

St Joseph's Catholic Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110478
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310324
Inspection date	9 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Paula Protherough

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	218
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Rogers
Headteacher	Mrs Angela Gavin
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2004
School address	Hazell Avenue Aylesbury HP21 7JF
Telephone number	01296 484618
Fax number	01296 719748

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The Inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated how successfully the school engaged and motivated pupils to write, how the school promoted high expectations for all groups of pupils and how far pupils are engaged with their own learning.

Evidence was gathered from observation of lessons, break-times and assemblies, discussions with staff, pupils and governors, examination of the school's records and other documentation, the results of national assessments, and questionnaires filled in by parents.

Not all the school's work was investigated in detail but some of the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is of average size. The pupils come from a wide range of ethnic groups and approximately one pupil in seven speaks a language other than English at home, a low proportion. The proportions of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs (SEN), or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) are lower than found nationally. They comprise autism, speech, language and communication and behaviour emotional and social difficulties.

The school offers extended services including pre-and after-school care.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Joseph's is a good school. It is popular and held in high regard by parents who comment on the happy and caring atmosphere where their children thrive. It is well led and managed by the headteacher and senior management team, effectively supported by a highly committed staff team and governors.

By the end of Year 2, pupils are achieving well. The school's results in national assessments have been above average in mathematics and reading over several years. Writing levels have been lower than those in reading and mathematics and have been closer to national standards with the exception of 2007 when results in writing were significantly above the national average, reflecting the higher ability levels of this group of children. However, current attainment in writing in Years 1 and 2 is lower than last year and pupils' achievements not as strong as in reading and mathematics.

Under the enthusiastic leadership of the literacy co-ordinator, the school has successfully introduced a structured programme for teaching sounds and letters (phonics). This programme is now in its second year and the school's evaluation shows that the structured approach has raised the confidence and skill levels of many pupils throughout the school in the development of their phonic knowledge and spelling. It has been particularly helpful for boys and for pupils in the early stages of learning English. These important aspects that support the teaching of writing are secure. However, pupils have insufficient opportunities to write at length, or to develop and apply their writing skills across the curriculum. Staff do not identify in their planning enough explicit opportunities for pupils to reinforce their technical literacy skills. Although the recent introduction of a new handwriting scheme is showing early signs of success, especially in the Foundation Stage, the presentation of pupils' work is not always neat enough. Some of the older pupils do not hold their pencils correctly and this contributes to their untidy writing.

The school has progressed well since its last inspection because of the reflective and analytical approach of the school leadership team and governors. Through careful recruitment, whole staff training and a rigorous monitoring programme they have ensured that the quality of teaching has improved and is now good. Thorough assessment and careful tracking of all pupils' progress ensures appropriate support and challenge from the Foundation Stage to Year 2. The school sets itself, and mostly achieves, challenging targets year-on-year. The school has gone some way to introduce individual targets in the classroom but this is not yet consistent across the school and in all subjects. These are not expressed in 'child friendly' language so that pupils can assess their own progress and know how to improve their work.

The care the school gives pupils is outstanding and results in pupils' excellent personal development and well-being. The strong Catholic ethos of the school means that, though young, pupils have a strong sense of their own spiritual, social and moral development and behave well. The after school clubs, playground activities and physical education lessons successfully encourage pupils to be energetic and active. Pupils understand the importance of healthy lifestyles. The successful promotion of high achievement means that pupils have a good attitude to learning and talk enthusiastically about their work. The school celebrates the rich ethnic diversity of its families so that all pupils feel welcomed and pupils who speak English as an additional language achieve well. Teaching assistants provide excellent support for all pupils with statements of special educational needs and learning difficulties and disabilities so that they too make good progress. The high standards, sense of community within the school

and productive links with other schools and the church enhance the experiences of pupils and ensure that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Pupils join the Foundation Stage from a diverse range of backgrounds and with a broad ability range. Whereas some children have had extensive pre-school experience, others have not. The school has recently taken over the management of the local playgroup and is developing productive links to prepare pre-school children for school. There are two intakes into the Foundation Stage, in January and April. This year the school has changed the organisation for Nursery and Reception age children so that there are four mixed-age classes. This has proved beneficial because the positive role models of the older children are helping younger children settle swiftly into the school routine.

Provision is good and children achieve well. Staff know the children's needs and keep careful track of their progress against all the areas of learning. Children are confident and make sensible choices when given opportunity to choose activities for themselves. They make rapid progress, especially in their social development, because the classroom organisation encourages them to share and negotiate with each other. Teachers' assessments show that, by the time the children move into Year 1, almost all have achieved the goals expected nationally. Whilst most have made a good start in communication, language and literacy skills, their writing is weaker than their speaking, listening and reading. The structured teaching of phonics and handwriting is successfully addressing the need to improve their early start to writing.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills across the curriculum and establish greater consistency in the development of handwriting and presentation of work.
- Ensure that pupils understand what they are learning and how to improve their work.

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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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	2
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

22 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Infant School, Aylesbury, HP21 7JF

As you know, I visited your school recently and you all made me feel very welcome. Thank you for your kindness and help in showing me how good your school is in helping you learn. You showed me that you are enthusiastic about your work and that you want to do well.

You have a good school because all of the adults look after you so well. They work hard to help achieve high standards in reading and mathematics. Your behaviour is good because you are polite and friendly to each other. Your work with 'Perfect Partners' shows that you can help each other learn. Your writing is improving because of the new 'Read, Write Inc' and the handwriting practice you have, but I think it could be even better. Some of you can talk about what you need to do to improve your work but this does not happen in all of your lessons. You told me that you do not have enough chances to develop your own ideas in lessons. I have asked your teachers to do the following so that your work could be even better.

- Give you more chance to write in other subjects and have your own ideas about what to write.
- Help you to improve your handwriting and make your work neater.
- Tell you exactly what you are learning in lessons so that you understand how to improve your work.

I hope that you continue to enjoy school.

Yours sincerely

Paula Protherough

Lead Inspector