

St Cuthbert Mayne Roman Catholic Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117468
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	290847
Inspection date	24 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Robert Drew

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	240
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jane Gonzalez
Headteacher	Mrs Bernadette Quinn
Date of previous school inspection	3 March 2003
School address	Clover Way Gadebridge Hemel Hempstead Hertfordshire HP1 3EA
Telephone number	01442 253347
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school. It is on the northern edge of Hemel Hempstead but serves a much wider area. Pupils' attainment on entry is significantly above average. Their social and economic backgrounds vary but, on balance, are advantaged. Far fewer pupils than average are entitled to free school meals. About three quarters of all pupils are from White British backgrounds, while ten minority ethnic groups together comprise the other quarter. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is below average and very few pupils have statements of special educational needs.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Its pupils make excellent progress and achieve very high standards. Personal development is also highly successful. Pupils are mature and socially aware beyond their years.

This success stems from first rate leadership and management. The headteacher and her deputy provide excellent direction for the school. In particular, they set exceptionally high expectations for pupils' academic work and their personal progress. Crucially they have gained the wholehearted support of colleagues and the vast majority of parents and pupils. This is evident in the strong sense of teamwork among staff, the commitment to continuous improvement of teaching and the high level of care, guidance and support for pupils. In response, pupils demonstrate extremely positive attitudes and excellent behaviour, showing real enjoyment of school. Links with parents are unusually strong, as seen in the remarkably high return of parental questionnaires associated with this inspection.

Attainment on entry to the school is well above average and excellent teaching and learning meet the challenge of further improving attainment. Teachers establish very positive relationships, set clear and highly challenging objectives in each lesson and cater well for the range of needs in each class. In some lessons the pace of learning is remarkably high, partly because teachers show great skill in questioning pupils and also because they keep pupils actively involved throughout the lesson. In others, even though the teaching is still good, the pace is slower. Supporting excellent day-to-day teaching are very effective tracking systems that are used to set medium and long-term goals for pupils and year groups and monitor their progress. All staff use this data well so that it has a strongly beneficial effect in helping to identify problems and direct efforts to ensure targets are met or exceeded. Consequently, standards have risen over a long period and now exceed national averages by a very wide margin at the end of Key Stage 2. Standards in English have been exceptionally high for several years, particularly in writing. This reflects a sustained phase of very effective subject leadership and prominence in the curriculum. Mathematics standards, and more recently those in science, have risen to similar levels because the school has concentrated on developing these subjects. The work of Year 6 pupils indicates that their achievement since entering the school has been excellent. It is a credit to the school that pupils of all abilities and backgrounds make equally impressive progress.

The attention directed towards pupils' personal needs is of a high quality. This promotes the behaviour and attitudes that make pupils such good learners and leads to outstanding overall personal development. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. They are reflective and appreciate the value of religious belief and different cultures. They are highly aware of the importance of personal safety and healthy lifestyles. They make an excellent contribution to school life and the wider community. Pupils help each other, for instance through the very active school council or by offering music lessons to younger pupils. Many support campaigns to protect the environment and petition the Prime Minister for help. Others visit the elderly with gifts at harvest festival. The school's extra-curricular activities provide excellent opportunities for pupils to extend their personal skills and gain new experiences. The formal curriculum is excellent, though there is scope for even stronger transition arrangements.

