

Sacred Heart RC Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132728
Local Authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	316002
Inspection dates	11–12 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Lesley Clark

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	73
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Michael Morrison
Headteacher	Mr P Griffin
Date of previous school inspection	22 September 2003
School address	Broomfield Avenue Northallerton North Yorkshire DL7 8UL
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small catholic primary school draws its pupils from the parish of Sacred Heart and has a broad intake of pupils. It has more than doubled in size since opening in 2000 but the number on roll has steadied in the last three years. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average but higher in some year groups; the proportion with a statement of special educational need is also average. Eleven per cent of pupils are learning English as an additional language. The languages spoken include Malayalam, Polish and Filipino.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

Although providing an acceptable standard of education, this school is not as effective as it should be. Despite some good features of the curriculum, which contribute to pupils' enjoyment of school, good spiritual guidance and satisfactory teaching quality with some lively lessons, standards are beginning to slip and the number of pupils underachieving is starting to increase because the school lacks drive and direction from the top. Those responsible for leadership and management have not addressed all the changes required from the last inspection, in particular those relating to assessment and future planning. With the help of the local authority, the school has made a start on these but too recently to have an appreciable impact on pupils' learning. Consequently, the pupils that are more able are not always challenged enough and provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is inadequate. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the leadership and management of the school.

Standards, while broadly average, are not as high as they have been and the most recent results in national tests at the end of Year 6 confirm that the school has not met its targets in English and mathematics for the second year running. The school's assessments confirm that some of the more able pupils do not do as well as they should, with fewer exceeding expected levels than predicted. In particular, results in English have gone down, especially in writing, despite the school's focus on this aspect. This is because the school is reliant on outside support from consultants rather than having effective systems from within. For example, standards rose in Key Stage 1 where the English subject leader had intensive support but dropped in Key Stage 2 because information was not disseminated sufficiently well. Although the school now has a clear overview of pupils' achievement from Years 1 to 6, this does not link into assessment systems which teachers can use to raise standards. Marking, for example, does not make clear to pupils what they need to do to improve their work and so pupils are not involved in checking their own learning. Achievement continues to be broadly satisfactory because conscientious teaching ensures that the majority make satisfactory progress. Inevitably, though, with imprecise assessments, some of the more able pupils coast along. Recently, pupils have been targeted for extra support but staff are awaiting further training to ensure that this is effective.

Leadership and management of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are inadequate. Without precise, regularly reviewed, individual learning plans, well matched to pupils' needs, there are no means to measure progress accurately. Individual teachers plan separate work for different ability groups in their class but do not have up-to-date information on hand to ensure that what they are doing helps those with specific learning difficulties to meet clearly defined targets designed to push their learning on. Consequently, they do not always make as much progress as they could. Similarly, the school identifies a small number of pupils as gifted and talented but that is as far as it goes. Pupils who are learning English as an additional language fare better because they receive good support from outside agencies, but initially they flounder because the school does not have systems to ensure that their learning is effective right from the start, relying on pupils to 'catch on' through working alongside others.

Pupils' personal development is satisfactory and they follow a satisfactory curriculum. Most pupils are happy at school and they enjoy art projects and sports events with other schools, and residential trips. Attendance has improved in the last year, following effective liaison with parents on this issue, and is now above average. While most parents agree that their children are happy, a substantial proportion believe that the school does not take account of their suggestions and concerns and that communication is a problem. Pupils have an appropriate awareness of why it is important to live healthy lives; they play energetically at break and lunchtimes and have satisfactory sporting opportunities both in and after school. They have a strong sense of community through fundraising for charities and taking part in a regular worship and lunches with parishioners. The school council has not really got off the ground, despite initial enthusiasm, and so pupils have a limited voice in school matters. Overall, their satisfactory skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) give them a reasonable preparation for their future lives.

