

St Joseph's RC Lower School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 109629 |
| Local Authority | Bedfordshire |
| Inspection number | 310046 |
| Inspection dates | 1–2 December 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Ian Jones |

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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| Type of school | First |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 3–9 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 294 |
| Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS | 0 |
| Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years | 0 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Sue Rumfitt |
| Headteacher | Mrs Jackie Boyle |
| Date of previous school inspection | 10 May 2004 |
| Date of previous funded early education inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Date of previous childcare inspection | Not previously inspected |
| School address | Chester Road Bedford Bedfordshire MK40 4HN |
| Telephone number | 01234 352062 |
| Fax number | 01234 300420 |

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| Age group | 3–9 |
| Inspection dates | 1–2 December 2008 |
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average sized catholic lower school situated in a multicultural area on the western outskirts of Bedford. A large proportion of pupils are from other Christian denominations or non-Christian faiths. Pupils come from a wide range of minority ethnic groups and half of pupils do not speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational needs, is broadly average. The percentage of pupils who qualify for a free school meal is above average. The school has had some recruitment difficulties. The deputy headteacher was acting headteacher last year, and the current headteacher is seconded from a local school to act in a similar capacity this year. The school has recently been awarded Healthy School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This happy and welcoming school provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. Parents are supportive of the school and its work. They are particularly pleased with how well their children are looked after and cared for. Parents are right in their views. The care and pastoral support that pupils receive is good. Attendance figures are above average and reflect pupils' good enjoyment of school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are especially enthusiastic about the extra responsibilities offered, as they get older, such as becoming playground 'buddies', looking after younger members of the school community. Pupils in this school really care about others. They speak maturely and sensitively of how, in some places, people are not as fortunate as they are. Their average levels of attainment confirm that they are adequately prepared for the next stage of their education.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) get off to a good start because they are taught well and activities are accurately planned to suit their ages and abilities. Teaching is satisfactory in the rest of the school, where consistent classroom management ensures satisfactory standards of behaviour. However, teachers do not always cater effectively for the wide range of abilities within their classes, particularly those who are more able. The academic guidance that pupils receive is satisfactory and much information is collected about their progress. However, this is not always used well enough to inform teachers' planning and to challenge pupils in their learning. Personal targets introduced in reading, writing and mathematics have not had a significant impact on achievement. This is because, although most pupils know their targets, they are not consistently referred to in lessons or when teachers mark pupils' work. While marking is affirming and positive, it does not provide enough guidance to support pupils' next steps in their learning.

Standards are broadly average when pupils enter Year 1 and when they leave in Year 4, consequently achievement overall is satisfactory. The satisfactory curriculum, effectively enriched by a wide range of cultural stories and activities, effectively helps promote community cohesion, as do the well established links with the local community and with pupils in a school in The Cameroon. A range of out of school clubs encourages pupils to exercise regularly. Parents and governors agree that the acting headteacher has led and managed the school well through its recent period of turbulence. She has quickly, and accurately, identified the school's strengths and priorities for development, and devised useful plans to address these areas. As she has taken up post this term, it is too early to see the full impact of these actions. However, a good start has been made and there are clear plans to increase the effectiveness and capacity of the recently established senior leadership team enabling them to take a greater strategic role in school improvement. Subject leaders are increasingly aware of the strengths and weaknesses in their subjects, but currently the school demonstrates only adequate capacity to bring about the changes needed to quicken the rate of progress and thus raise standards.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The well-resourced and stimulating classrooms in the EYFS enables all children to make good progress. From starting points below those expected for this age, most children attain standards broadly in line with national expectations by the end of Reception. The wide range of exciting learning opportunities both indoors and outdoors enable children to communicate well together and make good progress in their understanding of language, personal development and

mathematical knowledge. Well-planned observations enable staff to assess children's understanding accurately. This informs the good planning, which provides learning opportunities well matched to children's needs. The best progress is made when the depth and quality of questioning is carefully considered to enable children to think more widely and extend their understanding of concepts and ideas. For example, children were very excited by the prospect of feeding African snails, but a lack of questioning meant that learning opportunities were missed. The very good relationships between adults and children enable children from different cultural backgrounds to work well together and to understand the feelings of others. The good leadership and highly committed staff ensure that welfare requirements are met and children at risk are identified quickly. There are good links with parents, carers and other agencies to ensure that all children settle well and have a good start to their education. Parents are encouraged to become actively engaged in the children's learning through initiatives such as the 'Bear Diary'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the strategic role of subject leaders and middle managers to increase accountability and focus more sharply on raising achievement.
- Raise the level of challenge, particularly for more able pupils.
- Improve marking to link it more closely to specific lesson objectives and to the personal learning targets of pupils, thus providing them with clear information on the next steps in their learning.

