

St Edward's Catholic Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110475
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310323
Inspection dates	11–12 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Sean O'Toole

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	230
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Michael Lowry
Headteacher	Mrs Anna Majcher
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2003
School address	Hazell Avenue Aylesbury HP21 7JF
Telephone number	01296 424 544
Fax number	01296 381 509

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school draws its pupils from a wide area. About a quarter have minority ethnic backgrounds and a few are at an early stage of learning English. A low proportion are entitled to free school meals. The school has an average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties which include moderate learning, speech language and communication, behavioural and autistic tendencies. In the last two years there have been substantial staff changes including the appointment of a new leadership team.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

'We are a big family,' said one school council member, summing up the ethos of this good school. Following a period of declining standards, the new headteacher, with the support of an enthusiastic senior team, has set ambitious targets. Through robust monitoring and by tackling mediocrity, leaders, managers and governors have brought rapid improvement. Their success clearly illustrates excellent capacity to build on what has been achieved.

From a low point in 2006, when results were poor and pupils made insufficient progress, standards are now above average. Pupils achieve well, especially in English, although their problem solving skills in mathematics are still weak. Underpinning the success has been the headteacher's refusal to accept second best for the pupils. Consequently, teaching has been improved and assessment is now used well to help teachers to pitch work at sufficiently demanding levels and to set challenging targets. Good teaching ensures that pupils know what is expected of them and they respond enthusiastically to the high expectations of the staff. Pupils' behaviour is impeccable; incidents of bullying or rough play are extremely rare. They feel safe because, as one said, 'We trust and respect each other and try to be friendly to everyone.'

The satisfactory curriculum covers essential requirements. However, the school is at an early stage of linking work between subjects and providing opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills creatively. Pupils would like more opportunities to study history and geography in greater depth and are rightly concerned about the limited provision for physical education. They have good personal qualities and know how to live a healthy lifestyle. They value their involvement in charities, enjoy taking part in community events and grow in confidence in making decisions. Pupils concentrate effectively, work hard and take pride in presenting their work. The excellent relationships between staff and pupils encourage confidence. As one pupil said, 'Our teachers help us to understand. We never feel intimidated about asking questions.' Pupils benefit from outstanding levels of care, support and guidance. Staff nurture those with specific learning needs. Consequently, these pupils thrive, growing in confidence and feeling valued by everyone. It is clear that pupils' safety and well-being lie at the heart of the school's work.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the curriculum, particularly in providing more opportunities for physical education, and developing creative ways for pupils to learn and to apply their English and mathematics skills in other subjects.
- Extend pupils' skills in problem solving in mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In 2006, standards fell and pupils underachieved significantly. However, the relentless drive for improvement and high expectations by the new headteacher have raised standards and resulted in accelerated progress among pupils. Test results in 2007 showed that standards were above average in English and broadly average in mathematics. Good teaching has brought further improvement this year and pupils are on course to attain above average standards in English and mathematics. Nonetheless, pupils' skills in solving mathematical problems are relatively weak. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds are now achieving well. Their current

work shows that standards continue to improve. Pupils with specific learning needs, such as weaknesses in communication, behavioural difficulties or autistic tendencies, progress well because of good support and well-focused individual programmes of work. Those at an early stage of learning English settle quickly and soon learn to communicate competently and make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are happy and well motivated. They enjoy one another's company and show much respect for adults. Their polite attitudes and thoughtful behaviour make the school a pleasant and purposeful place where everyone can learn in safety. Pupils enjoy learning and listen well in classrooms. They respond to challenge and are keen to achieve their targets. Pupils are well equipped for the future. They have good basic skills, conscientiously complete homework and have good social skills, although opportunities to use their initiative are hampered by some over-direction by the adults. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is enhanced through opportunities to contribute to charities, learn about other cultures through their international links with Ghana and to be involved in decision making through the school council. One boy, summing up the views of many said, 'I enjoy school because the teachers and children encourage each other and this helps us to learn how to share and care for everyone.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

