

Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115146
Local Authority	SOUTHEND-ON-SEA LA
Inspection number	311856
Inspection dates	11–12 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Julie Winyard HMI

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	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Terry Dugdale
Headteacher	Mrs Bridget Frampton
Date of previous school inspection	10 November 2003
School address	Windermere Road Southend-on-sea Essex SS1 2RF
Telephone number	01702 468052
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School and Nursery is an average-sized urban primary school, serving the Catholic communities of Sacred Heart and St John Fisher. The majority of pupils come from the immediate area. There are an average number of pupils from minority ethnic groups, more of whom have English as an additional language than is found nationally. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. However, the school has a high proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. The number of pupils identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to the national picture, as is the number of pupils with statements of special educational need. The school is housed in two buildings separated by an alleyway. The school highlights difficulties in recruitment. The school has recently been awarded the NAACE Challenge Award and has achieved Investors in People for the third time. It also holds the Basic Skills Quality Mark and Activemark awards. It is part of the Southend Excellence Cluster, a local Sports Partnership and a Learning Network for mathematics.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Sacred Heart is a good and improving school that has some outstanding features. The majority of parents agree with the parent who says, 'My child absolutely loves coming to school. She has embraced the core values that Sacred Heart Catholic School encourages throughout.' Indeed, it is the powerful way in which the core values have been taken on by staff and pupils, the very impressive teamwork and the strong Christian ethos throughout the whole school community, which result in outstanding community cohesion, care, support, personal development and well-being. Pupils feel very safe at school and have an excellent understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle. Behaviour is exemplary at all times and the children are caring and careful even when not directly in the line of vision of adult supervision. They are well prepared for their future economic well-being because of the excellent relationship between pupils and between pupils and teachers, and the good level of basic skills acquired whilst at the school.

The school has good leadership and management and is led by an outstanding headteacher. Over the last three years there have been a considerable number of staff changes and the school now has a strong team who are already bringing about further improvements in teaching and learning. Teaching is consistently good and this is due to the strong emphasis on monitoring lessons, which is followed up by useful feedback. The Local Authority says that Sacred Heart is 'a reflective school', because staff listen carefully and take on board advice that will bring about improvements. The governors support the school well. The chair of governors says, 'We are always striving to be better,' and this is evident in the active role governors play in holding the school to account.

Pupils attain good standards throughout the school. They make good progress from when they enter the Nursery to when they leave the school at the end of Year 6. The progress through Foundation Stage and to Year 2 is good because of the consistently good teaching. From Year 3 to Year 6 progress is satisfactory and rapidly improving because of the current good teaching the pupils are receiving. The school has worked very hard to raise standards in writing. Learning targets for writing have been particularly effective, as has the teachers' helpful marking, because pupils understand precisely what they need to do to improve and this is evident in their work. However, in mathematics, learning targets are not always clearly linked to current topics and marking does not always refer to the learning objective and this has resulted in slower progress.

The curriculum is good and improving due to the changes the school has made in the last year. Pupils find the new creative topic work fun and engaging. They sometimes do not realise just how much progress in learning they are making because projects are so interesting. However, sometimes learning is too directed by the teachers and pupils need more opportunities to develop their own ideas and work independently so that they can achieve higher standards. The school organises a good range of visits, which enhance learning, and there is an impressive range of after-school clubs, which are very well attended. The school has achieved a number of national awards in recognition of its good work.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Data collected by the school shows that children enter the Nursery with levels of skill and understanding that are below expectations for their age. A number enter with English as an

