

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118762
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313078
Inspection date	31 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Susan Orpin

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	85
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jeff Cridland
Headteacher	Bridie Fogarty
Date of previous school inspection	31 March 2003
School address	Ackholt Road Aylesham Canterbury CT3 3AS
Telephone number	01304 840370
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Joseph's is a small Catholic primary school. Pupils are mainly White British. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average. More pupils than is usual are eligible for free school meals and there are some pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. There are fewer girls than boys. The school's roll has fallen in recent years. Although its future is now secure, the school recently went through a period of threatened closure.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School provides its pupils with a satisfactory standard of education. Pupils are confident and care for each other, many enjoy school and parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the work it does. Overall standards when pupils start school are below what are normally expected. Achievement is satisfactory but standards by Year 2 and 6 are below average. Pupils' progress through the school is inconsistent because their achievement is better in classes where teaching is more effective. Generally, pupils do better in English than in mathematics and science as a result of improvements in teaching.

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their moral, social and cultural development, are satisfactory. They behave well, feel safe and their spiritual development is good. Although many pupils enjoy learning, attendance is well below average. Despite some improvement, the high level of absence limits the progress that some pupils can make, so slowing the school's overall improvement to achievement. Pupils know how to stay healthy and are physically very active in lessons and in clubs after school, but they do not always make healthy choices when eating. They contribute well both in school and to the wider community through local events and fund raising. However, there are too few opportunities for them to show initiative in lessons.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Relationships are good and all adults use praise and encouragement well so pupils want to learn. Teachers make sure pupils are clear about the purpose of the lesson and they plan varied group activities that are well supported by teaching assistants. However, the teaching in some lessons does not challenge all pupils. Sometimes the pace of work is too slow and the work set too easy for pupils that are more able. The teaching of English, particularly writing, is better because lessons are more stimulating and interesting. Teachers assess pupils' work regularly, but the accuracy and usefulness of comments vary between classes. The curriculum is satisfactory and has improved well. Some good practical activities and themed weeks link subjects together and make learning more relevant and exciting. There is a good range of trips, visitors and after school clubs. Although reviewed annually, curriculum planning for mixed-age classes does not always ensure that all older pupils are challenged by their work. The care, guidance and support for pupils are satisfactory. Pupils' safety and security are cared for well, but the school's action to reduce absence has not yet had enough effect. The guidance pupils get about how well they are progressing and what they need to do to improve their work is satisfactory, but not yet consistent in all classes.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher leads by example and has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. She has successfully led the school through a period of uncertainty. Staff work together well and there have been improvements in pupils' behaviour, their achievement in writing and the curriculum. The monitoring of teaching is satisfactory, but despite some improvement, progress has been slow. Subject leaders do not all have a clear understanding of how to improve the consistency and quality of teaching in their areas. Data showing pupils' progress are analysed carefully and used to establish priorities for action. School targets are adequately challenging and generally based on pupils' attainment. The governance of the school is satisfactory. Governors work closely with the headteacher in the quest to take the school forward but recognise that they sometimes need to ask more challenging questions when they analyse the school's performance.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Provision in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Children's standards are below those expected for their age when they start school. Although a small group, their attainment in personal and social development, physical development and creative development is better, while standards in communication, language and literacy, mathematical development and knowledge and understanding of the world are lower. Children make satisfactory progress in the Reception Year but, by Year 1, most do not achieve all the goals expected for their age.

Children are suitably organised so the classroom provides a full range of areas of the curriculum. However, at times, their activities lack stimulation and excitement. Although planning takes account of the needs of reception children in a mixed-age class, at times the level of work and the questions asked by the teacher are too difficult for them. Children are cared for well, but the outdoor space is too cramped and unprotected from the weather, so some learning opportunities, for example the use of large play equipment, are limited. The school has plans to improve the outdoor area.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve attendance by increasing the range of strategies to discourage absence.
- Raise pupils' standards and improve achievement by making sure all teaching is sufficiently challenging and interesting, and that planning ensures that older pupils are all suitably challenged.
- Ensure that all subject leaders understand their key roles in improving the consistency and quality of teaching in their areas.

A small proportion of 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

Over recent years, standards by the end of Year 2 have been consistently below average with variable progress through Years 1 and 2. Pupils make a good start in Years 3 to 6, but their progress is again variable, so overall achievement is satisfactory. In recent years, there has been improvement in standards at the end of Year 6 although they have remained below average. The overall achievement of the current Year 6 is satisfactory, although standards remain below average. There is a larger than average number of pupils at the lower levels. Progress in English is satisfactory overall but standards are slightly lower in writing than in reading. However, pupils' writing is developing effectively as a result of improvements in teaching. Progress in mathematics and science is also satisfactory, but weaker than in English. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Many pupils enjoy school and, typical of many pupils, one said, 'We get a good education.' However, despite their positive attitudes, attendance is well below average, limiting improvement to achievement. Pupils are aware of ways to stay healthy, readily participating in physical

education lessons and clubs, but they do not all choose to eat healthily, for example, at lunchtimes. Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, although their spiritual development is good with strong links to the local Catholic Church.

