

Holy Family and St Michael's Catholic Primary School, Pontefract

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108267
Local Authority	Wakefield
Inspection number	309640
Inspection dates	12–13 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Joyce Taylor

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	97
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Anne Dyer
Headteacher	Mrs C Weir
Date of previous school inspection	8 December 2003
School address	Cobblers Lane Pontefract West Yorkshire WF8 2HN
Telephone number	01977 722840
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Holy Family and St Michael's Catholic Primary School takes the majority of its pupils from the local area, which experiences considerable social disadvantage. The majority of the pupils are of White British heritage. An average proportion is from minority ethnic backgrounds, with the largest group speaking Polish at home. The proportion of pupils eligible for a free school meal is lower than average. However, a higher than average proportion have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and a statement of special educational need.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Holy Family and St Michael's Catholic Primary School provides its pupils with a satisfactory standard of education and several aspects of its provision are good. The parents are rightly pleased with the care the school takes of their children. They speak very highly of the headteacher as someone who identifies their children's needs and supports the whole family if problems are encountered. Consequently, families respond well to the school and work with teachers to help their children overcome difficulties.

By the end of Year 6, standards are broadly average and achievement, which has improved steadily over the past few years, is satisfactory. There are still fluctuations between subjects and pupils achieve better in mathematics and reading than in writing and science. Good teaching in mathematics and reading has lifted the standards but teaching is less effective in writing where the assessment of pupils' individual progress is less detailed. The school has rightly identified the setting of targets as an area of current development, as some lessons do not provide accurate enough challenge for all pupils who could be making more of their learning. Standards at the end of Year 2, while broadly average, have slipped slightly over the past two years with writing, again, being less secure than reading and mathematics. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall but there are real strengths in the way teachers and classroom assistants ensure the pupils develop confidence and are able to concentrate in lessons. This particularly supports those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language, enabling these pupils to achieve well. Girls, who are sometimes less responsive to teachers' questions in lessons, achieve less well than boys.

Pupils' personal development is good. Staff work hard to raise pupils' confidence and help them develop the skills to get on well together. In the classrooms and around school, behaviour is good and pupils say they like school and feel safe. As a result they settle happily to their work and try hard to concentrate on their learning. The school council is effective in helping pupils make shared decisions and in taking responsibility for aspects of school life. Older pupils particularly are aware of the need to see everyone has a friend at playtime and value the playtime buddy scheme. Parents comment, 'The school helps children grow into good people.' Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and they talk with enthusiasm about their opportunities to meet with people from different cultures. Their understanding of healthy lifestyles is thorough. They talk knowledgeably about the effects of sensible eating and the need for regular exercise. Care, guidance and support of the pupils are good and the support for vulnerable learners is outstanding. The school keeps a very close watch on how pupils feel and steps in to help them if necessary. The watch kept on pupils' learning is improving towards the use of detailed targets but this system is not yet fully developed.

The curriculum is good. Staff have worked well to provide pupils with interesting learning activities designed to raise standards. The school broadens pupils' experiences through a good range of additional opportunities. For example, days celebrating particular authors, dressing in costume linked to historical theme days and using art work to help concentration. Across the school, the curriculum supports the pupils' personal development well, leading to pupils' working with confidence. Pupils say they enjoy the range of clubs the school provides, particularly those related to art and sport.

The headteacher and senior staff provide satisfactory leadership and management and some aspects are good. The headteacher's vision for ensuring there is high quality care of the pupils