The governing body oversees the school's work extremely effectively, giving strong, well informed support and strategic advice to staff. The school provides excellent value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Establish excellent curricular links with the secondary school to which most pupils transfer.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The school's standards show a long-standing upward trend. For several years standards in English, and sometimes mathematics, have been exceptionally high. Standards in science have now reached similar levels. Current Year 6 work represents excellent achievement from an already high starting point in Year 3. All groups of pupils make excellent progress. This success is a result of excellent teaching and pupils' high levels of active participation in learning. In writing, where standards are particularly high, boys are much more successful than is the case nationally. Pupils enter competitions, displays of pupils' work are very prominent and visits by popular male and female authors give the subject further prominence. Good analysis of assessment data has guided recent successful moves to raise standards in science to equally high levels. Tracking in all subjects is highly successful in picking up individual or group needs early and putting suitable support in place swiftly. Staff use data frequently and purposefully.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The school's aims focus on the all-round development of pupils and success in this respect is outstanding. Pupils show an excellent awareness of the importance of self belief, values that make sense of their world and the capacity to reflect. For many this extends to linking Christian values with their lifestyle and commitment to the needs of others. Behaviour, attitudes and attendance rates are excellent. Cultural development is very good. Pupils' outstanding personal development clearly shows in their understanding of how to stay safe, eat healthily and build the skills for later economic awareness. The maturity of pupils is best seen in their high enjoyment of lessons and the keenness with which they take up the opportunities to serve others. Many do this through the very effective school council. Others make a good contribution to school productions, charitable giving or the distribution of harvest gifts to the elderly. The school has particularly well developed links with environmental groups and campaigns to protect Antarctica and the Amazon region of Ecuador. Pupils' contributions to such work are extremely perceptive and persuasive.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning lead to excellent long-term progress by pupils. This is because staff have an intense commitment to their pupils and match this with a desire to constantly improve their professional skills. Teachers benefit from extensive observation of one another's good practice. They extend their strategies and approaches from their observations both within the school and on visits to other schools. Time is set aside for staff training. This helps to bring all staff up to date and promotes a consistent approach to teaching and learning. A significant proportion of teachers regularly teach outstanding lessons and the quality is rarely less than good. While all lessons are underpinned by wide expertise and thorough planning, the distinctive features

of the outstanding lessons are the infectious enthusiasm of staff, the high levels of participation by pupils and the great enjoyment shown by both.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The formal curriculum is excellent. It meets the wide range of pupils' needs very effectively and contributes extremely well to their academic and personal progress. There is much stronger provision than average in the core subjects and in music, sport and French. Extensive contributions are made by staff and students from the secondary school to which most pupils transfer, though subject content links with this school are less well developed than they might be. Additional support groups supplement mainstream provision for pupils needing to catch up and special provision is made for able mathematicians. Extra-curricular sport, music and visits are exceptional in quality and are enjoyed by a great number of pupils. Nearly 80% of pupils are involved in some sporting activity.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Staff know their pupils very well and share a strong commitment to their well-being. The excellent quality of care, guidance and support stems partly from this but also acquires strength from being highly systematic and efficient. Pupils' needs are very closely monitored. Their strengths are regularly acknowledged by praise in class and by having their work displayed. They are entrusted with important tasks, for instance collecting and analysing all the data on the 'Walking to School' project. Staff demonstrate the values and consistency needed to guide behaviour. Specific groups, especially pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, receive appropriate care and support. Academic progress is monitored and guided by excellent tracking arrangements, which identify needs quickly and accurately and always lead to action by the school. Pupils know what to aim for and how to achieve it.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The impact they have on standards, achievement and personal development is most impressive. Direction and organisation is good at every level, with governors showing an excellent knowledge of their school and subject coordinators leading their subjects most effectively. The headteacher, working closely with her deputy, sets the tone for the school. Nothing but the best is accepted, whether it is pupils' well-being or the promotion of their academic progress. At every level the school blends strong personal care and enthusiasm with the professional skills and management systems needed to help pupils enjoy school and do well. The effectiveness of the teaching, the curriculum and the care, guidance and support are monitored extremely thoroughly. The school acts on this evidence and is rigorous in ensuring changes happen wherever they are needed. Very good improvement has been made since the last inspection and the much strengthened senior leadership team has an excellent capacity to continue this momentum.

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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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

25 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Cuthbert Mayne RC School, Hemel Hempstead, HP1 3EA

Thank you for your welcome during last week's inspection. I am especially grateful to those of you who gave up time to come and speak with me.

You are fortunate to be in an outstanding school. Much is very good or excellent and there are no significant weaknesses. These are the main strengths.

- You make excellent progress and reach very high standards.
- Teaching is outstanding.
- The school provides you with exceptionally good care, guidance and support.
- You have very many opportunities to help others in the school and in the community.
- The way the headteacher and senior staff lead and organise the school is excellent.
- Your behaviour and attitudes are extremely positive.

It is still possible for the school to be even better. To do this, I have asked the school to focus on:

- Making even better links between the work you do in Year 6 and the courses you will follow at secondary school.

Best wishes for your remaining time at St Cuthbert's.

Yours sincerely

Robert Drew (Lead inspector)