

Our Lady of Grace RC Infant and Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101547
Local Authority	Brent
Inspection number	307732
Inspection date	9 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Mike Thompson

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	232
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Kathleen Jenkins
Headteacher	Miss Maria Shea
Date of previous school inspection	18 June 2002
School address	Dollis Hill Avenue London NW2 6EU
Telephone number	020 8450 6757
Fax number	020 8452 1501

Age group	3-7
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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 how well pupils make progress, both academically and in their personal development. The quality of teaching was also evaluated. The inspector gathered evidence from an analysis of data about pupils' achievements provided by the school, observation of parts of lessons, a scrutiny of samples of pupils' work, parents' questionnaires, and discussions with the headteacher, senior staff, the chair of governors and pupils. The inspector did not investigate other aspects of the school's work in detail, but found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified. These judgements have been included, where appropriate, in this report.

Description of the school

Our Lady of Grace is an average sized infant school serving a culturally and socially diverse community. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is high, and comprises about three-quarters of the number on roll. In recent years, the proportion of pupils of White European heritage, particularly those from Polish families, has increased significantly. These pupils comprise about one sixth of the roll, and many of them are in the early stages of learning to communicate in English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is slightly above the national average. The school has recently gained the National 'Healthy School' status and has the Investors in People award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Our Lady of Grace is a good school with many outstanding features. 'It is an extremely caring place where each child is made to feel special,' typifies the overwhelmingly positive comments received from parents. They are right. Securely underpinning all of the school's work is the high quality care guidance and support for pupils, based upon a strong Catholic ethos.

It is a good school because it is effective in ensuring that pupils achieve well. It moves children from below average starting points when they join the Nursery to attain standards in reading, writing and mathematics that are significantly above the national average by the end of Year 2. One of the chief reasons for this is the school's relentless focus on ensuring that as many pupils as possible attain or exceed the level expected nationally by the end of Year 2. It does this through good teaching, which ensures that pupils make at least good progress, and by targeting two key groups of pupils: those with learning difficulties and disabilities, and those in the early stages of learning English. The school clearly identifies the very different learning needs of these two groups through the good systems in place to check on and analyse the progress made by all pupils. The high quality help provided for these particular pupils by skilled support staff results in them making excellent progress in developing basic skills. 'My child was supported, encouraged, given extra help and is now off the special educational needs register,' was just one of the many positive comments received from the parents of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. The local authority has identified the work done to develop good levels of staff expertise in meeting the needs of pupils with English as an additional language as a model for other schools to follow.

The way in which provision is adjusted to meet the learning needs of all pupils is one of the reasons why the curriculum is excellent. Pupils benefit from many interesting and exciting activities, enriched through a wide range of visits to places of interest, such as museums and art galleries and opportunities for Year 2 pupils to spend a residential weekend at an outdoor environment centre. There is a strong emphasis on ensuring that pupils have a good understanding of the importance of keeping safe and living healthy lives. Visits to the school from the police, fire service and road safety team help reinforce messages about personal safety, while the 'Healthy School' status recognises the excellent impact of the school's work in promoting sensible eating habits and good quality physical activity. A further outstanding feature of the school, and one that contributes strongly to the very good climate for learning evident in all classes, is the pupils' excellent personal development. The school is very good at promoting and celebrating the richness and diversity of pupils' cultural heritages. For instance, an assembly observed by the inspector included a Polish song sung by one of the Year 1 classes. This contributed well to pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Behaviour is good overall. In closely controlled situations, such as in lessons, it is often impeccable. The school's average attendance rate does not reflect pupils' real enthusiasm for all aspects of school. One pupil summed this up beautifully in response to the inspector's enquiry about things that pupils did not like about school by saying, 'I feel really sad on the days when I can't come!' Absences are typically the result of family issues, such as extended breaks to visit family members overseas.

The quality of teaching ranges from satisfactory to good, with some elements of outstanding practice. Where teaching is good or better, teachers pitch work at different levels to ensure challenge for all. In these lessons, learning moves forward at a crisp pace with good questioning skills used effectively to make pupils really think hard about what they have to do. However,

on some occasions pupils only make satisfactory progress because teaching is less effective. This is due to a variety of reasons. For example, in one of the classes observed, the main teaching points and the subsequent activities provided during an exercise in counting were designed with the average and lower attaining pupils in mind. The more able pupils were not challenged enough and showed little interest or enthusiasm. The school is not content to rest on its laurels, and acknowledges that in order for pupils to make even better progress teaching has to be more consistent in providing challenges for all ability groups. This inconsistency of challenge is the reason why achievement is good rather than outstanding.

The driving force in ensuring that pupils reach their potential is the outstanding leadership provided by the headteacher. She has also ensured that the issues for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection have been fully addressed. She enjoys the enthusiastic support of the good staff team. Her new senior leaders are relatively inexperienced in their roles, but nonetheless provide good leadership. Governors provide good support and challenge through their interest and involvement. There is a very strong commitment to continuous improvement and robust systems to help ensure that this happens. The school is, therefore, well placed to make further progress.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

'My son loves coming to school and I am very pleased with his progress', wrote one parent. This comment reflects the effective leadership and teamwork which help ensure that the children are given a good start to their education. By making good progress, children come close to the standards expected nationally by the end of Reception. Teaching reflects a secure understanding of how very young children learn. The children enjoy a great deal of individual attention, and staff are adept at looking at what needs to be done to help each individual to improve. However, the interventions in children's play to help develop learning are sometimes not effective in helping them to make good progress. This is because support staff sometimes direct activities too much, or do things for the children. This holds children back in developing their skills in reasoning and in working independently. Activities are generally well planned, and children are given lots of opportunities to make choices and develop their social skills and confidence. The highly practical curriculum effectively promotes all aspects of children's development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide consistently high levels of challenge for all pupils so that all lessons are good or better.
- Ensure that the individual help given to children in the Foundation Stage classes enables them to fully develop thinking skills and independence as learners.

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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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
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	1

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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	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?	1

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	1
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	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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

21 November 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Our Lady of Grace RC Infant and Nursery School, London, NW2 6EU

Thank you for helping me so much when I came to your school to find out how well you are getting on. I particularly enjoyed looking at your work and talking to some of you.

I agree with your parents that you go to a good school.

There is so much I like about your school that I can't mention everything, so here is a list of what I think are the most important things.

- You do well in your work, and when you leave school at the end of Year 2 many of you read, write and do your work in mathematics better than most children in other schools. You should be very proud of this.
- Those of you who sometimes find work difficult and those of you who are learning English make excellent progress.
- Everyone in your school is friendly and welcoming, and you behave well.
- You learn a lot in lessons because the teaching you are given is good.
- Your teachers are good at planning lots of interesting things for you to do.
- All of the adults in your school make sure that you are really well looked after.
- All the people who help run your school do a good job in making sure that you get a good education, especially your headteacher.

I would also like to let you know that I really enjoyed hearing your beautiful singing in assembly.

Even in a good school like yours there is always something that could be improved. So, I think that what needs to be done next is for the school to make your lessons even better by always giving you work that makes you think really hard. This will help you to make even more progress. I'm sure that you are ready for the challenge! I would also like the grown-ups who help you in the Nursery and Reception classes to give you more time to work out how to do things for yourself instead of helping you too quickly. This will help you to learn even better.

I am sure that you will continue to have great success in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Mike Thompson

Lead Inspector