

St Margaret Clitherow Roman Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117474
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312628
Inspection dates	26–27 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Ian Jones

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	233
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Sloan
Headteacher	Mrs Geraldine Cartwright
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2003
School address	Broadhall Way Stevenage Hertfordshire SG2 8RH
Telephone number	01438 352863
Fax number	01438 352553

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Margaret Clitherow is a Roman Catholic Primary School of average size situated in the Broadwater area of Stevenage. The school serves families from different areas of the town. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational need, is also below average. The number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is in line with the national average, and few pupils have English as an additional language. The School has gained several awards including Healthy Schools, ECO Schools and Investors in People.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Margaret Clitherow is a good school. It has some outstanding features. The school, under the clear direction of the excellent headteacher, promotes a strong family philosophy with excellent care, guidance and support, and this contributes to the outstanding personal development and well-being of pupils. Pupils enjoy school a great deal. They have positive attitudes to learning and their behaviour is excellent. Pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations and good teaching. Their good attendance reflects their considerable enjoyment of school life. The school works closely in partnership with parents, who are overwhelming in their support for the school. In particular they praise its strong family values, the approachability of all staff and the additional guidance and support their children receive. As one parent, echoing the views of many, said, 'the school has a lovely caring atmosphere, just like an extension of a loving, caring family'.

Good provision in the Foundation Stage ensures that children enter Year 1 with skills and abilities above those expected for their age. This strong base is built upon well in Key Stages 1 and 2. As a result, Year 6 standards are above, and sometimes exceptionally above average. Progress is consistently good in English, mathematics and science, and the school is working effectively to further improve standards of writing. The school tracks the progress of pupils effectively and makes sure pupils receive support where needed. Pupils have a clear understanding of their targets, particularly in English, and the marking of work provides feedback to pupils on how to improve.

Outstanding care, guidance and support enables all pupils, including those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, to become increasingly confident learners. Pupils feel safe and recognize the need to adopt healthy lifestyles. Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers use a variety of teaching styles which engage pupils and support independent learning. In less effective lessons, progress is slower because pupils are not encouraged to develop their thinking skills. The curriculum is good and pupils benefit greatly from a wide range of additional activities that enhance their learning. Together these contribute well to pupils' future economic well-being. The school has recognised the need to further develop the curriculum by strengthening creativity through improving links between subjects.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher receives good support from her staff, who are dedicated to the school's continued development. Consequently, the capacity for further improvement is good. Governors are supportive. They provide good challenge and know the school well. Parents and carers are very pleased with the quality of education provided for their children. Strong links with partner providers help to support pupils' development. The school has made good progress since the last inspection.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage gets children off to a good start. Children feel safe and happy, because the staff are extremely caring and provide a warm and friendly environment. As one parent wrote, 'there is a holistic approach to educating the children and supporting the family'. The varied and well-planned activities ensure that children make the best possible progress in all areas of learning. They enter the nursery with skills, knowledge and understanding broadly in line with that expected of their age. Teachers and teaching assistants provide an effective blend

of direct teaching and encouragement to children to explore, work independently, and be creative. As a result, children make rapid progress and attain above nationally expected standards by the end of Reception. They enjoy enormously the varied opportunities to extend their learning as they use the very good facilities, both indoors and outdoors.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all pupils are encouraged to develop their thinking skills
- Develop the creative curriculum by improving links between subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good because of the outstanding care, guidance and support provided to pupils, supported by good teaching and the effective curriculum that the school offers its pupils. Pupils make good progress in the Foundation Stage, and enter Year 1 with standards that are above national expectations. Rates of progress during Key Stage 2 have improved and pupils now achieve well throughout the school. By the time they leave Year 6, pupils reach standards that are above, and sometimes exceptionally above, the national average. Pupils meet the challenging targets set by their teachers, who have high expectations of them. The effective additional support provided for those pupils who find reading and writing more challenging enables them to make good progress. Boys and girls meet with similar success, and pupils who are gifted and talented also achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They thoroughly enjoy their time in school, reflected in their very positive attitudes to work, their enthusiasm for learning and their good attendance. One parent wrote, 'my daughter is thriving in the environment. She loves school'. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is outstanding, and they are well prepared for life in a culturally diverse society. Their behaviour is exemplary and this supports the calm and purposeful atmosphere in school. Pupils understand the need for healthy diets and exercise, and actively participate in the range of sporting activities on offer. They feel safe in school and know who to go to if worried. 'We can use the worry box in the class', commented one. Pupils develop a keen sense of responsibility for others through roles undertaken in school, such as the house captains and lunch monitors. They have significant influence on school improvement through their school council. One member said 'we make the school better'. Pupils also contribute to the wider community through supporting a wide range of charities. Preparation for pupils' future economic well-being is very effective because of the good acquisition of basic skills, augmented by participation in a range of activities such as 'the young enterprise scheme'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils respond well to the consistently good teaching, and they make good progress in lessons. They love coming to school and demonstrate positive attitudes to their lessons, which they describe as 'interesting' and 'fun'. Teachers set clear learning objectives so that pupils are aware of what they are learning and why it is important. These are reinforced effectively throughout

