

St James' Roman Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101656
Local Authority	Bromley
Inspection number	307768
Inspection date	20 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Christopher Gray

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	216
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Mary Cava
Headteacher	Miss Pauline Sammon
Date of previous school inspection	26 June 2002
School address	Maybury Close Petts Wood Orpington BR5 1BL
Telephone number	020 8467 8167
Fax number	020 8467 8908

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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: pupils' progress and personal development, teaching and curriculum, academic guidance, leadership and management. He gathered evidence from records of pupils' attainment, samples of pupils' past work, observations of lessons and round the school, meetings with staff, governors and pupils and an analysis of 100 responses to the parents' questionnaire. 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 its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is similar in size to most primary schools and is over-subscribed in every year group. Many pupils come from socially advantaged backgrounds. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is well below average and none is at the early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is well below what is normally found.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. It is led by an inspirational headteacher, dedicated staff and governors and gives its pupils an excellent standard of education. It is clear that parents hold the school in high regard, both from the very positive response to the parents' questionnaire and from the large number of additional comments made in praise of the school's work. 'I couldn't choose a better school', wrote one.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. A mark of this is how pupils responded when asked what they thought would be the most important thing they would take away with them when they leave. The youngest child said 'Friends'. An older pupil expressed it, 'Learn to cooperate and make friends'. One observed, 'All children have the right to be included.' Another illustrated this by referring to a football match that pupils had spontaneously organised at playtime, involving all who wanted to play from all classes. Pupils agree that high standards of behaviour are shown virtually all the time and are adamant that bullying is very rare. They say they are very safe in school and are confident of a sympathetic hearing if they have problems. They understand the importance of staying fit and healthy. They speak of a balanced diet but show a mature moderation: 'You are allowed some treats.'

Achievement is outstanding and high standards have been maintained over a number of years. Pupils begin school with above average skills. They make very rapid progress in Reception and, by Year 2, standards are high. Pupils make outstanding progress in every year group and the measures of the value added by the school are among the highest in the country. Good improvements have been made in information and communication technology (ICT) since the last inspection. Standards exceed expectations, though they are not as high as in English, mathematics and science. The school makes use of exceptionally challenging targets to raise standards in these subjects, but does not apply this technique to ICT. The coordinator is extending the system of assessment in order to give a more accurate measure of how well pupils are progressing.

Teaching and the curriculum are outstanding and account for pupils' huge enjoyment of school. Modern technology is used well to help their learning. A Year 5 class was learning about the circulation of the blood and how exercise affects the heart rate. They discussed an animated diagram shown on the interactive whiteboard. The understanding gained from this enabled them to deduce from a graph of a runner's pulse exactly what he was doing at each change of rate. In another lesson, pupils were writing stories with exciting openings. One began, ' 'Help!' cried a faint voice from the heart of the flames'. An example of innovation in the curriculum is the days when pupils plan and lead activities. In one class, pupils taught and learnt football skills and T-shirt painting. Pupils' views on how they learn best are canvassed and taken into account in teachers' planning - for example, additional cross-curricular sessions in the ICT suite were added to the timetable. Curriculum enrichment is typified by the high quality musical productions and competitions in which many pupils participate.

The all-round high quality of education offered to pupils is well summed up in the words of a parent: 'A wonderful school in educational terms as well as a happy, caring environment for our children'. Pastoral care is of high quality and arrangements to safeguard pupils are very thorough. Academic guidance is excellent and even the youngest pupils quote their targets. 'Mine is to remember capital 'I's, said a Year 1 pupil. Teachers' marking is thorough and of a high quality in all pupils' work, and pupils say how much this helps them to improve.

Leadership and management are exceptionally thorough and effective. A parent recognised this as the main ingredient in the work of the school: 'The school is a huge success because of the head and the dedication of the staff.' Systems for self-evaluation are outstanding and are characterised by exceptional rigour. Teachers' work and their assessments are constantly evaluated, both by themselves and senior leaders, to ensure that they are of consistently high quality. These systems ensure that pupils make the best progress that they can and that all groups make equally outstanding progress. The governing body's high expectations of the staff match those that teachers have of pupils; governance is outstanding. Staff value the professional development that leaders give them and this too is at the heart of the school's continuing improvement; for example, the school is now part of the National Support School Initiative, in which the headteacher is a National Leader of Education. The school was judged very good at the last inspection and is now excellent, evidence of an outstanding capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The current Reception children were in their first full week at school during the inspection and the elder sister of one said, 'He's really tired at the end of the day.' This is because there is so much for them to do. Activities are well organised and arranged so that all the children get equal input from adults. Children start school with well-developed personal skills. Most have very good attitudes to learning, which enable them to progress quickly in other areas. The most rapid progress that children make across the year is in reading, writing and number skills. By the time they enter Year 1, children's attainment is well above what is usually found and their progress is outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the good system of assessment in ICT to include challenging targets, in order to raise attainment in ICT closer to the high standards achieved in English, 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?	1
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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
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	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?	1
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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

28 September 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St James' Roman Catholic Primary School, Orpington, BR5 1BL

I enjoyed my visit to your school and thank you for making me feel so welcome. I was glad to be able to speak to so many of you. You and your parents are clearly proud of your school and you are right to be so, because it is an outstanding school. (Outstanding is another word for excellent.)

One of the first things I noticed was how well you behave - even when you came in though the gates first thing in the morning. You work very hard in your lessons and seem to waste no time at all. You told me that you feel very safe in school because the adults are there to help you and because of the CCTV. You are often asked what you think about the school and about your learning and your teachers do their best to respond to your ideas.

Your hard work and the outstanding teaching you receive enable you to reach very high standards in English, mathematics and science by the time you are eleven. You make outstanding progress in every class, because all the staff work hard to make their teaching of the highest quality. They often give their spare time to go and learn about new things to make lessons even more interesting.

You have a lovely ICT suite, and I was sorry it was out of action because of a thunderstorm in the summer. You do very interesting things in ICT, such as the animation which pupils in Year 1 were preparing. You develop good computer skills, but you could get even better, so I have asked your teachers to set targets in ICT as well as in English and mathematics.

Your headteacher is an excellent leader. She receives outstanding support from the governors and all the staff. Together with your excellent attitudes to learning, you have created a very special school. Congratulations.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Gray Lead Inspector