



Our Lady's Catholic Primary School, Dartford

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118768
Local Authority Kent
Inspection number 296446
Inspection dates 7–8 November 2006
Reporting inspector Carole Skinner

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	King Edward Avenue
School category	Voluntary aided		Dartford
Age range of pupils	4–11		DA1 2HX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01322 222759
Number on roll (school)	214	Fax number	01322 225307
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Rosemary Bishop
		Headteacher	Maria Shepherd
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2004		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Our Lady's is a one-form-entry primary school situated in a suburban setting on the edge of Dartford. Pupils come from a wide variety of social backgrounds and just over three-quarters of them are Catholic. The majority of pupils are of White British origin but around a quarter come from minority ethnic backgrounds, which is higher than average. Most of these pupils speak English as their first language, and very few are at the early stages of learning to speak English. All but one of the class teachers have joined the school during the last two years.

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 which provides well for pupils' all-round development within a very caring Christian ethos. The serious weaknesses that were identified at the time of its last inspection in 2004 have been tackled with vigour and determination. The headteacher has led the school well through a difficult period and has appointed a strong team of senior managers who are working very closely with her to raise standards and improve the quality of education. Their shared vision and commitment to ongoing improvement place the school in a good position to continue on its upward path.

Rigorous self-evaluation accurately identifies the key areas for improvement but the school is a little too hard on itself when judging its own effectiveness. Most parents have very positive views of the school. One mentioned 'a dedicated team of teachers and staff who provide interesting lessons' while another described it as 'a thriving, caring and happy school'.

Pupils achieve well and reach well-above-average standards in the national tests in Year 6 in English and science. Standards in mathematics are above average but fewer pupils reach the higher level of attainment (Level 5) than in the other two subjects. In the Reception Year, children make satisfactory progress and most reach expected standards. Provision for these children is satisfactory and improving, and the school is currently introducing systems to improve the accuracy of assessments at the beginning and end of the year. Some aspects of learning, such as role play and activities initiated by the children, are not as effective as those that are planned and directed by the teacher.

The school has provided good support for new teachers during the past two years, when turnover has been high, and there is now a greater consistency in the quality of pupils' learning. At the heart of the good teaching are rigorous systems for assessing pupils' progress and making sure that all are achieving well. Aspirational targets are set for all pupils, and teachers keep these in mind when planning work for different groups. As a result, pupils' needs are generally met well, but this is not consistently the case in mathematics lessons. The school provides a good, well-planned curriculum, which is greatly enhanced by a wide range of visits, clubs and links with other schools. Pupils are becoming increasingly proficient in using information and communication technology (ICT) as a tool for learning, but the computers in classrooms are not always used to best effect in lessons.

A strong feature of the school is the pupils' good personal development. They have very positive attitudes to learning and enjoy being at school. They behave well and take their responsibilities seriously. Much of this is due to the good levels of care and support they receive and teachers' high expectations of them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Match work more carefully to pupils' needs in mathematics to ensure that the best possible progress is made by all pupils, especially the more able.

- Improve the quality of provision in the Foundation Stage, particularly the effectiveness of those activities that are selected by the children.
- Make better use of the computers in classrooms to develop pupils' ICT skills and enhance learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Most children start school with the skills and knowledge expected for their age. They make steady progress in the Reception Year and most reach the standards expected of five-year-olds. Children make good progress in their personal and social development because teaching focuses well on this aspect of learning from the outset. Pupils make good progress in Years 1 and 2 and achieve above-average standards in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Good progress continues in Years 3 to 6. Pupils do particularly well in English and science, with very high proportions of pupils exceeding national expectations. Although standards are above average in mathematics in Years 2 and 6, fewer pupils exceed national expectations than in English and science.

Recent initiatives to raise standards in writing have been very successful and have resulted in many more pupils achieving higher-than-average standards. Similarly, standards in science have risen dramatically in response to improved teaching and a greater focus on learning through enquiry and investigation. More rigorous target setting and tracking of individual pupils' progress are key factors in the pupils' good achievement. Pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds do well and achieve high standards by the time they leave.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils develop into sensible, mature young people. They are considerate and polite and they relate very well to one another and to their teachers. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is enhanced by their enthusiasm in undertaking several roles of responsibility within the school. The school council takes good account of pupils' views and actively identifies areas for improvement in the school and its grounds. Pupils show a good understanding of the needs of others in their very good support for a range of charities and in their community involvement with the elderly. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy eating and are working towards achieving the Healthy Schools Award. A letter from the school council to parents with advice about healthy lunchboxes brought good results. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe and they act responsibly and with thought for others. They enjoy school and participate well in extra school activities. Their attendance is in line with the national average. They are prepared effectively for the next stage of their education and develop a good range of skills which provide them with a solid foundation for life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