lessons. Good partnerships between teachers and teaching assistants lead to effective classroom support for less able pupils. Key features of the best lessons include a good pace of learning, with pupils of all abilities being challenged well. In these lessons pupils make very good progress. However, in some lessons pupils do not develop their ideas enough because learning is too heavily directed by the teacher; for these pupils, progress is slowed. Pupils are guided to assess their own work, and this is particularly well developed in English, where pupils know their personal targets and how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy learning and they are well-served by the curriculum. It is particularly effective in supporting pupils' personal development and pupils are regularly encouraged to reflect on how their attitudes and how their actions affect others. The information and communication technology curriculum has improved since the last inspection and is now good. For example, pupils were seen developing good skills through using multimedia pages to create animations. Improvements have also been made in design and technology and physical education, where standards are now good. The school has identified the need to extend further the creative elements of the curriculum by establishing stronger links between subjects. There is a good range of enrichment activities for all pupils, both during and after school, and learning is enhanced by the wide range of visits and visitors to the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

'My children love the school and have never had any concerns or worries about attending', wrote a parent. This reflects the high quality of care, guidance and support provided by the school. By creating a safe and stimulating learning environment, teachers promote pupils' health, safety and enjoyment in learning. Arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are rigorous and careful attention is given to the emotional needs of young people. Pupils' academic progress is carefully monitored to ensure that pupils generally make good progress. Pupils have individual targets and most are aware of how well they are doing. Teachers' marking is constructive and shows pupils what they need to do to improve their work. The school works in close co-operation with parents and outside agencies to provide additional support where needed. One parent commented, 'all the teachers are very approachable and accessible, should any problems arise'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher leads very effectively, with a clear focus on raising standards and improving achievement within a caring environment. Her leadership is outstanding. She is well supported by the deputy, and together they have a clear and accurate view of the school. Monitoring and evaluation of the school's work ensures that strengths and areas for improvement are accurately identified. The latter are dealt with in the school's plans for further development. It is supported by the increasingly effective evaluation procedures informed by regular monitoring of the school's work. Good systems for checking on pupils' progress to their targets are being made more efficient with the introduction of a central computer database of such information. The governing body is supportive of the school and effectively holds the headteacher to account

for her work. Governors are actively involved in monitoring and planning the development of the school. Encouraged and supported by the headteacher, staff are enthusiastic and work effectively to bring about progress. With the evident good teamwork of staff and governors, the school is well placed to make further improvement.

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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?	2
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	1

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

28 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Margaret Clitherow RC Primary School, Stevenage SG2 8RH

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school recently.

We would like to tell you what we think about how well you are getting on and how well your school is helping you to learn. There are lots of things that we like about your school.

Some of them are:

- your behaviour is excellent and you get on well with each other
- you achieve good standards
- you learn a lot in lessons and make good progress because the teaching you receive is good
- the school is good at organising lots of interesting things for you to do
- all of the adults in your school make sure that you are really well looked after
- Mrs Cartwright, and all of the other people who help run your school, are very good at making sure that you get a good education.

We agree with your parents that you go to a good school. All of the adults in your school want it to be even better. We think that the most important thing for them to do is to improve lessons by giving you more opportunities to develop your thinking skills to help you learn more for yourselves. We have also asked your teachers to look very carefully at how subjects can better link together in lessons.

We enjoyed talking with you and finding out all about your super school. Keep on working hard, doing your very best and enjoying your time at school.

Yours sincerely

Ian Jones

Lead inspector