

St Gregory's Catholic Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109696
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	302332
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Mark Sims HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	432
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Jim McGivern
Headteacher	Mr Paul Gardiner
Date of previous school inspection	30 June 2003
School address	Biddenham Turn Bedford Bedfordshire MK40 4AT
Telephone number	01234268649
Fax number	01234215119

Age group	9–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Saint Gregory's is a small, but rapidly growing middle school following the closure of another Roman Catholic school in the locality. It is situated in Biddenham on the outskirts of Bedford. Pupils' standards are lower than is usual for this age-group when first they enter the school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is twice the percentage than that found nationally. A very high proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and there are growing numbers at the earliest stages of learning English. The acting headteacher has been in post since September 2006.

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 is providing a satisfactory standard of education. Under the leadership and direction of the acting headteacher it is improving. It has made a realistic assessment of its strengths and of other areas requiring improvement.

Overall achievement is satisfactory as is the quality of teaching and learning. Whilst standards had been falling in recent years this has been turned around in English where a strong focus on writing has led to improvements. Standards in mathematics and science are broadly average but results have not improved as much as they have in English.

Personal development is good. Inspectors observed good behaviour in school although a significant number of parents and the school itself recognise there are pockets of poor behaviour, often linked to inadequate teaching. The Christian ethos of the school is evident in pupils' attitudes and their relationships with each other, particularly with those of different faiths. Attendance is high, confirming that pupils enjoy coming to school and they thrive on the responsibilities they are given.

Whilst satisfactory overall, there are wide variations in the quality of teaching from outstanding to inadequate. Although much is of a high standard, elsewhere inadequate behaviour management or inadequate planning leads to pupils' progress slackening. Progress in science has been hampered by the absence of a coordinator but action has been successfully taken to improve teaching in mathematics. There are also variations in the way teachers use assessment information, including marking, to show pupils what they need to do to improve. However, the school has some very good practice on which to draw, particularly in English, humanities, physical education (PE) and music where lessons are carefully planned to meet the varied needs of learners including those for whom English is an additional language and other learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.

The curriculum is satisfactory overall but there are strengths in the extra-curricular provision where there is high take up in music and sports activities, two strengths of the school. Pastoral care for pupils is good but care guidance and support for pupils is satisfactory overall because of inconsistencies in the quality of academic guidance. Whilst good tracking systems are in place to monitor pupils progress they are not used consistently well in all subjects or by all teachers.

The school works well with the local community and support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those at the earliest stage of English is good. Provision for gifted and talented pupils is at an early stage of development and there is no school approach to address the needs of advanced bilingual learners.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since his recent appointment the acting headteacher has overseen a strengthening of the leadership and management team to ensure the school has improved since the last inspection and has satisfactory capacity to improve when he leaves. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and improve the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in mathematics and science
- Improve the monitoring and evaluation of progress and ensure consistent use of such systems in all subjects

- Use assessment information better to support pupils and to help them to reach their full potential

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are broadly average. At the end of Key Stage 1, pupils reach standards in line with the national average but have made less than expected progress by the time they join school at the start of Year 5. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils' attainment is therefore often below the national average. Whilst attainment has improved and is now in line with the national average in English, standards are not as high in mathematics and science.

The school has successfully raised standards in English at Key Stage 2 by focussing on writing. In line with attainment, the progress of pupils from Key Stage 1 to 2 is better in English than in mathematics or science. The proportion of pupils achieving the highest levels at the end of Key Stage 2 in mathematics and science is below the average found nationally.

Pupils' standards improve significantly whilst they are in the school and their general progress, which is satisfactory overall, ensures they leave achieving the nationally expected levels. Appropriately challenging targets are set and met at Key Stage 3. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those for whom English is an additional language also make satisfactory progress. Provision for gifted and talented pupils is at an early stage of development.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development is good. Pupils develop their self confidence and mature well. They like taking responsibility, for instance, by acting as school councillors or office assistants. One of the youngest members of the council said 'I like listening to others and thinking about how the school can be better, the school takes us seriously and the headteacher meets us every few weeks'. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. In a discussion about persecution, for example, pupils gave thoughtful responses as they compared atrocities against Jewish people in World War 2 with other instances in history. Respect for the dignity and culture of different nationalities and minorities is promoted well in personal, social and health education (PSHE) and this supports the good relationships between different faith groups.

Pupils enjoy learning very much and this reflected in the good rates of attendance. Behaviour is good. Most pupils are well mannered and self disciplined. Alternatives to exclusion are used sensitively to promote good behaviour. The school's behaviour support unit is effective.