A particular strength is the way that teachers guide the pupils on how to improve their work through rigorous questioning, helpful marking and clear explanations of targets. Lesson planning is thorough and classrooms are well organised. Teachers match work to the needs of the different ability groups and teaching assistants are involved effectively in supporting those with particular learning needs. The success of this individual support was praised by several parents. One wrote, 'My son suffered with speech problems and I am certain that St Edward's has played a huge part in helping him to overcome these problems.' Those at an early stage of speaking English are encouraged to join in discussions and receive much help. English is taught well and pupils enjoy the opportunities to write in a variety of styles. Pupils work hard and present their work neatly. Although arithmetic is taught well, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to use their initiative to solve complex mathematical problems. Staff and pupils get on very well together, so that lessons are never disrupted by inappropriate behaviour.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The staff provide a curriculum which enhances pupils' personal development and provides good opportunities for them to learn basic skills. The use of circle time prompts pupils to discuss personal and social issues and gives them opportunities to make choices and to learn respect for each other. Pupils enjoy the range of extra-curricular activities and the residential visits, although many would like further opportunities for physical education. Discussions with pupils and parents show that there is not enough emphasis on pupils' physical development. All subjects are taught and basic skills in literacy and numeracy are emphasised strongly. However,

there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to apply these skills in depth in other subjects. This results in lack of challenge for some pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The vast majority of parents are delighted by the outstanding support, guidance and care their children receive. One wrote, 'St Edward's provides a safe and caring environment for my son and...enables him to flourish.' Robust procedures and policies ensure that pupils are safe and secure. Staff also focus very well on assessing pupils' academic needs and provide high quality guidance through marking, target setting and regular reviews of progress. These approaches mean that no one slips through the net. Pupils say how much they value the guidance. One said, 'The targets help me to do well and I am never afraid to ask for advice.'

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has an incisive view of the school's work and acts decisively in tackling any shortcomings. This determined approach has resulted in a well-motivated team who focus sharply on the individual pastoral and academic needs of the pupils. By rigorously monitoring lessons and providing support where needed, leaders and managers have successfully improved the quality of teaching. The introduction of well-focused assessment and challenging targets has also contributed to improved standards. The school has clear priorities for this year but the improvement plan lacks a longer-term view. It is not clear how middle managers will be involved in developing the curriculum. Almost all parents feel that their views are valued but a few feel that communication should be better. The school keeps parents appropriately informed and staff are available for support and advice. Governors are supportive and involved in checking on the school's work. Working with the headteacher, they have substantially reduced the school's large underspend by improving staffing, resources and the fabric of the building.

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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	1

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?	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	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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	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?	3
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	1
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

26 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Edward's Catholic Junior School, Aylesbury, HP21 7JF

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. You help to make it a special place because of your good manners and excellent behaviour. We enjoyed talking to you and were very impressed by your enthusiasm for work. It was good to hear that you feel that the adults listen to your opinions. It was great to see how well the school council works and how they represent your views. We agree with you that St Edward's is a good school. There have been lots of recent changes which have helped to improve your school. We know that you are particularly pleased by the new toilets and improvements to the grounds.

There are several reasons why the school is good:

- you care about each other and show respect to everyone
- your work in English and mathematics is now above average
- your teachers and the other adults working with you give excellent advice and guidance on how you might improve
- you are very good listeners and do your best to improve
- the adults in your school take really good care of you
- your headteacher has made a real difference to how the school works.

Most of your parents said how much they felt that the school has improved recently, although a few would like better information from the school. Many things have improved but we have asked your teachers to give you more opportunities to do problems in mathematics. You can help by always thinking through your work and trying different methods to solve problems. Several of you told us that you would like more lessons in physical education and more interesting work in other subjects. We agree and have asked the teachers to find ways to give you more opportunities to be creative and to find ways for you to do more practical work.

Thank you again for helping to make our time with you enjoyable. We hope you will always be as happy at school.

Sean O'Toole

Lead Inspector