

Our Lady Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117464
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	290846
Inspection dates	26–27 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Paul Cosway

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	231
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Marcel Mester
Headteacher	Mrs Julie Ann Connolly
Date of previous school inspection	12 November 2001
School address	Woodhall Lane Welwyn Garden City Hertfordshire AL7 3TF
Telephone number	01707324408
Fax number	01707391005

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Our Lady Roman Catholic Primary School is of average size. The school population represents a wide mix of social backgrounds, but there are areas of deprivation in the locality and attainment on entry is below average overall. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. There is a higher proportion of pupils than nationally whose first language is not English, but there are no pupils at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with statements, is close to the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school judges itself to be satisfactory and improving, and the inspection confirms this. Almost all parents are pleased with the quality of education provided. One commented, 'It promotes Christian values and provides a safe and happy learning environment, enabling all children to succeed'.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They behave well and have positive attitudes to school. They feel they are valued as individuals and that, when they have problems, they will receive the help they need to overcome them. Good provision for their care, welfare, health and safety ensures that pupils fully understand how to lead healthy lives and feel safe in school. This is appreciated by parents. One wrote, 'We are delighted with the care and social development provided for our daughter. She has not just joined a school: the family has joined a very welcoming community.' Consequently, links with parents are good and help them to help their children to learn. Pupils are prepared satisfactorily for their future lives and contribute well to the school as a community. The school council is effective and all pupils learn to accept responsibility and to care for each other. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall within the Christian ethos of this school, but not enough is done to celebrate the multi-cultural nature of the school community or to prepare pupils for life in a culturally diverse society.

The attainment of most children is below that normally expected when they enter the Reception class. They make satisfactory progress but at the end of Year 6 standards, though close to national expectations, remain below average overall. In 2006, standards fell in the national tests for Year 6 pupils, and results were significantly below average. This year group made inadequate progress from Year 2 to the end of Year 6 because it had suffered disruptions to its teaching and a significant number of pupils had behavioural difficulties. However, staffing is now more stable and as a result of this and other measures to improve pupils' progress, there is an improved ethos throughout the school and teaching and learning are getting better.

The curriculum is satisfactory, as is the range of clubs and educational visits. However, the amount of teaching time for the older pupils only just reaches the minimum recommended and it is not planned well. Relatively little time is given to academic subjects and this is restricting pupils' progress. Teaching is satisfactory. Teachers manage classes well and plan interesting lessons, but pupils do not always get enough advice on how to improve their work. The school measures pupils' academic progress termly. Detailed tracking began this academic year and teachers are becoming more accountable for the progress that their pupils make. These procedures have already had a positive effect and pupils' achievement has risen. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school is improving because senior staff and governors monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school satisfactorily and have targeted the right areas for development. The school gives satisfactory value for money and demonstrates the capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards by restructuring the curriculum to increase the amount of time for academic subjects.
- Raise achievement by ensuring all teachers use assessment and marking to make it clear to pupils how they can improve their work.

- Improve pupils understanding of living in a multi-cultural Britain by introducing topics that better reflect the multi-ethnic nature of the school population.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities and the gifted and talented, achieve satisfactorily. Standards reached in the national tests have varied both at the end of Year 2 and Year 6, reflecting the numbers of pupils in each year group with learning difficulties. For example, standards fell to well below average in 2006, because a significant number in Year 6 had emotional and behavioural difficulties, which affected their own and others' progress. Since then, the school's systems for tracking pupils' progress and supporting those who need additional help have been strengthened and as a result, pupils' progress has improved.

From below average starting points, children make satisfactory progress during the Reception Year in all areas of learning. However, few children reach the early learning goals and as a result start in Year 1 with below average skills and knowledge. Consequently, although pupils make satisfactory progress in developing their numeracy and literacy skills, standards in Year 2 remain below average overall. In Year 6 standards are close to, but below average overall. Nevertheless, most attain the standards expected for their age in English, mathematics and science and around a quarter are working at an above-average level.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are responsible and enthusiastic learners. They settle into school well and quickly make new friends. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory, but a few pupils are persistently late despite the best efforts of the school. Pupils are generally courteous and polite, give of their best and take pride in their achievements. They enjoy school and are particularly enthusiastic about visits they make and clubs they join. They feel safe and confident that staff will help them if they feel upset or worried.

