



Saint Vincent de Paul Roman Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Better
education
and care

Unique Reference Number 117498
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290857
Inspection date 22 February 2007
Reporting inspector Roger Brown

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Bedwell Crescent
School category	Voluntary aided		Stevenage
Age range of pupils	3-11		Hertfordshire SG1 1NJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01438 729555
Number on roll (school)	465	Fax number	01438 351121
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Teresa Scott
		Headteacher	Mrs Diann Ross
Date of previous school inspection	10 March 2003		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This large school serves communities from across the locality of Stevenage. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, a significant proportion, around a third, come from a diverse range of backgrounds. The nature of the school is changing as more pupils enter or leave the school at times other than the normal starting and leaving points. Only 20% of the current Year 6 started in Foundation Stage. Almost 27% of the pupils do not speak English as their mother tongue. The proportion of pupils eligible for a free school meal is below the national average. The proportion with learning difficulties or disabilities is also below the national average. Attainment on entry to the school, although varying considerably, is broadly average. The school has been awarded Investor in People status, the Basic Skills Quality Mark, a Healthy School Award and an ECO School Silver Award.

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 with outstanding features. The overwhelming majority of parents are wholly positive about the school. 'It is a beacon of light' wrote one. This school has grown and changed over recent years. A significant proportion of the pupils now come from overseas and some only stay at the school for a relatively short time. Pupils recognise this change, but they are proud of the cultural diversity it is bringing. As a Year 6 pupil explained, 'It is good that we are now a multicultural school, we learn so much from each other. At this school we learn to be tolerant, - but not of racism.'

Children begin in the Foundation Stage with broadly average attainment. They settle quickly into school routines and make steady progress thanks to the good quality teaching they receive. Pupils in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 make good progress, ensuring that the standards achieved by the time they leave school are usually above those expected, and often well above in English. Although the majority of pupils make better than expected progress, in 2006 the end of Key Stage 2 results were below the national average in mathematics and science. This arose for a variety of reasons beyond the school's control. These included staff illness and a changing and challenging group of pupils. Standards in the current Year 6 are good once again. Teachers' assessment of pupils' work is rigorous and the results are effectively monitored. However, the comments in pupils' books and the guidance they are given does not always ensure that they fully understand what they need to do to improve.

The leadership of the school has been particularly successful at nurturing and developing staff. Several of the teachers started work at the school as support staff but with the school's encouragement, have qualified as teachers. This has helped to ensure that the high expectations and high standards at the school have been maintained. At the same time the links with training agencies has fostered the development of innovative teaching practice across the school. There is still some inconsistency in the implementation of the developments, but teaching and learning are at least good and at times outstanding. The curriculum is good, links between subjects are developing well and there is good provision of extra-curricular activities.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. The high standards of behaviour, good manners, and enjoyment of learning personified in the thoughtful, caring attitudes and actions of the pupils all reflect the positive and demanding standards set by the leadership. Leadership and management are outstanding but have yet to have full impact on pupil's achievement and the quality of teaching and learning. The headteacher, deputy, governors and teachers with leadership roles are all focused on delivering a high quality, caring and compassionate education to the children in their care. This is a successful school which gives good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of advice and guidance to pupils to ensure that they have a better understanding of how they can develop their learning.