is exceptional. Governance is good and governors work closely with senior staff. The school accurately identifies problem areas, and is working steadily to raise standards. Appropriate plans for developing the school are already bearing fruit and demonstrate a satisfactory capacity for further improvement. The school's approach is bringing about consistency of provision and improving pupils' achievement, but senior staff and governors realise the need for a continuing, strong focus on raising standards. As a result, the school gives satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision for Foundation Stage pupils is good and children achieve well because of good teaching and an active curriculum. They arrive with skills that are slightly below expected levels and, by the time they move into Year 1, are reaching the expected goals. The children have access to a good range of resources inside and outside and learn to make sensible decisions as they work and play. Their progress is tracked closely and lessons are planned to support identified areas of weakness.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the overall achievement of girls.
- Raise standards in writing across the school and in science for the pupils in Years 3 to 6.
- Extend assessment strategies to include the setting and monitoring of detailed targets.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The school is working hard to raise achievement and has been particularly successful in improving mathematics and reading by the end of Year 6. 'Catch-up' reading programmes have considerably improved reading skills for identified pupils. Improving the standards in writing is a school target and new approaches are beginning to have a positive impact on standards. Achievement and standards in science slipped in 2007 due to insufficient time being allocated to the subject and this problem has been remedied. The school is tracking progress in science to ensure the rearrangements prove successful. Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage through a practical and investigative curriculum.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school lives out the characteristics of its Catholic status. Pupils are valued and are at the heart of the school's work. They enjoy making a contribution to school life and develop their citizenship skills by taking on a good range of responsibilities. They participate in assemblies with enthusiasm and there is a sense of spirituality in their memories of a disabled pupil from China who they eventually met when she came to England for treatment. They have a good understanding of cultural awareness. Attendance is above average. Pupils like school and many indicated how keen they were to return after the summer holidays. Children in the Foundation Stage make good strides in learning to work and play independently and alongside others.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers are very effective at helping pupils feel good about themselves and as a result most pupils behave well and try hard. For example, during a group discussion in Years 5 and 6, bilingual pupils were encouraged to translate for a friend with less English, thus reinforcing their own learning and helping their classmate. Good subject knowledge is increasing the progress of pupils in mathematics and reading, but the school has rightly identified that strategies to improve standards in writing need updating if the pupils are to be challenged effectively. Assessment procedures are improving but pupils do not yet have individual learning targets which show exactly what they need to learn next. As a result, a number of pupils, who are at different levels in their learning, cover the same work and, in a number of instances, some girls are allowed to become passive learners. Teachers and teaching assistants provide good support to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities because they pay close attention to their needs and question their understanding closely. Teaching is good in Reception and consequently, these pupils achieve well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Stimulating learning opportunities for Foundation Stage children ensure that they have a secure basis on which to build. In Years 1 to 6, staff are adapting the curriculum to develop a practical approach to learning. As a result, more investigative and play opportunities have recently been introduced to support learning in Years 1 and 2. These active tasks interest the pupils but are not always sufficiently challenging. Staff are monitoring this provision and working to improve it. Across the school, good use is made of visits and visitors to evoke excitement. The older pupils, for example, expressed considerable interest in every day Tudor life during re-enactment sessions. A good range of extra activities and trips further engages pupils' interest and supports their personal, social and cultural development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school uses a strong network of support services for pupils, especially the most vulnerable, and tracks their personal development extremely well. Pupils say they feel there is someone to share difficulties with through the system of posting confidential notes to the staff if they have any problems. This helps them feel safe in school and on the rare occasions bullying occurs, it is dealt with promptly. Broader procedures to keep pupils safe are also in place. Good behaviour is promoted well. The systems to track pupils' achievement are satisfactory overall and a review of assessment data clarified underachievement of pupils in writing and science. As a result, new learning approaches have been introduced by the school. Pupils' individual targets for improvement, however, are not as clear as they should be and the school has identified the need to improve the setting of targets as a high priority, with all staff undergoing training.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and assistant headteacher work well together. Some of their recorded evaluations of how well the school is doing appear to judge the school to be further along than it is. However, through discussion with them, the inspection judgement is that they have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have already taken decisive action to implement strategies to raise standards, for example, in reading. Their preparations are in hand for staff training designed to improve provision in writing and assessment, but they recognise there is still a little way to go before the pupils' targets become really challenging. Good personal development and care are key features in enabling most pupils to settle to their learning and reflect the headteacher's keen focus. Parents strongly support the work of the school and appreciate the commitment of the headteacher and staff. Links with other schools, particularly Catholic schools, are strong, so pupils transfer smoothly to the next phase of their education. Governance is good: governors question and support the work of the school and this is leading to stronger provision.

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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?	3
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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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

Thank you for your help when I visited your school. I very much enjoyed watching you work and talking with you in your classes and around school. Yours is an improving school. At the moment it gives you satisfactory opportunities for learning and it is getting better all the time.

You have a very caring headteacher and an enthusiastic, hardworking staff. Lots of your parents say they are pleased you come to this school because it helps you do well. You work hard and, as a result, your standards are beginning to rise in reading and mathematics. Now standards need to rise in writing across the school and in science in Years 3 to 6. Not all of you know what to aim for in order to make your work better and your teachers are working on ways of making this clear for you. Although high achieving girls do well, some of the girls have got left behind and need to try extra hard to catch up. Across the school, you enjoy your lessons and you are making a huge effort to behave well and get on with each other.

I have identified several areas for the school to improve. This will help you do even better in all areas of learning.

- Make sure girls achieve as well as boys, especially in literacy and numeracy.
- Reach higher standards in writing across the school and in science in Years 3 to 6.
- Develop targets to help you improve and keep a check on how fast you make progress.

You are enthusiastic about your school and I hope you carry on enjoying lessons and making Holy Family and St Michael's Catholic Primary School such a happy place for learning.