additional language or with no English. Induction procedures are effective, ensuring that the staff have a good understanding of children's needs and good relationships are built with parents. Information from pre-school settings contributes to initial assessments. As a result, children settle quickly, feeling safe, secure and confident. Good teaching and a positive, nurturing environment ensure that the children make good progress, with many reaching the early learning goals by the end of the Foundation Stage. This is particularly evident in personal, social and emotional development, as shown when children happily, and unprompted by adults, shared their dough with a child who had none. Good use is made of the shared outdoor area which is well organised to cater for all six areas of learning and promotes the children's understanding of the need to be safe and healthy. The children enjoy their learning and are actively engaged. Literacy and numeracy are well catered for in appropriate play-based activities, as well as some focused teacher-led sessions, and the children are benefiting from the Early Literacy Development Pilot Project. Assessment is used well to track children's development and is used to inform planning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to raise achievement and standards and improve progress in writing and mathematics, ensuring all pupils know and understand their learning targets and that marking consistently refers to how well pupils have done and what they need to do next, especially in mathematics.
- Further develop pupils' learning skills and ability to work independently across the curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 2 has been consistently above national expectations since the last inspection and, whilst attainment by Year 6 has been variable, last year it was above national expectations in all subjects. Overall progress is good. Inspection evidence shows good progress from Nursery to the end of Year 2 and satisfactory and improving progress from Year 3 to Year 6. The school's own data shows an improving picture in Key Stage 2, especially in writing, because pupils' learning targets are very carefully linked to what they need to do to improve further. Whilst the school's data shows some improvement in progress in mathematics, this is not consistently the case. Learning targets are not used as effectively as they could be and are not specific enough nor focused sufficiently on what the pupils are learning in their lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Learners' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Behaviour in lessons, around the school and on the playground is consistently excellent. Pupils are always polite, considerate and thoughtful, and this contributes significantly to the very positive atmosphere in school. Pupils are taught very effectively about health and safety and willingly adopt healthy lifestyles, as one pupil said, 'It changes your appetite!' Because of their strong understanding of democracy, through working together in class councils and through the School Council, the pupils are developing the skills that will enable them to become effective citizens and productive members of their communities. School prefects take on their responsibilities extremely well and arrive at school early, carrying out their duties around the school joyfully and with great care. The new Eco monitors are equally committed to improving the school's and the world's environment! There have been no exclusions and children say that incidents of bullying or racism are almost

non-existent. Pupils are confident that the strategies to ensure their safety are very effective. The school's core values are known by all and even the youngest children are able to talk about concepts such as 'compassion' and 'responsibility' with understanding and can relate Christian ethics and values to their own lives. At breaktimes, the playground is superbly organised and zoning is highly effective and respected well. Pupils play very happily with one another, with older children often caring for younger ones. Both boys and girls were seen playing team games such as rugby, netball, basketball and football, all of which attracted many players and were maintained without the need for an adult to referee. Pupils' understanding of cultures other than their own is very good, and their enjoyment of every aspect of school life is evident in class and around the school. Their good level basic skills mean they are well prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Most teaching seen during the inspection was good. Teachers plan carefully to meet the needs of all pupils in their classes, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Learning objectives are carefully explained to pupils, so they are clear what it is they are learning about. Teachers have high expectations for good behaviour and good learning and they manage pupils well. However, pupils are not always given sufficient opportunities to develop their learning skills through independent work. Ability setting in Year 3 and 4 is working well, because this enables teachers to plan sufficiently challenging tasks for the most able, whilst giving effective support to the less able pupils. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning through their effective support in lessons and in the range of additional activities, which help pupils develop key skills like learning their times tables.

The school has worked hard to improve teacher assessment and this now gives an accurate picture of standards attained by pupils. The termly learning conferences (TLCs), recently introduced between pupils, teachers and parents, have proved popular because parents feel better informed about what they can do to help their child to improve. One parent says: 'The TLCs were excellent. I know my child's targets and can work on them.' Whilst targets in writing are helping pupils to do better, targets in mathematics are not yet sufficiently focused on what the pupil is learning in class. Marking in mathematics does not always refer back to the learning objective nor does it explain what pupils need to do to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum is broad and balanced. There is an appropriate focus on key skills such as literacy and numeracy and the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is developing well. Good resources are provided and enjoyed by all pupils from Nursery to Year 6. For instance, Reception children were keen to program the Beebot robots. There are significant opportunities for pupils to join extra-curricular activities. These are very well supported and add to the pupils' enjoyment. Everyone can find an area to succeed in, whether it is sport, music, chess or one of the many other activities. These activities have also gained school awards such as the Activemark and NAACE Challenge Award. All children are challenged, whatever their abilities, and the school takes care to make sure that the curriculum meets the needs of all its pupils. However, there are not yet enough opportunities for pupils to use the skills they

