

St Paul's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110006
Local Authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	310172
Inspection dates	19–20 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Olson Davis

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	301
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Ann Epps
Headteacher	Ms Julia Feeney
Date of previous school inspection	22 September 2003
School address	City Road Tilehurst Reading RG31 4SZ
Telephone number	0118 942 2003
Fax number	0118 945 4924

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below the national average. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Other pupils come from a range of other ethnic backgrounds, the largest groups are from white Irish, other white backgrounds and pupils of Indian heritage. The proportions of pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties, moderate learning difficulties and behavioural difficulties are in line with national averages. A slightly higher than average proportion of pupils join or leave the school other than the usual times. The deputy headteacher took over as acting headteacher two weeks before the inspection due to the substantive headteacher being on temporary medical leave. The school has an Investors in People award, the Challenge Award for its provision for able, gifted and talented pupils, the Basic Skills Quality Mark and Artsmark Gold.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school provides a good quality of education for its pupils. Under the effective leadership of the headteacher and the senior leadership team, the school includes every child so that they make good progress in their learning. Parents and pupils rightly hold the school in high regard. As one parent wrote, 'Both of my children have been through St Paul's and I know that it has made them confident, learned and happy children, whilst supporting them spiritually.' There are outstanding aspects to the school's work. A particular strength of the school is the excellent care, guidance and support it provides for its pupils. As a result, pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They are keen to learn and participate enthusiastically in a range of activities out of school time. They take on a range of responsibilities such as being Year 6 mentors and school council members, which they carry out diligently. The strong partnerships with the church, other schools and outside agencies provide many benefits to pupils' learning and well-being.

Children make a good start in the Foundation Stage because of good teaching and provision. As they get older, pupils continue to achieve well and attain above average standards overall by the end of Year 6. This is the result of good teaching, good provision for those who need extra support learning to read and write and a good curriculum. Fundamental to the pupils' good progress is teachers' effective use of regular assessments to plan work in lessons that is well matched to pupils' needs and abilities. Another important feature of teaching and learning is the excellent relationships between adults and pupils. The strong ethos of respect between teachers and pupils and amongst pupils means that pupils greatly enjoy lessons and other activities in school. As a result, pupils behave very well, show very positive attitudes to learning and attendance is good. A good range of after school clubs, including sports and music, adds to the richness of the pupils' experiences. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Leadership and management are good. The strong partnership between the headteacher and the deputy headteacher is an important feature of the school. This strength was demonstrated by the effective way in which the deputy headteacher led the school through the inspection. Teachers with specific areas of responsibility offer useful support and advice to colleagues throughout the school. However, the school has rightly recognised the need for some of these middle managers to have greater oversight of standards and achievement and for them to increase their influence on the quality of teaching and learning within their areas of responsibility. Self-evaluation is good and provides an accurate picture of the school that has helped to steer it well in its work. Issues from the previous inspection have been successfully tackled along with good developments and initiatives, such as improving the provision in the Foundation Stage. This demonstrates that the school has a good capacity to continue improving.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children join the Foundation Stage with a wide range of skills but overall their levels of attainment are in line with those expected for their age. Skilled teaching staff and teaching assistants provide children with a stimulating range of experiences within an attractive learning environment. Good use is made of information and communication technology to make learning interesting and fun. Children experience a good balance between activities led by an adult and those that they choose for themselves. Consequently, children make good progress in all areas

of learning. They do particularly well in their personal, social and emotional development because of the strong emphasis teachers place on this area. Children are happy and settle quickly because they are very well cared for by adults. Parents appreciate the way that staff are friendly and approachable. The school has worked well in partnership with the local authority to improve provision in the Foundation Stage since its previous inspection. As a result, children now have access to a dedicated outdoor play area with appropriate equipment for creative play.

What the school should do to improve further

- Strengthen the roles of middle managers so that each has greater oversight of achievement and standards and greater influence on the quality of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

From broadly average starting points pupils achieve well and reach above average standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. Pupils make good progress in lessons because of good teaching and their very positive attitudes to learning. In the 2007 national assessments, pupils did not do as well in English at the end of Year 6 as in mathematics and science. However, the staff acted quickly and achievement in English has improved because of successful interventions by the school. Consequently, pupils are on course to reach more challenging targets this year and are benefiting from well-planned opportunities to write for real purposes and from focused target setting in English and mathematics. Previously, boys were not doing as well as girls. The school has made appropriate changes to some of its teaching methods to involve boys more and has invested in resources to suit them. Boys are achieving better as a result of this work. Pupils who find learning difficult make good progress because they are very well supported by skilled learning support assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupil's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Assemblies and circle times provide excellent opportunities for pupils to reflect on spiritual matters and the consequences of their actions. The curriculum provides pupils with an excellent understanding of different cultures. Activities such as oriental dance and the gamelan music workshop help pupils to understand and celebrate cultural diversity, preparing them very well as future citizens. Pupils cooperate very well in pairs and groups, and assist each other with their learning.

