

Our Lady of Grace RC Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101538
Local Authority	Brent
Inspection number	307728
Inspection date	4 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Jane Wotherspoon HMI

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	233
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Philip Bell
Headteacher	Mr Steve McGrath
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2004
School address	Dollis Hill Lane London NW2 6HS
Telephone number	020 8450 6002
Fax number	020 8208 3430

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the reasons behind the dip in standards and achievement in 2007 and the effectiveness of actions taken to improve writing and science; the effectiveness of the new system for tracking pupils' progress year on year, especially that of higher attaining pupils, and in providing detailed information to enable target setting to be sharp and challenging.

Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form, assessment records and performance data, planning documentation, observation of staff and pupils at work, and analysis of 120 parents' questionnaires. Discussions were held with staff, a governor, and pupils. 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, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This average sized school has more girls than boys in all year groups. The school serves an area of social and economic deprivation. Over half are from White British or Irish backgrounds with the remainder from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. A higher than average number has been identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities. A high proportion speaks English as an additional language, although only a small number are in the early stages of learning English. The school has a stable population; few pupils join or leave the school other than at the normal times of transfer. The school has undergone some staff changes in the last two years, including to the senior leadership team. It was without a substantive headteacher for the academic year 2006-2007. The new headteacher took up his post in September 2007.

The school has gained a number of awards in recent years: Healthy Schools, Activemark, Basic Skills Quality Mark, information and communication technology (ICT) mark, Investors in People status, Football Association Charter Mark, and Artsmark gold.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school correctly judges itself as good. A thorough approach to monitoring and evaluating aspects of its work, including a detailed analysis of performance data, identifies strengths in the provision and clear areas for improvement. The new headteacher has set clear expectations of staff. Through restructuring staff responsibilities he has created a new senior leadership team that is working together effectively to move the school forward after a period of instability in leadership. Governors give the school good support. Well-established procedures for making visits to the school and regular involvement in school development planning gives governors a good overview of the quality of provision and the challenges the school faces. The school actively seeks the views of parents and pupils in setting priorities for improvement.

Following several years of achieving very high standards in tests at the end of Year 6, results in 2007 dipped a little in English and quite dramatically in science. Standards and achievement in mathematics remained high. Although standards remained at a good level overall, pupils might have expected to do better given their good starting points in Year 3. On taking up his post, the headteacher took immediate action to identify the causes of the dip and put in place appropriate measures to tackle the relative weaknesses. Closer analysis of results revealed that a smaller proportion of pupils exceeded expectations to attain Level 5 in writing and in science than had been the case in recent years.

The school's monitoring of teaching identified the need for greater challenge for more able pupils in some lessons, especially in science. A new planning format for science was introduced and training for staff has raised the profile of investigative science. A focus on improving writing is underpinned by teachers moderating samples of pupils' work together. This is increasing the accuracy of teachers' assessment identifying more clearly what needs to improve. A new system for tracking pupils' progress in writing and mathematics combined with termly meetings between the headteacher and class teachers to review pupils' progress serves two purposes. It makes staff accountable for the progress made by their pupils and it ensures that any underachievement is identified at an early stage so that it can be rectified. These strategies are working well and there are signs that the targets set for current Year 6 pupils may be exceeded. More importantly, data show that pupils are making good progress overall during their time in the school. However, there is more to do to ensure improvements are implemented consistently.

Teaching is good. Typically, lessons are well planned and pupils clearly enjoy them. Discussions feature strongly in most lessons and pupils are highly motivated by the many opportunities to discuss their work in pairs and groups. The quality of discussions in mathematics, for example, is high. Pupils are confident that teachers help them when they need it. They have a strong sense of achievement and know they are doing well because teachers give them helpful feedback. Pupils think that the 'three stars and a wish' system of marking their work is successful because it praises them but also tells them how to improve. Although not entirely consistent, teachers' marking of pupils' written work is good and some is exemplary. The learning environment is stimulating with plenty of displays that value pupils' own work, set high expectations, and support their independence in learning. At times, the pace of science lessons is not quick enough and teaching does not build sufficiently on pupils' responses to challenge them further. Experiments in science are directed too much by the teacher and limited by the range of available resources.

