

The Holy Family RC Junior Mixed and Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117481
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312630
Inspection dates	22–23 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Missin

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	225
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Karen Day
Headteacher	Mrs Catherine McMahon
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2003
School address	Crookhams Welwyn Garden City Hertfordshire AL7 1PG
Telephone number	01707327419
Fax number	01707320308

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is about the same size as most other primary schools. Most but not all children attend pre-school. Attainment on entry is broadly average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average but a higher than average proportion have statements of special educational need. Most pupils come from White British backgrounds. A small proportion is from minority ethnic groups, the largest being Black African. There are no pupils at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. A below average proportion is eligible for free school meals.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a caring school where the promotion of Christian values is at the heart of its work. One parent wrote, 'This is a caring and considerate school which creates a strong sense of community and encourages pupils to think of others'. Inspectors agree. Pupils' personal development is promoted well and their spiritual awareness is outstanding. Pupils have a clear understanding of healthy lifestyles. They know how to keep safe. They enjoy school and appreciate what it provides for them. Attendance is above average. Attitudes and behaviour are good. Pupils are interested and eager to learn. Pupils contribute well to the school and wider parish community activities. However, the school is not yet fully successful in using these strengths to accelerate the progress which pupils make.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Standards in different year groups vary across the school, but mostly they are above average. Standards in the Foundation Stage are above those expected for children of this age and progress is good. They get a particularly good start in the Nursery. Standards in the current Year 2 are broadly average and progress is satisfactory. Standards in Year 6 are now above average. This is an improvement since last year and represents satisfactory progress given pupils' starting points. Indications are that until recently teaching did not ensure that pupils always successfully built on what they already knew and could do. Indications are that pupils are now making better progress but this is not yet consistent across the school. Older pupils are on track to meet targets that are more challenging in 2009 than in the past.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall but with some good and outstanding features. The marking of pupils' work is clear and effective. However, a continuing shortcoming is that work is not always matched closely enough to pupils' abilities and as a result, pupils, particularly those who are more able, are sometimes not helped to do their best. The curriculum is good. It is well balanced and provision in design and technology, which was a key issue at the last inspection, now fully meets requirements. The school has a very good range of well planned and innovative curriculum enhancements including a very successful choir, band and Latin group. The use of assessment data to track pupils' progress and setting learning targets is at a very early stage of development. Consequently, these strategies are not yet fully effective in relation to raising standards. Targets are very broad and pupils do not yet appreciate their use in helping them to improve.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. Since her appointment, the headteacher has successfully revised the approach to teaching letters and sounds and has begun to introduce a whole school assessment system. The roles of the newly appointed deputy and other senior leaders are, rightly being refocused. Governors support the school well and challenge it satisfactorily. However, a lack of clear reference to overall priorities in the school improvement plan limits its use as a management tool. It is difficult for leaders to use the plan to ensure that the school's work is focused securely on ensuring that pupils make the best possible progress in their learning, and on monitoring and evaluating the school's performance. The school provides a satisfactory standard of education for its pupils and has a sound capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make a good start to their schooling. They settle quickly because there is a strong emphasis on the development of personal and social skills and effective links are established with parents. The curriculum is good and gives children opportunities to learn in groups led by adults, and make independent choices from a range of interesting activities. However, access to the outside activity area is sometimes limited. Teaching is well planned and effective. Sometimes children spend too long sitting on the carpet listening passively. The assessment of children's progress is thorough and is used to plan activities for their differing abilities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate the progress that pupils make by using assessment data more sharply to monitor pupils' progress and to set appropriate learning targets.
- Improve the consistency of teaching and learning and ensure that work is provided for pupils' of all abilities, including those who are more able.
- Improve the effectiveness of school improvement planning to ensure that priorities to raise standards and accelerate progress are more explicit and that progress in meeting them is monitored rigorously by all leaders.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards on entry to the Nursery are broadly in line with those expected for their age. Children make good progress in their learning and most reach standards in all areas of learning that are above expected levels by the end of Reception. Standards in Year 2 are currently average in reading, writing and mathematics and pupils make satisfactory progress given their starting points. Standards in Year 6 have improved since last year, and now they are above average in English, mathematics and science. This represents satisfactory achievement given their higher starting points in Year 2. The recent progress that some pupils have made has been good, for example in mathematics in Year 6, but it is not consistent across the school. Pupils with learning difficulties make sound progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is good and their spiritual development is outstanding. Pupils have a very mature appreciation of the importance of reflection, prayer and worship. Pupils' enjoyment of school is shown in their positive approach to learning, their good behaviour and their above average attendance. However, although there have been no fixed-term exclusions this academic year there were a very high number of fixed-term exclusions last year. Most pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and many attend sporting clubs. Pupils relish the responsibilities given to them as peer mediators, reading partners and members of the school council. Pupils contribute to the community by making decisions about new playground equipment and collecting for charities. They regularly take part in parish or