At the heart of the good teaching are thorough assessment procedures which give teachers a clear idea of where pupils have got to in their learning. Teachers plan lessons well and generally take care to match the work to the needs of different groups of pupils. This is not always fully effective in mathematics, where a few lessons have overlong introductions which take too little account of the differences in pupils' previous learning. Nevertheless, the quality of teaching in mathematics and science has improved significantly since the last inspection and is having a good effect on raising standards. The teaching of writing has also come on in leaps and bounds under the guidance of the subject leader, whose exemplary practice provides an excellent model for all to follow. Teaching in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory but also has some good features. It is strongest in the lessons where children are engaged in activities that are led by the adults. When children are able to choose activities for themselves, these do not always have a clear enough purpose or outcome.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well planned for the most part with a good balance of work. The time allotted to physical education lessons is somewhat lower than that recommended, although there is a good range of well-attended extra-curricular sporting activities, including inter-school competitions. Good provision for pupils' personal, social and health education contributes well to their personal development. Links between subjects are developing well, for example, in science and design and technology. Whilst pupils make effective use of ICT to support learning across the curriculum, there is insufficient routine use of the computers in classrooms. Visits, such as those to the science museum and the local environmental centre, and worthwhile links with other local schools, greatly enrich pupils' learning. Good provision for pupils with English as an additional language and those who have learning difficulties underpins their good achievement.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This is a very caring school which secures the pupils' confidence and that of their families in tackling any issues that may arise. Pupils' understanding and awareness of safety matters are effectively influenced by the good use of visitors such as the school nurse. Pupils are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles and to think about the needs of others. There are good systems for tracking pupils' progress which enable teachers to respond quickly to any signs of underachievement. The individual education plans for pupils with learning difficulties are well written and promote good progress. Good records are maintained in mathematics, but they are not always used effectively in

matching work to pupils' needs. Pupils' welfare and child protection have a high priority and there are good arrangements to promote good behaviour and improve attendance.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Despite having a number of significant barriers to overcome, not least the high turnover of staff and difficulties with recruitment, the school has made great strides over the past two years. Much of this has been due to the headteacher's strong leadership and clear vision for the school, which is now shared by a committed management team who all have good levels of expertise. Very good leadership in English and science is having a very positive effect on raising standards. The appointment of a new subject leader in mathematics has coincided with a whole-school focus on raising standards, particularly for the more able pupils.

Staff and governors evaluate the quality of provision rigorously and identify clearly where the school's strengths lie and what needs to be improved. Thorough analysis of test data and rigorous tracking of pupils' progress enable teachers and managers to determine exactly where there may be gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Parents' and pupils' views are valued and taken into consideration when creating the school improvement plan. This is focused clearly on raising standards and is helping to drive the school towards meeting the challenging targets it has set.

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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	3
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	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

Thank you very much for talking to us and showing us your work when we visited your school. You told us that you enjoy school and we can see why. Our Lady's is a good school which is helping you to make good progress in your learning. Here are some of the good things we found:

- You reach high standards in English and science and your writing has improved a lot. Most of you are doing well in mathematics but a few could reach even higher standards.
- Teachers are very good at checking your progress and giving you extra help if you need it. They make lessons fun and set you challenging targets.
- We were impressed by your good behaviour and the way you concentrate on your work in lessons. You enjoy taking responsibility for different jobs and helping to look after each other.
- The school makes sure you have plenty of interesting things to do, both in lessons and in clubs and on visits. The overnight stay at the Science Museum in London sounded very exciting!
- All of the adults care for you very well and help you to stay safe and healthy.
- The teachers and governors who run the school are always looking for ways to make it even better and they check up regularly to see what needs to be improved.

We have asked the teachers and governors to do three things to make the school even better:

- Make sure that you all get work that is at the right level of difficulty in mathematics. This will make sure that you all do as well as you possibly can.
- Improve the way some activities are planned for children in the Reception class, especially those they can choose for themselves.
- Ensure that you make more use of computers to support your learning in the classroom.

We hope you will help your teachers to do all of these things and will continue to enjoy your time at Our Lady's.