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

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children get a great start in the EYFS, improving at a faster than expected rate, to reach broadly average standards by the time they move into Year 1. However, their language and communication skills are weaker, particularly reading. In Key Stage 1, pupils make satisfactory progress in reading, writing and mathematics, and by the end of Year 2, standards remain broadly average. Progress to Year 4, is satisfactory overall, but is weaker in writing, largely because helpful support programmes used in Years 1 and 2, do not continue into Key Stage 2. Standards are broadly average by the time pupils leave school at Year 4, reflecting satisfactory achievement overall. Pupils who have difficulty acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills and those who have speech and language difficulties receive effective help and achieve well from their relatively low starting points. Those pupils who speak English as an additional language achieve satisfactorily because adults are well aware of their individual needs and the school works hard to provide for them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Learners enjoy coming to school and develop good personal relationships. This is achieved through opportunities to take responsibility, well-resourced playground activities and a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The strong level of involvement from the community enhances and enriches children's experiences, for example, through additional extra-curricular clubs. Pupils are aware of how they can contribute to school improvement through the school council.

The strong nurturing ethos strives to meet the needs of vulnerable learners. Attendance is good and promoted well. Parents feel that learners are safe and secure and develop good attitudes towards safety. The school has recently received the Healthy Schools award; however, some learners are not fully aware of what they need to do to lead healthy lifestyles. Learners are encouraged to take responsibility, for example, in keeping the dining hall tidy and helping younger children in the playground. Personal development is often good where the impact of the recent implementation of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning curriculum is seen.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Relationships in classrooms are generally good and as a result, pupils develop positive attitudes to learning. However, although planning is pitched to meet the expectations for separate year groups, it is not always matched well enough to the needs of individuals. As a result, activities are sometimes not sufficiently challenging, nor expectations high enough. Teaching is making improving use of the interactive white boards in classes, using these well to reinforce, develop and make learning more interesting. In some lessons, talking partners are used successfully to promote speaking and listening and develop good social skills. However, questioning techniques are not consistent across the school and miss opportunities to fully challenge pupils' thinking. Pupils are becoming more aware of their learning targets, which are increasingly used to involve pupils in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides pupils with a good range of extra-curricular activities and experiences to help their learning. These help to effectively promote their personal development and give pupils a good understanding of safe and healthy living. The curriculum is enriched by the good links in lessons with multicultural activities recognising the range of minority ethnic groups within the school. Together with focused events such as Black History Month, these effectively promote community cohesion. Links between subjects provide more creative and practical opportunities for pupils to see the relevance of the lesson and to enjoy their learning. The school is implementing the revised frameworks for literacy and numeracy satisfactorily. Music and art are strengths within the curriculum and enjoyed by the pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The pastoral care and nurturing ethos enables learners to develop their skills in their personal relationships with one another. Those pupils who find learning more difficult are identified quickly and an increasingly effective range of intervention strategies in place enables them to make good progress. All classes have displays of appropriate learning targets but these are not referred to consistently in teaching. Where this does happen, learners make better progress. The marking of work is mainly affirming and encouraging but is often not sufficiently linked to pupils' personal targets or lesson objectives and so inhibits learners' capacity to know what they need to do to improve. Arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements and, together with good systems for health and safety risk assessments, provide a safe and secure environment for learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The acting headteacher has quickly and accurately identified key areas for improvement. She has quickly evaluated the needs of the school and learners, and contacts with parents and the local community are developing well. She has a good understanding of the needs of the wide range of social, religious and ethnic groups within the school. Together with other senior leaders, she is working hard to ensure that the school continues to run smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Furthermore, she has brought a clear strategic direction and vision. She has overseen the development of a useful school improvement plan, and introduced other measures, such as greater accountability to senior leadership and subject leaders for their responsibilities. However, it is too early to see the impact of these changes in terms of learners' outcomes. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school provide much information for senior leaders, but hitherto this has not been rigorously used to deliver improvement. A good example of this is in marking, where senior staff are aware of inconsistencies but have not effectively addressed them. The governing body are supportive and regular visitors to school. They have a satisfactory knowledge of how well the school is doing and of its priorities for development.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| 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 capacity to make any necessary improvements | 3 |

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

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| How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS? | 2 |
| How well do children in the EYFS achieve? | 2 |
| How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS? | 2 |
| How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop? | 2 |
| How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted? | 2 |
| How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed? | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| 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/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

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|---|---|
| How good are 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 | 3 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners | 3 |
| 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

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| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs? | 3 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 3 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 3 |

Leadership and management

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| 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 | 3 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated | 3 |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion? | 2 |
| 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 | 3 |
| 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**

3 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Joseph's RC Primary School, Bedford, MK40 4HN

Thank you for making my colleagues and myself so very welcome when we visited your school recently. We certainly enjoyed talking to you. We think yours is a satisfactory school and we know that you and many of your parents and carers think so too. We were impressed by your friendliness and the way you enjoy school.

The headteacher and the staff are good at making sure you are happy at school and help you make satisfactory progress. They make sure that those of you who find learning difficult receive the help you need. The staff work hard to help those of you who speak other languages, to learn. We were very pleased to see how well you play together and behave as you move around the school. We were also pleased to see how you take responsibility and are willing to do jobs to help.

We have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to make your school even better by:

- helping you to make better progress by improving the way teachers organise the different subjects
- giving those of you who learn quickly more challenge in your work
- giving you marking which clearly tells you what you need to do to improve.

You can help by continuing to try hard, behaving really well in lessons and always doing your best.

I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Ian Jones

Lead inspector