

St Ursula's RC Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102332
Local Authority	Havering
Inspection number	307971
Inspection date	15 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Nick Butt

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 (total)	240
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr D O'Connor
Headteacher	Mrs U J Murphy
Date of previous school inspection	23 May 2005
School address	Straight Road Romford RM3 7JS
Telephone number	01708 343170
Fax number	01708 379590

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Introduction

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

- How the school is raising the achievement of White British boys.
- The extent to which pupils have opportunities to apply their skills across a range of subjects.
- The effectiveness of subject leaders in improving their areas of responsibility.

The inspector gathered evidence from lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and parents' questionnaires. Discussions with staff, governors and pupils also contributed to the judgements. 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 is an average sized school. Almost a third of pupils come from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest group being Black African. A small number of pupils speak English as an additional language. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is around average. These include specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. The school has the NACE Challenge Award for gifted and talented pupils, the Activemark and the Healthy Schools award. It is part of an Excellence in Cities cluster of schools that funds a Home School Support Worker to assist vulnerable pupils and their families.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Ursula's is a good school with many strengths. It has a justifiably good reputation in the local community for its effective teaching, friendly family atmosphere and outstanding care, guidance and support. Parents value the school greatly. One commented, 'It is a very kind and caring school that cares for each and every one of its pupils.' Under the outstanding leadership of its headteacher, the school has maintained above average standards for several years and pupils achieve well. The school has made good progress since its last inspection in putting in place a straightforward marking system that helps pupils to understand how they can improve their work. Subject leaders are involved well in monitoring their areas of responsibilities and produce detailed reports showing strengths and areas to develop.

Pupils join the school with broadly average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. They make good progress, especially in Years 5 and 6, so that standards are generally above average by the time they leave. The proportion of pupils who attain the higher levels in English, mathematics and science is close to average because teaching does not always challenge the more able pupils sufficiently. The school identified that White British boys did not achieve as well as they could, and targeted groups in each class for additional support. In 2008, this resulted in these pupils successfully making rapid gains to the extent that almost all the Year 6 group attained the nationally expected grade. This year there are far fewer such pupils needing help. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, such as dyslexia, are included extremely effectively in lessons and achieve well, benefiting from valuable support from teaching assistants.

Teaching and learning are good, with very positive relationships between adults and pupils. A pupil said, 'If you don't understand it they explain it well.' Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning and are very enthusiastic about taking part in lessons. The sessions are structured effectively, with time in the middle for pupils to do short exercises that enable them to concentrate well. Teachers are confident about using technology to enhance learning, and pupils say how much they enjoy educational games on the interactive whiteboards. There is some outstanding teaching, as observed when a Year 6 class discussed how to write a 'Titanic' poem from the iceberg's point of view. Pupils were immersed in the task and excited by the teacher's imagination and verve. At other times, especially in mathematics lessons, there is too much reliance on pupils completing worksheets that do not take fully into account pupils' different levels of ability. This can lead to the more able pupils doing undemanding tasks before being given work that challenges them, so slowing their progress.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, contributing significantly to their overall personal development and well-being. They embrace the school's Christian values and sing spiritual songs joyfully. Behaviour is excellent, and they go out of their way to help one another. Many of the Year 6 pupils act as play leaders for the younger children, organising games for them at lunchtime. Class counsellors ensure everybody has somebody to play with, and the school council is influential in canvassing opinions. Pupils' suggestions are often taken up by the school, such as the purchase of additional computers and the planting of new flower borders in the grounds. Pupils have an excellent understanding of their own and others' cultures, and contribute very well to the school's festival of language and culture. They thoroughly enjoy school, and the vast majority attend well. Pupils take plenty of exercise, with high participation in the school's many sports clubs. They have a very good understanding of how to stay healthy and feel free from bullying or harassment. A particular feature of pupils' outstanding personal development is the way they include and support classmates who have

disabilities or face other difficulties. They all grow in confidence and leave the school well-rounded individuals with a good set of skills and abilities, well-prepared for secondary education.

The impact of leadership and management on standards and achievement is good, with effective systems in place to monitor and evaluate the school's work. This leads to a clear understanding of strengths and areas for improvement. Strategic plans are closely linked to the school's key priorities and all leaders play an important role in ensuring their success. Leaders focus their energies on setting challenging individual targets for the Year 6 pupils, and this contributes positively to their rapid progress. Although achievement for most pupils in Years 3 to 5 is good, even more of them could achieve well if they had similarly sharply focused targets for the progress they should make by the year end. Careful tracking identifies pupils at risk of falling behind, and there is good provision for their support. The home-school support worker plays an important role in enabling vulnerable pupils to access the curriculum and in assisting families facing difficulties. This excellent pastoral care is complemented by good academic guidance, so that pupils know what they need to do next for their learning to improve.

The curriculum caters well for a wide variety of needs, and staff ensure that all pupils are able to access the full range of activities, even if they have quite severe disabilities. Pupils have good opportunities to extend their knowledge and understanding through cross-curricular events, such as the annual 'enterprise travel' day. Here they research a European country and set up market stalls based on its culture and traditions, making games and producing posters. The event raises money for children in the Kenyan school that pupils sponsor and correspond with. The school recognises the need to make the curriculum even more creative on a day-to-day basis as the range of tasks can sometimes be too narrow. There are plenty of clubs for pupils to enjoy including 'reading partners', netball and choir. They take part in many events with other schools such as a general knowledge quiz and a country dancing festival. Pupils enjoy a good variety of trips and have a residential visit to Somerset where they tackle adventurous activities and develop their team-building skills.

School leaders and governors have adapted and modernised the 1950s building well to create a rich learning environment where pupils can thrive. There are strong links with the local community, and the staff and governing body reflect its diverse character. Governors support the school well and ask searching questions. They also contribute to pupils' cultural development by sharing their skills in dancing and cuisine with them. The school has improved well over recent years and is in a good position to continue to go from strength to strength.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teaching consistently challenges the higher attaining pupils.
- Take more account of individual potential when assessing how much progress pupils should make, especially in Years 3 to 5.

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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?	2
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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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 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?	1

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	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

24 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Ursula's RC Junior School, Romford, RM3 7JS

Thank you for welcoming me to your school. I enjoyed my visit and agree that yours is a good school with many strengths. Here are some of them.

- You make good progress in your work and reach standards that are above average.
- The teaching is good and you are very keen to take part in lessons.
- Your behaviour is excellent; you care for one another very well.
- You contribute very well to the school community through your jobs as play leaders, counsellors and reading partners.
- There are plenty of clubs and visits for you to enjoy.
- The school looks after you extremely well, especially if you are facing difficulties.
- The headteacher leads the school very effectively.

I have asked your teachers to make sure lessons challenge all of you all the time, so it is never too easy for you. The staff check how well you are doing and work out how much progress they want you to make. I have asked them to make sure they base this on your individual capabilities, rather than expecting the same of everybody in the year group.

Thank you once again for your help. My best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mr N Butt

Lead Inspector