

Holy Rood Catholic Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126426
Local Authority	Swindon
Inspection number	315543
Inspection date	12 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Eira Gill

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	180
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Phil Gilvin
Headteacher	Denise Slaght
Date of previous school inspection	24 March 2003
School address	Groundwell Road Swindon SN1 2LU
Telephone number	01793 523802
Fax number	01793 523802

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: •provision and achievement in the Foundation Stage, including independent learning •provision and achievement of the children who are in the early stages of learning English •how effectively leaders and managers bring about improvement by using and setting targets linked to accurate analysis and tracking of the pupils' attainment and progress. Evidence was gathered from observations, school assembly and observations of pupils at lunch and play. It was also gathered from teachers' assessments, pupils' work and discussions with pupils, staff, governors and parents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the schools' own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Children's attainment on entry broadly matches that expected for their age but it can vary from year to year. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language is high compared to that found nationally. Numbers of such pupils have risen sharply in recent years. The school is oversubscribed.

The school holds the following quality marks: Active Mark, Healthy Schools Status, Healthy Schools Award and Quality Mark Basic Skills.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with outstanding features and a very strong Christian ethos. The headteacher has been highly successful in creating a calm and reflective community. Her leadership of the pupils' personal development is outstanding. Personal development and well-being are outstanding and pupils receive exemplary care in a very purposeful environment for learning. As one pupil said, 'We all feel very safe here'. Many parents wrote expressing their appreciation of the care their children receive. One typical comment is, 'My son is receiving the best care and education he could possibly get in my view. I would recommend this school to all parents'. The school is oversubscribed.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and is one of the reasons achievement is good. Pupils enjoy excellent relationships and the above-average level of their basic skills means they are well prepared for the future. Pupils are extremely knowledgeable about how to live healthily and safely. Attendance is only satisfactory, despite the school making every effort to encourage parents not to take extended holidays in their country of origin during term time. Pupils' contribution to the school and the wider community is excellent. The young members of the school council take their responsibilities seriously. One reported, 'We have special meetings and we can help to make the school a better place like the buddy bench in the playground for people who are lonely'. Pupils present their selected 'readings' weekly for the celebration of Mass in the church next door in front of a large congregation of local residents and parents. Spiritual, moral, social and emotional development is outstanding.

Pupils achieve well throughout the school. Children in all groups make a positive start in the Reception classes from a very wide range of starting points. Teaching and learning is good, and sometimes outstanding. Provision and achievement have improved since the last inspection in the Foundation Stage and children are happy and very well cared for. Good progress continues in Years 1 and 2, particularly in the vital areas of speaking and listening. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above average by the time pupils leave. Pupils who are in the early stages of learning to speak and write in English make good progress and work mainly within average national standards. Pupils who are potentially capable of attaining at the higher levels make particularly good progress because of good teaching and improved grouping arrangements.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. High expectations of pupils' behaviour result in a steady output of work. Lessons have clear objectives. Planning is very thorough and caters for the needs of all groups of pupils. Explanations are usually lively. Teachers' questioning skills vary. They are mostly good but, sometimes, teachers do not probe sufficiently and are not demanding enough of pupils who do not have their hands up. Teaching assistants usually give good support. Pupils in Year 2 are beginning to evaluate their own work with the help of their teachers. Teachers are conscientious in marking pupils' work.

The school provides a good curriculum, with significant improvement made in multicultural as well as subject links. Planning in English for all groups of pupils now includes a tightly structured system for teaching speaking and listening skills. This is proving successful in ensuring that pupils move forward in their learning in appropriate small steps. They are beginning to sustain their listening better and are keen to 'have a go' at answering questions. Pupils' understanding of different cultures is good. In assembly, Year 1 children from Poland and Goa wore their national costumes and explained their traditions. The 'Explorer Dome' (a portable planetarium), practically filled the hall during the inspection and excited pupils climbed inside it and took

turns in experiencing the wonders of space and noisy scientific experiments. Gifted and talented children have every opportunity to succeed particularly in their information and communication technology (ICT) skills. The curriculum is enriched well with visits and visitors, and a good range of after-school clubs for sport and creative activities.