Pupils are well aware of what constitutes a healthy diet because of excellent surveys they have done as part of the School Nutrition Action Group. They make healthy choices. The school council represent their classmates very well and feel that their views are valued. Pupils contribute very well to the wider community. They play an active part in the local church and community, for example, the school choir performs at music festivals. Pupils show a strong sense of social responsibility by raising money for charities, such as CAFOD.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers use their good subject knowledge to set learning intentions for different groups of pupils which they share at the beginnings of lessons. This means that pupils are clear about what they have to learn. Teachers make use of skilful questioning to check pupils' understanding and to challenge their thinking. They make good use of resources including information and communication technology (ICT), which enthuse and extend pupils' thinking further. Classroom routines are well-established and teachers use encouragement and praise effectively to engage pupils and manage their behaviour well. Teaching assistants are effective in helping pupils who find learning difficult, to manage classroom work. As a result, lessons proceed smoothly and pupils make good progress in learning. Lessons are usually well paced but in a few lessons teachers talk for too long. This can lessen the time that pupils have to work on tasks on their own, slowing the pace of their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well-matched to the needs of the different groups of pupils in school. For instance, pupils with moderate learning difficulties have good opportunities to work in small groups to develop their numeracy and literacy skills. Pupils learning English as an additional language make good progress in acquiring spoken language because of effective specialist support. More able pupils have a good range of extension activities to challenge and stretch them, including master classes in mathematics and science run by a partner secondary school. Information and communication technology is used well to support pupils' work in other subjects and the school has good plans to improve links further between subjects. Religious education and personal, social and health education make a strong contribution to pupils' excellent personal development. After-school sports and lunchtime clubs, including dance and gardening, develop skills, promote fitness and add to pupils' enjoyment of school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Provision for pupils' care, guidance and support is outstanding. Systems for safeguarding pupils' health and safety are scrupulously followed by staff. Parents confirm the strong ethos of care and pupils say that '...teachers look after us really well.' Excellent relationships between adults and pupils foster confidence and trust. Adults are very caring and approachable. As a result, pupils feel safe and included. Pupils are confident that any social or academic difficulties they have will be dealt with promptly and effectively. The school liaises very well with outside agencies to support all of its vulnerable children. Teachers make good use of assessment information to set challenging targets for pupils in English and mathematics. As a result, pupils have a clear view of how well they are doing and what they need to do next to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides good leadership and maintains a strong focus on raising achievement and providing high standards of care for pupils. She includes all the staff and there is a strong sense of teamwork. She ensures that there are good systems in place so the school runs smoothly and purposefully in her absence. The well-focused improvement plan shows that school leaders and governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and what needs to be done to bring about improvements. For example, recent initiatives to improve pupils' writing have proved particularly successful in raising achievement in English. School leaders' close tracking of pupils' progress in English and mathematics has led to improvements. They use assessment information well to identify those pupils who need additional support or challenge. Nonetheless, some middle managers are not yet sufficiently adept in using this information to check how well pupils are doing against national norms or in relation to their starting points. As a result, they are not always clear enough about what priorities need improving most in their areas of responsibility. Teaching and learning are monitored regularly. Managers give due attention to professional development, curriculum planning and the monitoring of pupils' work. However, some middle managers do not yet have sufficient opportunity to monitor the quality of teaching and learning in order to share good practice across the school. This lessens their impact on improving standards. Governors are effective. They are supportive and challenge the school to do its best for all pupils.

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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	2
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	2

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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well 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 the 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

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	2
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	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

02 April 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Paul's Catholic Primary School, Reading, RG31 4SZ

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school recently. We appreciated the help you gave us when we looked at you working and when you shared your ideas about the school.

Your school provides you with a good standard of education, which prepares you well for the next stage of your education. There are some outstanding aspects too, namely your personal development and the care, guidance and support that the adults provide for you. Here are some of the many things that we consider are good about your school.

- The work in the school's Foundation Stage is well organised and gives the youngest children a good start.
- You make good progress in your learning.
- You enjoy school greatly and behave very well in lessons and around the school.
- You are taught well and you are given good help when you find the work hard.
- The school council represents your views very well and you all help the school to run smoothly.
- All of the adults in your school make sure that you are very well looked after.
- The headteacher, staff and governors run the school well and are continually trying to make your school even better for you.

We have asked the school to do one main thing to help it improve further. We have asked the teachers responsible for different areas to keep a closer check on how well you are doing in comparison to pupils nationally. Furthermore, we have asked the school to provide more opportunities for some teachers who have particular responsibilities to observe lessons and work with teachers in other classrooms; this will help them to check that you are being taught well and that you are all making good progress.

We hope that you will help your teachers as they try to make your school even better for you.

Yours sincerely

Olson Davis

Lead Inspector