

St Paul's Catholic Primary School, Thames Ditton

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125212
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	315194
Inspection date	18 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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	381
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr N Twist
Headteacher	Mrs M Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	20 October 2003
School address	Hampton Court Way Thames Ditton KT7 0LP
Telephone number	020 8398 6791
Fax number	020 8398 4275

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and looked at in greater detail the impact of measures taken to raise standards in mathematics, the progress of more able pupils and provision in the Foundation Stage. Different aspects of some lessons were observed, parents' questionnaires and a sample of pupils' work were examined and school information, including self-evaluation, was scrutinised. The inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

This popular school has grown steadily since it was last inspected as its intake has expanded from one to two classes. This expansion will have worked all the way through the school by September 2008. A below average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities covering a wide range of different learning and physical needs. Children start school with skills and capabilities above those expected nationally for their age. St Paul's is part of the Elm Partnership Confederation of schools and the Weybridge Deanery cluster of schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school where pupils of all abilities achieve very well, both academically and in terms of their personal development. Many parents describe St Paul's as 'an excellent school'. A parent summed up the views of many in praising the way, 'All children, from Reception upwards, are able to express themselves clearly and confidently and are empowered to do this at every turn.' Pupils are certainly encouraged to take on responsibility, both through the active and enterprising school council and through taking on jobs such as house captains and prefects. They also develop a growing interest in the wider community, not least through their support of a host of local, national and international charities.

The overwhelming majority of parents appreciate what some describe as school leaders' 'structured approach' in relation to organisation and discipline. Certainly, St Paul's operates as a very orderly community. Pupils' behaviour throughout the school is exemplary, and they get on and work very well together. Pupils greatly enjoy school and they develop into confident, articulate young people. It is the pupils themselves, for example, who successfully made the case for establishing a salad bar at lunchtime to ensure healthier diets. Pupils understand and respond very well to the encouragement they are given in all their endeavours. As a parent described, this 'makes my child appreciate that you are rewarded for effort as well as results, which makes him try harder'.

Standards have been consistently high over many years and this represents outstanding achievement for pupils of all abilities, including the more able and those with learning difficulties and disabilities, some of whom achieve spectacularly well. In 2007, every pupil in Year 6 attained the nationally expected level and two thirds attained higher levels in English and science. Standards in mathematics were also significantly above average, but not quite as high as in the other subjects. School leaders have looked carefully at pupils' progress in mathematics and have made changes to the way this subject is taught. Pupils are now taught in ability sets from Year 2 onwards and greater emphasis has been given to ensuring all pupils fully master the basic numeracy skills they need to do well. The school's tracking data shows this is beginning to have a positive effect, and the brisk pace of progress in lessons shows that pupils of all abilities respond very well to teachers' exceptionally high expectations.

Teaching and learning are outstanding because lessons are consistently good or better. This is particularly remarkable given the number of new staff joining the school. This consistent quality has been achieved through school leaders' thorough monitoring of lessons. This focuses rigorously on the pupils' progress and learning and has quickly identified where teaching can be improved and where additional training and support has been needed. As a result, lessons are very well planned to challenge and extend all pupils. The pupils rise to this challenge, work at a brisk pace and get a lot done. Pupils themselves stress that this does not mean that anyone is left behind. As one pointed out, 'If you don't understand something, you ask, and teachers make sure it's explained really well.' Marking is of a high standard because it gives pupils clear guidance on what they need to do to move their learning on. Excellent care and welfare arrangements help to ensure that pupils feel safe. They and their parents say that bullying is exceptionally rare and that any incidents are quickly dealt with.

One of the features that stands out about St Paul's is the way teaching assistants are used not merely to support teachers but to actively teach some groups and classes. Although this concerns some parents, the high quality of provision is maintained through school leaders' careful

monitoring. Teaching assistants who graduate to become 'leaders of learning' in the school have their work monitored and supported with the same rigour as the teachers.

This is not a school that achieves high standards in the national tests at the expense of other subjects. Pupils enjoy the rich variety of activities that have been extended this year to include French in Years 4 to 6. Teachers are becoming increasingly adept at linking subjects together to make pupils' learning even more relevant and fun. For instance, Year 1 pupils' work on toys included elements of science, art, information and communication technology (ICT), history and mathematics. For example, they used Venn diagrams to sort toys by different materials and by whether they were old or new. The curriculum is enriched through a good range of well-attended clubs covering a wide range of sports and other activities.

As one parent aptly put it, 'The school ethos of 'work hard but have fun too' is good preparation for life.' St Paul's success has been achieved as a result of the drive and commitment of the headteacher, leadership team and a dedicated governing body who have together steered the school through its steady year-on-year growth. Though school leaders know that their school is doing very well, there is no hint of complacency. What makes their leadership and management outstanding is their clear, shared focus on continued improvement in standards and in the personal development of the pupils. This, and the way in which quality of provision and standards have been maintained over a period of considerable change, show the school's excellent capacity for continued improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

'The care that is taken to ensure a smooth entry into school life for both the children and the parents has been fantastic.' This view is typical of the many favourable comments voiced by parents of children in the Reception Year and it gives an accurate picture of the good start that children have at the beginning of their education. Children quickly develop in confidence and concentration as they choose activities for themselves and settle attentively to more formal teacher-led activities, for example in supporting their mathematical development. Pupils make good progress and leave the Reception Year having attained standards that are significantly above national expectations in almost all of the areas of learning. It is just physical development where standards are not as strong. This is because of limitations to the Foundation Stage learning environment. The outside learning area does not allow children the opportunity to make their own choice about whether they would like to play indoors or outside. They have to wait for an adult to accompany them. This limits their ability to improve on their physical development. The decor of the Foundation Stage classrooms is tired looking and the display less stimulating and vibrant than in the rest of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Brighten up the accommodation and facilities in the Foundation Stage and develop plans to give children more ready access to outdoor activities.

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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?	1
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	1

Achievement and standards

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

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	1
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?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

01 April 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Paul's Catholic Primary School, Thames Ditton, Thames Ditton, KT7 0LP

Thank you for making me so welcome when I came to visit your school today. I am writing to tell you what I found.

Some of you told me that you thought St Paul's is a fantastic school. You are right! It is an outstanding school where you do very well and achieve high standards. The school also helps you to leave school as mature well-rounded young people.

I was very impressed with the exemplary behaviour I saw today and the excellent concentration you all show in lessons. Well done! Thanks are also due to your teachers, who do such a very good job keeping you on your toes with lively lessons and interesting activities for you to tackle. I could see how much you enjoy all the different subjects you learn and several of you told me about all the clubs and after-school activities that you take part in.

Staff look after you very well, and I was pleased to see that your teachers' marking give you all very clear guidance on how to make your work even better. Do make sure you always read their comments carefully and follow their advice.

Your headteacher, senior staff and governors all work exceptionally well together to make the school the success it is. They have helped to make sure that new teachers who join the school, and the teaching assistants who teach you for some lessons, are consistently effective in helping you make such great progress. They have also ensured that the school has maintained its success during the period over which it has doubled in size.

There have already been improvements this year that are helping to further raise standards, particularly in mathematics. I have asked the school to look at just one aspect where I would like to see further improvement, and that is in the classrooms and facilities for the reception children. I have asked the school to develop plans to improve the outside area for reception and children's access to it and to update the classrooms and make them more attractive.

Best wishes,

Selwyn Ward

Lead Inspector