

Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120222
Local Authority	Leicester City
Inspection number	313556
Inspection dates	7–8 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Paul Weston 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	353
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Lally
Headteacher	Gerry Hirst
Date of previous school inspection	2 November 2006
School address	Mere Close off Mere Road Leicester LE5 3HH
Telephone number	0116 2624418
Fax number	0116 2538230

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This large school serves an area of social deprivation in the city of Leicester. At its previous inspection in November 2006, the school was given a Notice to Improve. Pupils attend the school from a wide area, with two thirds from Catholic families. Around three quarters are from minority ethnic backgrounds with almost half in the early stages of learning English, this is above average. The percentage of pupils claiming free school meals is high. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, although fewer than average have statements of special educational need. Attendance is below average. More pupils join or leave the school at times other than the usual designated starting points than is found nationally. Pupils enter school with standards well below expected levels.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school has been through a difficult period over the last 12 months but, under the determined leadership of the headteacher and senior leadership team and better oversight by the governing body, has emerged as a stronger school. It now provides its pupils with a satisfactory quality of education. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. Since the previous inspection, leadership and management, pupils' achievement, and the quality of teaching have all improved and are now satisfactory. The school has accurately diagnosed areas of weakness and identified appropriate remedies which have secured the necessary improvements. These changes indicate that there is good capacity for further improvement.

Standards on entry to school are generally well below average. Children get off to a good start, with most making good progress. By the end of Reception, standards are close to those found nationally. From Year 1 onwards, most pupils make satisfactory progress so that, by the end of Year 2 and Year 6, standards are broadly similar to the national average. Over the last year, pupils made good progress in some classes but, in others, progress was adversely affected by the absence of staff. There is now a full complement of staff who are united in their commitment to move the school forward. There are still differences in the quality of teaching from one class to the next but the inadequate teaching noted at the time of the previous inspection has been eradicated. Some higher attaining pupils do not make the progress they should. The right actions have been taken to identify where improvement is needed and to provide appropriate training and resources for staff to strengthen provision further.

Most parents are pleased with their children's positive attitudes to learning, which are brought about by a number of significant factors. Relationships between staff and pupils are good. The school provides a satisfactorily broad curriculum with an interesting array of additional activities. This, coupled with the friendly, supportive atmosphere, helps pupils grow in confidence, enjoy learning and behave well. A sound start has been made in developing the curriculum but further improvement is required, particularly in ensuring sufficient depth and linking subjects together where appropriate. Pastoral care for pupils is good so that pupils feel safe in school, saying that, 'You never have to worry because there is always someone who will help you.' A good recent development has been the much stronger focus on providing better academic guidance through the marking of pupils' work and involving some pupils in the assessment of their own work. However, the new systems have yet to become fully established in all teachers' practice. Although pupils say they enjoy school, some do not attend often enough, which adversely affects their progress.

The headteacher and senior leadership team have provided the school with a clear sense of direction. They have good understanding of the school's strengths and areas that need to be developed. Staff and governors are well aware of these too. Subject leadership is strong in some areas, but those leaders whose subject has not been a priority have not had sufficient opportunity to develop their role. Recently appointed middle managers are taking on their responsibilities with greater confidence, increasing their support for school improvement. A more rigorous process of monitoring the quality of teaching and pupils' work and progress has strengthened management.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children coming into the Foundation Stage classes have a very successful start to their school careers. When children first enter the Nursery, there is a wide variation in their attainment. For some years, standards have been well below the level expected nationally but the current group of children are at or above the expected level. Once in school, children quickly make good progress in their learning and in their social and emotional skills. This is because the school gives them a wide range of experiences which are very carefully planned by teachers to make sure they learn everything they need in an interesting and stimulating way. They are particularly gaining a good grounding in reading skills and children in the Reception classes are beginning to use these to read independently and enthusiastically. All children enjoy coming to school and are particularly good at caring for each other. They understand the need to share and cooperate with others. This is helped by the strong relationships children have with the adults working with them. The Foundation Stage manager is very effective. She is continuing to improve the way children are taught. She has rightly identified that the urgent priority for the school is to improve the outside play area, so that children can use it throughout the day and in every season to extend their experiences.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve rates of progress for the higher attaining pupils throughout the school by challenging and expecting more of them in lessons.
- Develop the curriculum to ensure all subjects are taught in sufficient depth and make appropriate links between subjects so that the curriculum is more thought provoking, enjoyable and interesting for pupils.
- Work more closely with parents and carers to promote good attendance.
- Further develop the role of subject leaders other than those of core subjects.

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

Children generally enter the Foundation Stage with skills well below expectations for their age. A combination of good teaching coupled with a stimulating curriculum helps them make good progress. As a result, most children enter Year 1 with broadly average standards. From then on, most pupils achieve satisfactorily until they leave school in Year 6, although their progress through school has been somewhat uneven. For example, standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 have been gradually improving in recent years, drawing closer to the national averages. However, the 2007 national test results declined owing to a combination of circumstances. Firstly, this cohort had lower attainment on entry to Year 1. Secondly, a high number of new pupils in the early stages of learning English joined this group in Year 2. Finally, changes in teaching staff disrupted the continuity of teaching and learning. In response, school leaders have taken swift and decisive action which is beginning to secure improved rates of progress. In 2007, most pupils achieved average standards in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6. The school has successfully addressed the criticism of the previous inspection that it needed to raise achievement and standards, particularly in mathematics and

