on their tasks and behaving very well. The recent investment in computers and interactive whiteboards is being used well to make lessons interesting and relevant. Teachers make good use of small group work to focus learning well to meet pupils' differing ability levels. Teaching assistants work very closely with teachers to guide pupils' learning effectively. Marking is regular and highlights pupils' achievements for them. It also identifies where work could be better but it is not always clear how pupils respond to this guidance or if they have mastered skills highlighted for improvement in later work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and balanced and has a positive impact on pupils' learning. The school has a growing awareness of how to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects and is using the good practice in some classes to strengthen this approach in others, although this is still at a relatively early stage of development. Good links with other schools widen opportunities further, such as links with other primary schools to introduce French and with a local secondary school to support and improve writing for boys. Pupils' enjoyment is also encouraged by visitors to the school and these visits broaden pupils' understanding of the topics being studied. Pupils are so keen to participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities that some clubs are unable to accommodate all who want to take part at any one time and some pupils have to wait for a term for a particular activity. These activities impact positively on pupils' personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school successfully meets one of its key aims: 'to ensure that its provision is safe, warm and caring but also challenging and encouraging all children to fulfil their potential'. Pupils are safe and parents are confident that their children are well cared for. The school's safety procedures meet national requirements. Pupils know that there is always an adult on hand to help if they need it. The success of the school's extended care is another example of how it helps pupils to feel secure so that they can enjoy and concentrate on learning.

The school works well with a wide range of external agencies to provide additional support where this is needed. For example, pupils who are at an early stage of speaking English are given the help they need to make the same rate of progress in their academic studies as other pupils. Individual families have been given support to improve their children's attendance, which is now in line with national averages and a significant improvement since the last inspection. New systems were introduced at the beginning of this academic year to monitor pupils' progress more closely. Although pupils have made good progress for a number of years, there have been occasions in the past where this has not been even from year to year. More regular monitoring of pupils' standards is intended to ensure that any pupils not making the intended rates of progress will be given more support and guidance at an early stage.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The strength of the school's leadership and management is shown in its success in ensuring good levels of achievement for pupils over a number of years and in its capacity to sustain its effectiveness during a period of significant staffing changes. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities well. The interim arrangements it has put in place while a substantive headteacher is appointed have been effective in maintaining standards, providing stability and securing the ongoing development of the school. Discussions with staff showed that they are committed to improving provision further and that they have a very good understanding of how this can be achieved. Staff morale has remained high during an extended period of significant change in senior leadership because middle managers are being given the support they need to develop the skills and understanding to fulfil their roles, although they recognise that the pace of change could be faster. This has resulted in an accurate self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses, a focused plan for ongoing development and a strong capacity for further improvement.

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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?	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	3
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	3
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.

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

I really enjoyed visiting your school and looking at some of the things you do in lessons and at playtime. I would have liked to have had more time to talk with even more children. The school council really helped me to hear your views of the school. I promised them that I would let you know what I found out about the school.

- You attend a good school and I am glad that you recognise this.
- You enjoy school because lessons are interesting and sometimes fun.
- You say that you particularly enjoy the new computers and interactive whiteboards.
- You work hard so that you make good progress in your work.
- Your good behaviour and care for each other means that lessons and playtimes are happy and enjoyable.
- You are safe in school and there is always someone to talk to if you have a problem.
- You have a lot of interesting things to do outside lessons and many of you attend clubs, even if you have to wait a term to join the one that interests you most.

You told me that you liked the school as it is and did not want much to change. I can see why the school has planned some things for the future to help you make even better progress, such as assessing the level of your work more often to see how well you are doing. Anyone beginning to fall behind can then be given more help and you can help too by making sure that you ask when there is something you do not understand. Your teachers will also be finding more ways for you to practise your writing and numeracy in other subjects.

Best wishes for the future.