- Ensure the quality of teaching consistently matches that of the best by continuing to develop the training and mentoring roles of senior staff.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The children's skills, knowledge and understanding at the end of the Foundation Stage are good with most children achieving beyond the goals for learning. By the end of Year 6 teachers' assessments in reading, writing and mathematics show that the standards are above average. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities, achieve well throughout their time at the school so that by the time they leave at the end of Year 6, standards in the national tests for English, mathematics and science are usually above those found nationally, and in English almost always well above. Most pupils, whatever their background or starting points meet the challenging targets they are set.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils are proud of their school. From the time that pupils start school to the end of Year 6, their behaviour is excellent and they are enthusiastic about learning. Their enjoyment of school contributes significantly to their achievement. The heart of the school's work is its commitment to developing responsible citizens with respect for others. The Catholic ethos is apparent in all aspects of the learning. Consequently pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. They consistently demonstrate qualities which include care and concern for others, as well as cooperation and teamwork. Pupils relish taking on responsibilities, and when they do so, this clearly helps them to build the skills they will need when they are adults. For instance, the school council is determined that the school will, through their leadership and actions, achieve the ultimate Green Flag ECO award this year. Pupils like the emphasis on sport, and act excellently on their understanding of the need to eat healthily and keep fit. Attendance and punctuality are good, but a few families from abroad make extended visits to their homeland. The school's procedures for dealing with absence are good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The school has successful partnerships with a number of teacher training institutions; this has had two significant consequences for the school. Firstly, the school has been involved in the training of several of the teachers it has recruited, so they understand and uphold the high expectations that school sets for teachers and learners. Secondly, all teachers have thoughtfully adopted new approaches and techniques learned from the partnerships. Many of these are very successful, but there is still some inconsistency

in the application of the ideas across the school. Lesson planning is consistent and thorough, classroom management skills are excellent and the pace of lessons very effective as is the teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is developing well. A wide range of stimulating learning activities for children in the Foundation Stage provides a good start to their education. A successful partnership with a secondary school has brought much improved opportunities for pupils to experience a range of sports, games and physical activities. The school has extended its range of enrichment activities and pupils benefit from taking part in extra-curricular clubs and a good range of educational visits including an annual residential trip for Year 6. This broadens their experiences and makes a significant contribution to their personal and social development. A group of older pupils have started to produce their own newspaper, and this has helped them to recognise that working on this cross-curricular project has significantly improved their motivation, skills and teamwork. They would welcome more opportunities to pursue such creative learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of pastoral care and support is good because there is a strong emphasis on nurturing and developing each individual pupil. Pupils feel safe and secure in school and have confidence that adults will help them should problems arise. Teachers and classroom assistants know the pupils and many of their families well and make the school a secure and inviting place in which to learn. Arrangements to ensure pupils' safety and well-being are securely in place and understood by all staff. Pupils of all abilities including those who speak English as an additional language are well supported and encouraged academically. Pupils are set challenging targets, but as some of the older pupils recognise, they need more detailed explanations of just what it is they need to do to improve their work. The school works closely with parents and outside support agencies to ensure that pupils who need extra help receive the necessary support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership's successful emphasis on running a fully inclusive school is one element giving rise to the school's high local standing. A second factor is the constant drive for high standards. A third constituent is the importance that is attached to recruiting staff and developing their potential. The leadership team makes excellent use of the school improvement process to evaluate and assess what works well and what needs to be improved. This allows the headteacher and the governors to have a clear and accurate picture of the school's development and its effectiveness. The extremely

effective governors' team not only support and promote the school, but also act as a thoughtful critical friend overseeing the developments and checking progress. Financial management is strong; the school seeks to ensure that it always secures best value for money. There have been significant changes and improvements at the school since the last inspection, and with more initiatives planned, the school clearly has an excellent capacity to continue to grow and develop.

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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	1
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
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	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?	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	2
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

22 February 2007

Dear children,

Saint Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School, Bedwell Crescent, Stevenage SG1 1NJ

Thank you for your warm welcome when I visited your school. It was a real pleasure to be with you. I enjoyed watching your classes and activities, and I really enjoyed talking to you about your work.

I thought that the things that were good about your school were:

- your good manners, and thoughtful and caring attitudes
- the impressive way in which you take turns, and listen carefully to each other as well as to adults
- the fact that you enjoy your school, you learn well, and think learning is fun
- the way the adults in your school lead you by their example.

However I would like your teachers to:

- help you to understand even better how to improve your work when they mark your work
- help and support each other even more when they introduce new ideas and better ways of teaching.

Many of your parents wrote to me, and almost everyone said that they think that you go to a good school, and I agree with them. I thoroughly enjoyed the time I spent with you in school.

Best wishes for the future.

Roger Brown

Lead inspector