are learning by engaging in independent work. There is good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and they are included well in all lessons. The Magic Movers group is an example of this, as is the good provision for gifted and talented pupils. The curriculum is further enhanced by the many visits, visitors and special events, such as the Mini Enterprise project, arts week and Other Faiths week. Pupils in Year 6 undertake a residential visit, which raises self-confidence greatly.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support given to pupils are outstanding. The school provides a very safe, secure environment in which pupils are nurtured and valued and in which all children can achieve their best. All safeguarding procedures are fully in place and there are comprehensive policies, regularly reviewed, to ensure pupils' welfare is of the highest priority. There are very few absences, because pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school. There are excellent procedures in place to celebrate high attendance and follow up any absences. Health and safety are promoted through an impressive range of very effective initiatives and interventions. The school has gained the Healthy Schools Award. Displays around the school make the core values of faith, compassion, respect, achievement and responsibility explicit, and these are very clearly lived out in the lives of pupils and staff. Relationships with parents, carers, other schools and outside agencies are very good and have a huge impact on the pupils' learning.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and greatly appreciate such arrangements as the Breakfast Club and the very high degree of care and concern shown by everyone in school. Parents also greatly value the support for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. One parent said, 'His academic learning has improved, as has his behaviour. From hating school and having no friends, he is sociable and happy at school.'

The staff and children have given him back his self-esteem; they are always willing to listen and go the extra mile.' A small minority of parents are concerned about the alleyway that separates the two school buildings. The governors are working very closely with the local authority to improve this matter as soon as possible.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The excellent leadership of the headteacher has enabled the school to make good progress since the last inspection. Her single-minded drive for improvement has ensured that the school stayed on track through a considerable number of staff changes. Leadership has been successfully distributed through an extended leadership team. The recently formed Achievement Teams, who meet every three weeks to discuss pupils' progress, ensure that all staff take responsibility for improving standards, achievement and pupils' progress. Subject leaders and the senior leadership team observe teaching and give helpful advice to teachers. They also look in detail at pupils' work. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very well managed and excellent use is made of external support, including speech therapy. These factors have strongly contributed to the good teaching across the school. Governors hold the school to account and are well led by a chair of governors who knows the school and what it needs to do to improve further. All governors visit the school at least once a year and write well-focused reports, presented to the full governing body about what they have seen. Overall,

the school knows itself well and self-evaluation is good. The school has good capacity to make further improvements.

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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	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	1
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

13 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School and Nursery, Southend on Sea SS1 2RF

Thank you very much for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school. We were very impressed with your excellent behaviour in lessons and around the school and how well you work and play together. It was great to have time to talk with the School Council and thank you for giving up part of your lunchtime to do this.

We think Sacred Heart is a good school with some outstanding features. The way the school cares for you and supports your learning is excellent, as is your personal development and well-being. For example, you are very committed to living a healthy lifestyle and know how to make healthy choices both food and exercise.

Your teachers work very hard to make learning interesting for you and we were pleased to see how much you like your new topic work. We have asked the school to give you more time to develop your own ideas about these topics and to work more independently.

It was really good to see how hard you are working in lessons to do your best. Your learning targets and the teachers' marking in writing are helping you to know exactly what to do to improve your work. We have asked your teachers to make sure that targets and marking are just as helpful in mathematics.

Thank you again for enabling us to have such an interesting and enjoyable time and keep up the good work, especially in continuing to apply the core values throughout your lives.

With every good wish for your future lives,

Yours truly

Julie Winyard HMI