Care, guidance and support are good, with outstanding care shown to all groups of pupils. Provision for all groups of pupils is effective and supported well by good links with outside agencies. The school has tried to ensure that adults working and helping in the school mostly represent the many different cultures present in the pupil population. However, leadership and governance agree more effort is needed to include adults from all heritage countries to give pupils more confidence and to improve community cohesion even further. Academic guidance for all pupils is good. Although teachers give pupils very clear targets and stick them in the front of their books, pupils find their targets difficult to remember because there are too many.

Leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher and governors include pupils equally, whatever their needs. They monitor and evaluate the school effectively. They are continuously seeking to improve the school further and capacity is developing well. The improvement plan is based on good self-assessment, although intended initiatives to secure improvement are for one year only and need to be projected further forward. Challenging long-term targets are in place for pupils, and the school's track record over time shows their effectiveness. Managers are aware, however, that the system for tracking pupils' progress is at an early stage of development and is not useful for quickly identifying pupils who might be lagging behind.

Provision for pupils who are in the early stages of learning English is good. Parents wrote saying how happy they are with the good care taken of their children and the high quality of teaching. A typical comment is, 'Teachers are always willing to make time to listen and talk and there is a warm and friendly atmosphere'. Most pupils make good progress, particularly in their personal development, and in reading and writing. Standards in Year 2 are broadly average compared to pupils nationally but pupils are having difficulty with their understanding of mathematical vocabulary. More finely tuned teaching strategies are now in place to improve pupils' understanding but they have yet to have an impact. Small-group teaching for English and mathematics twice a week is proving to be more effective in improving pupils' skills. Teaching is good. Occasionally, teachers do not use pupils' misunderstandings to probe deeper and to improve their speaking and listening skills. Learning assistants usually give very effective support. Leadership of this aspect of the school is effective.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision for children in the Foundation Stage is good and much improved. Because of the strong care provided for them by teachers and the very effective support of skilled teaching assistants, practically all children settle quickly and make outstanding progress in their confidence and social and emotional skills. One parent commented, 'My daughter wants to come to school even when she is sick'. The majority of all pupils meet or exceed the early learning goals in all areas of learning although a significant minority are still catching up in their speaking, listening, writing and calculating skills. Children's skills in speaking and listening are weak overall on entry because a high percentage of the children are in the very early stages of speaking English as an additional language. Nevertheless, effective organisation and support ensures that most pupils who find learning English difficult make good progress. The quality of teaching and learning is good, and sometimes outstanding when exciting activities are

organised using excellent resources. Occasionally, the children lose their concentration when they are expected to sit on the carpet for too long but mostly they enjoy their learning immensely, especially when exploring the outside environment. The school makes good use of the outside learning environment. However, the space available restricts the pupils' movement and opportunity to improve their physical skills.

What the school should do to improve further

- modify the system for setting short-term targets for pupils so that they know precisely what it is they have learned and the next small step in learning they need to take
- further develop the system for tracking pupils' progress throughout the school in order to identify quickly pupils who may not be making sufficient progress
- ensure that pupils in the very early stages of learning English have the opportunity to be with adults from their own cultures with whom they can converse easily to give them greater confidence and pride in their heritage.

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	3
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	2

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?	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?	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

16 February 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Holy Rood Catholic Infant School, Swindon, SN1 2LU

This letter is to tell you what I found out during the recent inspection. I really enjoyed coming to the school to meet you and I would like to thank those of you who took your time to speak to me. I was very interested to hear what you had to say about your school. I found your school to be good, with some aspects quite outstanding, and could tell that you and your parents quite rightly feel the same.

Here are the things I found to be best about your school:

- you are all making good progress in your work
- you are all being taught well by your teachers
- your headteacher, teachers and governors take great care of you
- your behaviour is exemplary and you have excellent attitudes to your work
- you enjoy school very much and have outstanding relationships with each other and this reflects the excellent care provided by the school
- those of you in the Year 1 assembly showed just how good you all are at singing, playing musical instruments, dancing, handling shadow puppets and telling us about the traditions of the countries you come from
- you enjoy a wide range of learning activities that help you to become very clear about how to live healthily and safely and how to be a very caring member of a community.

Here are the things that I have asked the school to do better:

- to make sure your teachers give you one target at a time so that you can remember the small steps in learning you need to make to improve your work
- to improve the way the headteacher and governors watch the progress you make as you move through the school so that they can spot any of you who might not make good enough progress.
- to try very hard to encourage adults who can speak your languages to help out in the school so that you all have someone to talk to if you have problems or if you just want a chat.

Very best wishes

Eira Gill ? Lead Inspector