

St. Stephen's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101455
Local Authority	Bexley
Inspection number	307690
Inspection date	27 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Wendy Simmons

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	5-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	418
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr A Woodcock
Headteacher	Mrs M Masterson
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2003
School address	Ruskin Avenue Welling DA16 3QG
Telephone number	020 8303 9738
Fax number	020 8303 0052

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- how well standards and achievement are improving in mathematics
- standards and achievement in the Foundation Stage
- pupils' personal development.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report. Evidence was gained from lessons and the school's own evaluations of its work. Discussions were held with staff and pupils and a range of documentation was evaluated. Pupils' work was scrutinised in mathematics. The views of parents were gathered from questionnaires.

Description of the school

St. Stephen's is a large school. Pupils come from diverse backgrounds. Three quarters are from White British backgrounds, but the school also has an increasing proportion from Black African, Asian and mixed heritages. A few pupils are from Irish or other White backgrounds. The school has a lower than average number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Difficulties mostly relate to specific learning difficulties, sensory impairment or autistic spectrum disorders. The school has gained the Healthy School and Active School awards. Very recently, they gained an award for the Outstanding Contribution to Out of School Sports.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St. Stephen's is a good school. Pupils receive a thoroughly rounded education and are well prepared for their future lives. Pupils are happy at school due to the interesting curriculum and calm, purposeful and welcoming atmosphere. Relationships are excellent. The words of one parent sum up the views of many when saying, 'The school is a credit to the headteacher and her team'. The headteacher provides strong leadership. She is well supported by her deputy, all staff and governors. As a result, pupils are well cared for, show outstanding personal development and make good progress.

Standards were securely above average by the end of Years 2 and 6 between 2003 and 2006. Results dipped in 2007 and some pupils did not make good enough progress, especially in mathematics. The school has tackled this well. There is, however, more to do to ensure that pupils' progress in mathematics is as good as in English. The capacity to secure this improvement is good. For example, in Years 5 and 6 a very high proportion of pupils are on track to gain the expected Level 4 or the higher Level 5 by the end of Year 6.

The achievement of pupils is good. Pupils from White British, Irish and Black African backgrounds do better than average. Boys and girls perform better overall than is found nationally in English. However, in mathematics girls do not do as well. The school has been successful in helping boys to do better in reading by promoting reading as an enjoyable activity. The introduction of a book club is further aiding pupils' enjoyment and skills. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities do well in reading and writing, but in mathematics they should be doing better. The school has introduced several new initiatives to support this group. However, in lessons, activities are not always modified sufficiently to ensure that they make consistently good progress. The provision for gifted and talented pupils is good.

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, but stronger in English than mathematics. Many interesting extra activities, residential visits and good links between subjects enhance learning. In English, there is a very good focus on discussion in lessons and opportunities for pupils to think of many creative and personal ideas when writing. English activities contribute much to pupils' excellent spiritual and cultural development. Strong links with the church and opportunities for pupils to learn about different beliefs and cultures enhance this further.

Leaders and teachers have altered the mathematics curriculum to make it more fun and pupils value this. Pupils are now doing more real-life calculations and problem solving activities. Teachers are beginning to encourage pupils to talk about, explain and modify the ways that they solve mathematical problems, although there is room for far more of this. Opportunities are missed by adults to demonstrate how to write down, step by step, pupils' ideas of how to solve problems. This is an important area for development to ensure that pupils develop greater clarity and accuracy when thinking and explaining their problem solving strategies. Older pupils generally know what they have to do to improve their mathematics, because they are clear about their targets, but younger pupils are less clear about how to improve. The marking of pupils' work rarely gives guidance or further challenges to pupils and does not indicate how well pupils are doing in reaching their targets. These factors slow pupils' progress in mathematics.

Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They are respectful, happy and help to make the school a special and successful place to be. Pupils contribute much to the life of the school and enjoy attending. As one said, 'There are lots of fun ways of learning'. The outstanding range of sporting activities contributes much to pupils' fitness and adoption of healthy lifestyles. Sports

also help pupils to gain a strong awareness of the importance of teamwork. Pupils also spoke very enthusiastically about arts and musical activities which help them to gain confidence, become creative and develop a willingness to share their talents outstandingly well with the community. They love the musical soirées and art exhibitions as they, '...make you feel proud'. Leaders and the administrative team showed great vision and determination in securing funding to open the new arts block, which contributes significantly to pupils' development.

Almost all parents are delighted with the school and its leadership. A few parents noted that they would like a foreign language to be taught and the school is taking action to implement this shortly, to enrich the curriculum. Links with the community are excellent. One parent put it, 'The school includes pupils, staff and parents in a unity of sharing'. This was demonstrated very well recently when an ice-skating rink was set up in the grounds and thoroughly enjoyed by the whole community. The very effective parents' association contributes much to the school.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children attend over 30 different pre school groups before joining the Reception classes. Children's skills on entry to the school have altered in recent years. They were at a higher than expected level but in the last three years they are lower and are now more in line with what is usually expected. Leaders recognise that their procedures for securing a fully accurate assessment of children's attainment on entry needs further work. This is because not all six areas of learning are included in their initial assessments. Leaders have recently taken part in training to address this. Children make satisfactory overall progress. Within this, they make good progress in their personal development, in widening their speaking skills and in their knowledge of shapes. Creative development is improving. Relationships are good. By the end of the Reception year, a high proportion of children reach the expected levels. However, writing standards are below average. Higher ability children should be doing better. The challenges given to this group of learners are not always demanding enough in reading, writing, calculating, and in helping them to gain a deeper understanding of the world around them. The outside learning area is used effectively to help children to develop physical skills, but it is underused to extend learning in other areas of the curriculum.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and achievement in mathematics.
- Improve children's writing in the Foundation Stage and ensure that the most able children are suitably challenged in all aspects of their learning.

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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

07 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St. Stephen's Catholic Primary School, Welling, DA16 3QG

You may remember that a school inspector came to your school recently. Thank you for being so fantastically polite, friendly and helpful. I am writing to let you know what I found out.

Your school is a good school. This means that it does many things well for all of you and there are only a few things to do to make it even better. I was very impressed by the welcome that I had and I agree with you that the school is a happy and caring place to be. Your behaviour is outstanding, please keep this up! Your teachers give you many exciting activities to do, which make learning fun and in return, you work hard. You make good progress and this is especially evident in your English work. You thoroughly enjoy coming to school and I can quite understand why this is. I was especially pleased to see how well you are learning so many different skills, such as in music and art. I like the new mathematics work and agree with you that that you are doing work that is more interesting. It would be good if you did even more real life problem solving activities. I was also impressed by the book club activities. I was very pleased to find out how well you are exploring your feelings and ideas. I call this spiritual development and it is excellent. The links with your church, the community and work on English really help you with this. Your school makes sure that you get to higher levels in your work than in many other schools in the country. I am extremely impressed by your interest in sports. Please keep this up.

The adults, especially your headteacher, are working very well to keep improving things for you. I have asked them all to:

- make sure that you can do even better in mathematics
- make sure that the children in the Reception classes get even better at learning how to write; also, make sure that those who find learning easy are given activities to do that help them to learn new things as quickly as possible.

Yours faithfully

Wendy Simmons

Lead Inspector