Pupils' contribution to the community is good. There is extensive fundraising because pupils appreciate that there are always people less fortunate than themselves. Pupils develop a strong sense of safety and have a clear understanding of the importance of leading healthy lifestyles. There is a high level of participation in sports and other physically demanding extra-curricular activities. Outside agencies contribute effectively to programmes dealing with bullying and the need to avoid harmful drugs. Careers advice is satisfactory and, overall, the school prepares pupils appropriately for their future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Work has been successfully undertaken over the last year, in partnership with the local authority, to raise the quality of teaching and learning and overall provision is now satisfactory. In strong subjects, such as English, humanities, modern foreign languages, PE and music, lessons seen were characterised by good planning, clear aims, good use of the schools' data to track progress and set high expectations and good behaviour management. Together these ensure appropriate learning takes place. Literacy and numeracy are well supported and good use of imaginative and well-planned teaching and learning strategies ensures pupils are interested and achieve as they should. In other subjects sketchy planning results in pupils' needs not being fully met. Consequently, their interest and enjoyment flags and they make less progress than they should.

Marking and feedback in pupils' books are highly variable overall, with both exemplary and weak practice being seen. In some cases there is insufficient collaboration between teaching assistants and teachers. The provision of extension work for the more able is an improving aspect of the school's work but needs further development. The recent developments in information and communication technology (ICT) have laid a good foundation for further improvements in teaching and learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets statutory requirements. It meets the needs of most pupils who make sound progress over time. At Key Stage 2 a primary model of teaching and learning has been developed which makes lessons varied and interesting. This has begun to impact positively on standards, especially in Year 5. At Key Stage 3 the subject knowledge of teachers is generally good and this promotes a wide range of specialised interests that can be pursued by older pupils. The school is in the early stages of implementing school-wide strategies with the support of the local authority to develop literacy and numeracy. ICT, an area identified for action across all teaching areas, although used by teachers and pupils to an increasing extent, needs further development. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities have equal access to the curriculum and those whose first language is not English are well supported upon arrival. Parental involvement in this respect is good. Community involvement is built into the curriculum. The extra curricular activities are wide ranging and participation rates are high. Music and PE in particular play a strong part in this aspect of school life. Education for safety and health are satisfactory and a good PSHE programme successfully promotes the personal development and well being of the pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides satisfactory care, advice and support. Pupils' comments include 'Teachers always stop and listen, they explain things if you get stuck and are patient with you'. However, some pupils are unsure about how they can improve and the guidance they receive through marking and target setting is inconsistent. Procedures to ensure health, safety and child protection are in place and reviewed regularly. Arrangements to manage any risks to safety, particularly in PE where the indoor accommodation is limited are also in place. The school works

positively with the community to raise awareness about health and safety; for instance, the school nurse and community police officer visit the school regularly and talk to pupils about issues such as drugs and bullying.

Provision for pupils at the early stage of learning English as an additional language is strong and this helps pupils to integrate into the school community effectively and progress as well as other groups. Several pupils benefit positively from additional support provided at a neighbouring school. Learning mentors make a positive contribution to the school's work by working with different groups, including pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. The acting headteacher has a clear vision for the school and has focussed the staff on raising standards and further promoting the personal development and well-being of learners. He is supported by a strengthened leadership team who are working towards the improvement of the school. These efforts are beginning to impact upon results at Key Stage 2, which are now satisfactory. Performance is monitored and strategies have been put in place to improve the quality of teaching and learning but more needs to be done in both these areas to ensure pupils meet their full potential. Subject co-ordinators are beginning to evaluate their teams' effectiveness but the absence of a science co-ordinator is limiting progress in this subject. The school makes every effort to secure equality of opportunity. Most parents are supportive of the school and appreciate the recent improvements. Governors carry out their duties conscientiously. They have responded robustly to staffing issues but need to challenge performance more, especially in mathematics and science.

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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	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	2
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?	3

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

18 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Saint Gregory's Roman Catholic Middle School, Bedford, MK40 4AT

You will be aware that we recently visited your school. Thank you very much for your warm welcome. I thought you might like to know what we have said about your school.

Saint Gregory's provides a satisfactory standard of education with some features that are good. Attendance is high and this together with what you and your parents have told us indicates you enjoy school. Your behaviour in school is also good. The Christian ethos of the school means you talk sensibly and maturely about issues of persecution and discrimination. You have a good range of extra curricular activities to enjoy and these are strong in music and PE. Those of you with additional needs are supported well. The school looks after you well to make sure you are healthy and safe.

We have asked to consider some things that we think can improve the school further. These are to

- make sure that teaching and learning are consistently good so that you can do as well as you can, especially in mathematics and science;
- check that in all your lessons your progress is consistently checked;
- give you more support and guidance on how you can improve your work.

We very much enjoyed our visit and I would like to wish you every success in your future.

Yours sincerely

Mark Sims

Her Majesty's Inspector