local events and those organised with other schools. Their attitudes to learning and standards attained prepare pupils well for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall with some good and outstanding features. Where teaching is strongest, lessons are well planned and the good management of pupils results in good attitudes and behaviour. Teaching is enthusiastic and lively, and activities which interest and challenge pupils are provided. Speaking and listening skills are promoted well through well managed class discussions and the effective use of 'talk-partners'. Most teaching assistants work effectively with pupils who need additional support. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and make helpful comments which encourage them to improve. Weaknesses in teaching are that work is not always provided for pupils of different abilities including extension work to further challenge the more able. Sometimes the pace of lessons drops and pupils lose concentration and commitment.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum, including that for design and technology, now fully meets requirements. There is a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy. A recent initiative to develop writing across different subjects has been successful, although in some classes and some subjects there is an over-reliance on worksheets. The grouping of pupils by ability in mathematics is beginning to challenge more able pupils and to support those who find the subject difficult. The enrichment of the curriculum is good. There is a wide range of visits and visitors that motivate pupils to learn, for example, the visits of theatre groups. Clubs are very well attended by pupils and include sport, music and Latin.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pastoral care is good. Child protection arrangements are rigorous and careful attention is given to health, safety and safeguarding procedures. Pupils feel safe because there is a clear focus on anti-bullying. There are effective systems to support those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although the short-term learning targets for some are still being established. The school assesses pupils regularly and is now beginning to track attainment and progress more effectively. Pupils have learning targets in writing and mathematics but these are not used consistently well by all teachers and only a few pupils can recall them or agree that they are helping them to improve. In some classes pupils are given good opportunities to evaluate their own learning but this is not yet consistent across the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has worked successfully to build an effective partnership with parents and the local community. Recent initiatives such as the

focus on letters and sounds and the introduction of a new system to monitor the pupils' progress have been managed well. Teachers are developing their roles as subject coordinators well. However, several senior teachers are new to their roles and they do not yet have a sufficiently clear view of the impact of their work across the school. An important shortcoming is that the school improvement plan does not clearly prioritise initiatives and the drive to raise standards and accelerate progress is not clear enough. This makes it more difficult for progress to be monitored and evaluated by senior staff and by the governing body. As a result, some of the school's evaluations of its own performance have been too generous. Nevertheless, the school gives satisfactory value for money.

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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?	3
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	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

24 January 2008

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of The Holy Family RC Junior Mixed and Infant School, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 1PG.

Thank you for making my colleague and I so welcome when we came to the school recently to see how well you were doing.

Here are the things that we think are best about your school.

- Children in the Nursery and Reception classes get off to a good start to their time at school.
- The sensitivity and maturity that you show in prayer times and worship is very impressive indeed.
- You behave well and are very polite to visitors.
- The school provides lots of clubs, visits and visitors for you which you say make your learning fun.

There are a few things that we thought could be better.

- School leaders need to plan more clearly for the school's improvement and to keep checking on how well you are all doing.
- Teachers need to ensure that your work is better matched to what you can do and to use assessment information to make sure you all make the best possible progress.
- You need to work with your teachers to devise learning targets which will help you to do even better.

Thank you again for your welcome.

We wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Missin

Lead inspector