science. Demanding targets were in the main achieved, although greater challenge is still required for the higher attaining pupils throughout the school. Girls achieve significantly better than boys in most subjects. Staff know they need to raise attainment and progress of identified groups in some classes further. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress because of well targeted intervention and support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal and social development of pupils is good. Pupils care for each other well and this is reinforced by the strong Catholic ethos. Many pupils who have recently joined the school comment on the warm welcome they have received and the care taken of them when they arrived. Pupils are polite, behave well and show consideration for others. They have good attitudes to their learning and respond well to the positive role models offered by the adults in school. Pupils enjoy coming to school because, as one pupil reported, 'The teachers make learning fun.' However, last year, attendance fell to below the national average because a small number of parents took their children out of school for extended holidays in school time. The school has begun to tackle this issue. As a result, attendance has shown some improvement and is now broadly average, but more needs to be done. The school council makes a good contribution to decision-making and fundraising. It is currently planning a campaign to improve the activities available in the playground at break. Pupils contribute well to the community through effective links with the neighbouring junior school and by supporting a range of charities. Pupils feel extremely safe in school and are confident that they can obtain support if needed. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. Most of them also follow their own advice. 'You have to eat fruit because it makes your brain more faster', said one pupil, accompanied by the eating of a large bunch of grapes. Pupils know how to keep themselves and others safe. Older pupils have a very mature attitude towards avoiding smoking and drug use. The school is now better supporting pupils in the development of their independent skills. This, along with satisfactory achievement in basic skills, gives them a sound basis for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching has improved since the previous inspection. It is now satisfactory and most pupils make the progress expected of them. Many teachers use a variety of different classroom activities to encourage pupils to learn well. Most pupils are challenged to cooperate with each other on tasks which make them explore new ideas for themselves. In such lessons, pupils of all abilities work hard all the time and their rate of progress increases. However, in some lessons pupils have to sit still for too long without being given interesting things to do. Work is regularly marked, but the quality of comments varies and so feedback to pupils does not always tell them what they need to do to improve. Also, pupils are not adequately helped to assess their work for themselves. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, special educational needs and those whose first language is not English make good progress because of the good quality additional support they are given.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of pupils' reading, writing, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Statutory requirements are met. There have been recent efforts to develop a cross-curricular approach, such as using a visit to an art gallery to inspire projects in design and technology and numeracy, but such imaginative approaches are not yet a regular feature. 'Golden Time' enables all pupils to select and participate in a wide programme of interesting activities. These activities are much valued by pupils. Most pupils also participate in lunchtime and after school activities. All these things contribute to their skills and personal development. However, religious education and 'Golden Time' take up more than 10% of the curriculum, while subjects like history, geography and music receive limited amounts of time. This reduces the depth of the curriculum. The school has not evaluated the effects of this on pupils' progress in all subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff are committed to providing good care for their pupils. They demonstrate the kind of behaviour they expect from pupils and, in response, the school community is racially harmonious. Pupils who arrive in school with little or no English are well supported, quickly settle in and make good progress. Procedures for ensuring pupils' safety are in place and used when needed. Pupils feel safe in school and have confidence in their teachers. There has been recent improvement in the academic monitoring of pupils' work, which is now carefully tracked. Pupils falling behind in their work are quickly identified and supported through a range of additional learning groups. Pupils are set appropriate targets, although they are not yet fully involved in setting these for themselves. The school works well with parents and other agencies.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and senior leadership team have shown great determination to make the improvements required to address the areas of weakness identified at the time of the previous inspection. Following the drive to raise attainment and establish higher expectations, the school is now in a much stronger position. Leaders have fully resolved the previous long-term absences of staff and difficulties in recruitment. As a result, all pupils are currently enjoying stability of teaching. Staff and governors now have a good understanding of the school's strengths and its areas for development. One of the most important changes is that staff now share this understanding and are working together as a team to make improvements. Good systems to keep a regular check on the quality of teaching and pupils' work have been implemented. A rigorous system for monitoring pupils' progress each term now enables staff to see if any pupils are underachieving and there are better procedures for providing support for these pupils. Subject leaders are increasing their understanding of their roles and responsibilities. This understanding is strong in English, mathematics and science but now needs to develop in other subjects. A team of middle managers has been established but is in the early stages of development. Governance has improved and governors now have a much better understanding of the school and of their role in holding the school to account. The school now needs time to embed its new procedures and ensure that these all have positive effects on pupils' achievement.

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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	2

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	2

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	3
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?	2

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	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	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

9 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, Leicester LE5 3HH

We really enjoyed our visit to your school because everybody was so helpful and friendly. Thank you for welcoming us so well. We were very pleased to work with you in your classrooms, join in with your prayer services, and watch you play outside. We thought you would like to hear what we thought about your school and how it could get even better.

- What we liked about your school
- Mr Hirst and other adults in the school look after you and make sure everyone behaves well and is happy.
- You behave well and work hard in class. You are friendly and are happy to talk about what you are doing.
- You enjoy lessons because your teachers make lessons interesting and fun. You have lots of interesting activities, sports clubs, trips out of school and visitors into school.
- All adults look after you really well and you say this makes you feel safe and secure in school.
- Your teachers and teaching assistants work hard and try to get it right for each of you.
- Your parents really like the school and think that you learn well.

- What we have asked your school to do to make it even better
- Make sure the work teachers set each of you is hard enough to make you think and stretches you further.
- Think of even more interesting and enjoyable ways for you to learn in different subjects by sometimes linking them together.
- Work more closely with your parents to make sure that all of you come to school more regularly.
- Find out more about what is happening in subjects other than English, mathematics and science and share all the good things so that staff can learn from each other and get even better.

You can help by working as hard as you can on your reading, writing and mathematics. We feel certain that everyone at the school will continue to work hard to help you learn. You have some challenging targets for 2008. Continue to work hard and good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Weston Her Majesty's Inspector

9 November 2007

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Yours sincerely

Paul Weston
Her Majesty's Inspector