Pupils grow in self-awareness and reflect upon their feelings and actions. As a result they have a clear understanding of right and wrong. Pupils have good knowledge of how to live healthy lifestyles. They develop a good understanding of personal safety and learn to look after one another well. Through the School Council and the 'buddy' system, they enjoy taking responsibility and contribute well to the school community, offering ideas to help improve the school and its environment. Pupils are building a satisfactory foundation for later life by learning the skills they need and how to work together in a community. However, the curriculum does not include enough topics that give pupils an appreciation of the richness and diversity of modern society.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, though teaching varies from satisfactory to good across the school. In all lessons, teachers set a range of tasks to take account of the needs of different groups. Effective extra support for those who need it is given by the teaching assistants. However the overall pace of some lessons can be slow. This is because the length of time taken to explain the work at the start of the lesson is sometimes too long. In these cases, progress is

satisfactory rather than good, particularly for the more able. Where pupils are moved into different class groups for literacy and numeracy, the more able pupils make good progress because they are effectively challenged and expected to work quickly.

The management of pupils is good and relationships are often very good. All classrooms have a good learning ethos, with pupils concentrating and listening to the ideas of others. Improved assessment procedures are giving teachers a better understanding of what pupils should be able to achieve but their marking of pupils' work does not concentrate enough on the steps that pupils need to make in order to progress to the next level.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum, including provision for developing pupils' basic skills, is satisfactory overall. Provision in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory, offering a wide range of relevant and interesting learning opportunities that stimulate pupils' imagination. However, in Years 3 to 6 the balance of the curriculum is weighted too much away from academic subjects, especially for the older classes. On some days, after an hour of literacy and numeracy, pupils have a diet of less demanding subjects such as hymn practice, 'golden time', 'circle time' and story for the rest of the day. This has a negative effect on pupils' academic progress because opportunities to reinforce and extend key skills are lost. Overall enrichment of the curriculum, through visits and visitors, is satisfactory and the residential visits offer stimulating opportunities for personal challenge. The provision for personal, social and health education has a good impact on pupils' personal development and themes such as 'World book Day' further stimulate interest and enthusiasm.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff know their pupils well. Good support and thorough induction systems ensure pupils settle quickly when they join. Older pupils are prepared well for their move to secondary school, so they look forward to it positively and confidently. Procedures to protect pupils and care for the vulnerable are good and fully meet current requirements. Pupils know what to do if they are worried and are confident staff will resolve issues. Parents agree that their children receive the support, guidance and care they need. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is good and allows them to make the same progress as others, because individual needs are accurately identified and well matched activities provided. Pupils for whom English is an additional language are equally well supported.

Procedures for monitoring academic progress have improved and are now good. The whole-school focus on setting challenging but achievable targets that are shared with parents and pupils is already leading to better progress and achievement. However, these procedures have not been in place for long enough to impact fully on overall standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has had to deal with a number of challenging staffing issues as well as a significant budget deficit. The fact that these problems have been successfully overcome shows that the school has the capacity to improve and is now

ready to move forward. As a result of the school's satisfactory monitoring and analysis of data, the reasons for the fall in the performance in 2006 are fully understood and achievement has improved this year. There has been an effective focus on tracking pupils' progress and setting clearer expectations for teachers. All staff now understand what their pupils are capable of and where they must be by the end of the year.

The governing body's support and monitoring of the school are satisfactory. The co-ordinators in English, mathematics and science have a clear understanding of how to take their subjects forward and provide effective leadership. Parents value the leadership of the headteacher and both they and the pupils recognise that their opinions are taken account of in the running of the school.

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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

28 March 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Our Lady RC Primary School, Woodhall Lane, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL7 3TF

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful to us when we visited your school. You all told us that you like your school. We liked it too. It gives a satisfactory education and there are some good things about it. For example, we were impressed with how helpful and kind you are to each other, so that the school feels like one large family. We enjoyed the lessons that we shared with you and saw how well you work, especially when the tasks are interesting and enjoyable. These are some of the good things about your school:

- your behaviour is usually good
- you work hard
- teachers make lessons enjoyable
- teachers, teaching assistants and all adults care for you well
- you are helped to be healthy and safe.

We have asked your school to try to make things even better. The most important things are that:

- more time is given in the school day for older children to work on their numeracy and literacy skills
- there are more opportunities for you to learn about other cultures
- when teachers mark your books, they make clear the things you need to do to improve your work.

Keep working hard and make the most of your time at school.

Paul Cosway

Lead Inspector