Staff make sensible links between subjects to bring coherence to pupils' learning and provide an outstanding range of learning opportunities that capitalises extremely effectively on pupils' very positive attitudes to learning. The curriculum is very broad and not just focused on achieving high standards in basic skills. All pupils learn to play the recorder, for example, and extensive provision in physical education and the arts contributes much to pupil's self-confidence and healthy lifestyles. A large number of visits, visitors and clubs play a strong role in pupils' social and cultural development. The programme for pupils identified as having particular strengths and talents is well established and wide-ranging.

A significant strength of the school's provision is the high level of pastoral care and support that underpins the strong ethos. This is an important factor in the pupils' outstanding personal development and well-being. The school draws effectively on its outstanding links with external agencies and with the parish to provide specific support for pupils who are vulnerable, or have learning difficulties and disabilities. Intervention programmes for pupils who may be falling behind are successful in helping them to catch up, as close monitoring of their progress by the inclusion leader shows. Pupils appreciate additional help in the 'early morning club' and the 'high 5' group. Pupils who are new to the school are supported effectively and those who join the school speaking little English make rapid progress.

Pupils are great ambassadors for the school they love. Those that met the inspector spoke proudly of their school and said they would not change a thing about it! Their positive attitudes to learning, and to all that the school offers, are reflected in their outstanding attendance. Behaviour is exemplary and relationships are excellent. Pupils are confident that 'everyone is your friend'. As a result, they learn and play in an environment where bullying, name-calling and racism are extremely rare. Pupils respond very positively to opportunities to take responsibility and to help others, for example in their roles as 'buddies', as school sports leaders, as prefects, and as school council members. Fundraising for charities at home and abroad are a feature of school life. Pupils have a strong awareness of how to keep themselves safe and are developing the skills and qualities that will serve them well in later life.

Parents' responses to the inspection questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive. Their confidence is justified. Parents consider themselves fortunate to be able to send their children to a school that 'promotes a strong Catholic ethos', 'is an extended family', and in which 'all children are valued and recognised for their contribution to the school'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the challenge for higher attaining pupils, especially in science through open-ended tasks and opportunities for investigation and experimentation.
- Embed new systems for tracking pupils' progress in English and in mathematics to ensure that challenging targets are set and reviewed regularly.

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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
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 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	1
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	1

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?	1
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

16 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Our Lady of Grace RC Junior School, London, NW2 6HS

I thoroughly enjoyed visiting your school and meeting you all. A special 'thank you' to those of you who came to speak to me. You told me that yours is a good school and I agree. Your parents think so too!

I was pleased to see how much you love school and how hard you work. I was impressed by how well you all get on with each other. You told me that there is hardly any bullying and I could see for myself that your behaviour is exemplary. It is good to know, though, that you feel confident that there is someone to turn to if you have a concern. All the staff look after you very well. I was pleased to hear that you are encouraged to keep healthy through the PE you do and the healthy food you eat. Well done to those of you who walk to school when you can! I was impressed by the number of ways you take responsibility to help each other and to think about others through your fundraising for charities. You are developing important skills and qualities that will help you when you go on to secondary school.

You told me you like having 'two subjects in one' and I can see that teachers work hard to try to give you interesting things to learn. They also organise plenty of trips and visitors to add to your learning. You are very lucky to have so many different clubs to go to after school. Some of you told me about the extra groups you have to help you catch up.

You reach good standards and achieve well but I think some of you could sometimes do even harder work. I have asked teachers to think about this, especially in science. I have also asked staff to make sure they keep checking how well you are doing and update your targets so that they are challenging.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Wotherspoon

Her Majesty's Inspector