Pupils' behaviour is good, pupils feel safe and describe the school as 'well disciplined'. They are confident and work together amicably. Around the school and in lessons they are safety conscious and care for each other. They contribute to the local and school communities well. They raise funds for charities such as the local hospice, the air ambulance and Children in Need, and participate in local music festivals, singing at Canterbury Cathedral. The school council is active and has written the pupils' version of the school's mission statement. Some pupils successfully undertake responsibilities around the school, for example, being office monitors or play leaders. However, in some lessons, where opportunities to learn independently are few, they are too reliant on the teacher. Pupils' ability to work constructively with others and their satisfactory progress in literacy and numeracy mean they are soundly prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Throughout the school, relationships are good and teachers manage their pupils well, so behaviour problems are few. Adults are encouraging so pupils want to learn and gain confidence. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning, working effectively with individuals and groups. Teachers ensure that pupils know what they will be learning and why, planning interesting and varied activities for small groups. In some lessons, the teacher provides good stimulation through demonstration. For example, in a Year 2/3 lesson, the teacher created an exciting and mysterious atmosphere, where she became the 'storyteller', so pupils' imaginations were captivated and they readily offered ideas. However, in some other lessons, the pace of work is too slow and the work too easy. On other occasions, the questions asked by the teacher are too difficult, so some pupils are unable to take part. The quality of teaching varies between classes, so while there is some better progress, it is not yet consistent throughout the school. The teaching of English, particularly writing, is better than other subjects because it is generally more stimulating, as a result of training and development in the school.

Assessment is satisfactory, marking is regular and informative, and pupils know their targets. However, assessment is not always sufficiently accurate, so sometimes pupils' work is not challenging enough.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has improved since the last inspection when it was unsatisfactory. Planning is reviewed annually and some links between subjects are being developed to make learning more interesting. There are practical activities and themed weeks such as Docks and Dungeons (history and geography), Cheese and Chocolate (science week) and an arts fortnight. However, planning for mixed-age classes is not always effective and sometimes leads to a lack of challenge for some older pupils. There is a satisfactory programme of personal, social and health education, which contributes to pupils' personal development. Information and communication technology is taught and its use to help pupils learn other subjects is satisfactory. The curriculum is enriched well by a good range of extra-curricular activities and clubs, on topics such as cello, dance,

bugs and sewing. Pupils benefit from learning French throughout the school, and music, especially singing, is a strength.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school is a caring community where pupils feel safe and secure. They know who to go to if they have any worries. Procedures to ensure their safety are robust and regular safety checks are made. There are satisfactory procedures to help children settle when they start school and prepare Year 6 pupils for secondary education. There are strong links with external agencies to provide support for pupils when required. For example, the family liaison officer helps groups, individual pupils, and their parents and there is a counselling group that provides good support. The school uses a range of approaches to reduce absence, but these are not yet having sufficient impact. Although there have been some signs of improvement, there is still some way to go. Pupils' academic guidance is satisfactory. Most know their targets, and some know how to improve, but assessment is not yet consistent throughout the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has a clear and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. She leads by example and has vision for the school's future, having successfully maintained staff motivation through the uncertainty of possible school closure. All staff work together well and the school is overwhelmingly supported by parents, as demonstrated in the questionnaires, where no adverse views were expressed. Priorities for action are appropriate and there have been improvements, for example in behaviour, the curriculum and pupils' achievement in writing. However, despite some progress in improving attendance and pupils' overall achievement, gains have not always been consistent.

The monitoring of teaching, undertaken by the headteacher, is rigorous, with clear indications that it has led to some improvement to teaching. However, its impact has not been sufficiently rapid, so there is not yet enough good teaching. The headteacher's good grasp of areas needing development is not yet fully shared by all subject leaders. There are extensive school data on pupils' progress, which are used well to give individual and groups of pupils' additional help when needed.

The school's targets are adequately challenging and based on an analysis of pupils' attainment. Data are analysed carefully and used to establish priorities for action.

The work of the governors is sound. They are highly committed, perceptive and very supportive. However, they are aware that they sometimes need to ask the school more challenging questions to hold it to account. Despite some remaining inconsistencies, there has been progress and improvements since the last inspection, and the school demonstrates a sound capacity to improve further.

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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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	4
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	3

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?	3
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

1 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Aylesham CT3 3AS

Thank you for making us so welcome in your school. We enjoyed talking to you and were very impressed by how friendly, polite and confident you are. Your school is giving you a satisfactory standard of education.

- These are some of the good points we found out about your school.
- You make satisfactory progress and sometimes you do better than this.
- Most of you enjoy school and feel safe.
- You behave well and value each other.
- You contribute well to your school and to the local community.
- You are taught in a satisfactory way and English lessons are often best.
- Most of you know your targets.
- Your English, especially writing, is improving because some lessons in this subject are better.
- The school is led in a satisfactory way; adults work as a team and the headteacher knows what to do to make the right improvements.

To help your school get even better, we have asked your teachers to:

- reduce absence so you do not miss important lessons and can improve your work
- improve the level of your work, which is below average at the moment, by making sure lessons are not too easy for you.
- make sure subject leaders help the headteacher improve the school so you can learn more
- make sure governors find out how well the school is doing.

Your attendance is well below average, so you can help by making sure you do not miss school unnecessarily.

Yours sincerely

Sue Orpin Lead inspector