There are strengths in the pastoral care and support given to pupils at a personal level, and the small size of the school means that everyone is well known. The school operates as a large family; this helps pupils to feel secure and they respect their teachers. Academic support and guidance, however, remain weaknesses. The governing body is supportive but does not focus sufficiently closely on standards and achievement, which limits its effectiveness as a 'critical friend' to the school. The leadership and management lack rigour. Managers do not take consistent and effective actions to ensure continued improvement. Systems to check the quality of the school's work rely on encouragement, rather than tackling weaknesses with clearly defined areas for development and then checking to see whether there is improvement. The school rightly identifies much of its work as satisfactory on balance but its weaknesses are such that its capacity to improve is inadequate.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

On entry to school, children's skills are appropriate for their age. They settle in quickly, responding to adults' calm approach. They make satisfactory progress and, by the end of Reception, most reach the level expected of their age in most areas of learning. Teaching quality and children's learning are satisfactory. The recent development of an outside play area, as well as different activities set up indoors, is helping children to learn through discovery. However, routines to ensure that children use time productively are less secure and so some time is wasted. Adults use assessment satisfactorily to establish what children know and can do but do not use the information sufficiently well to determine what children should learn next and how best they should do so.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve leadership and management so that the school has clear direction and takes consistent and effective actions to secure improvement and prevent underachievement.
- Improve support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities so that there are secure systems to check progress regularly against achievable targets and thereby ensure effective learning.
- Increase the level of challenge for the more able pupils, especially in English.
- Ensure that teachers' systems for assessment and marking of work help pupils to understand what they need to do to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are broadly average, as shown in results in national tests at the end of Years 2 and 6. Results can vary widely from year to year, as year groups are very small and contain different proportions of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. While the vast majority of pupils achieve satisfactorily, some of the more able pupils do not always reach the higher levels, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make limited progress because of inadequate support. Standards are generally a little higher in mathematics than in English though the school has rightly identified problem-solving as an area to improve. Standards in reading are better than in writing, especially in Key Stage 2. The most recent test results in science show that when pupils are well taught they score highly, as reflected in the high proportion of pupils attaining the higher Level 5 in science in 2007. The school's targets are inaccurate because they do not relate to assessments of what pupils can do.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils like coming to school and say, 'it's fun' and 'we see our friends'. They dislike the way new ventures fizzle out, saying, 'The homework stickers will go to pot like last year with the spelling logs' and, comparing the school council to a kettle, 'You fill it up, wait for it to boil, then pour it out and the cup of tea goes cold.' Nevertheless, they are full of enthusiasm and think school would be improved if staff 'keep things going so we learn better'. Behaviour is satisfactory. While most pupils behave well, pupils and parents confirm there is some anti-social behaviour, including name-calling. The school's records indicate that this is dealt with appropriately. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall, with strengths in their spiritual development. The day's work begins and ends with prayers and those written by the pupils are moving testaments to their faith.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching quality is satisfactory, as is pupils' learning. The teaching of mathematics and science in Key Stage 2 is more effective than in English, where tasks are repetitive and not always well thought out to extend pupils' skills. Teachers' good subject knowledge in mathematics and science ensures that pupils learn well in Years 5 and 6. The quality of teaching in Key Stage 1 is more consistent across the full subject range. Although much of pupils' learning is enjoyable, teachers sometimes miss opportunities to involve pupils and get them to think for themselves. Teachers use ICT satisfactorily as a teaching aid and ready access to laptops, an improvement since the last inspection, benefits pupils' learning. Marking is encouraging but rarely makes clear what pupils need to do to improve the content rather than the presentation of their work. Consequently, pupils tend to be passive rather than active learners.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum makes suitable provision for teaching the skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT but makes limited provision for teaching these through other subjects. Provision for art, music

and physical education is strong, well supported by links with other schools and after-school clubs. Although the curriculum is planned to cover subjects on a two-year cycle, it is not managed robustly enough to ensure that pupils do not repeat some aspects of the work if they spend three years in one class. A good range of educational visits and visitors to school enriches the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Good provision for pupils' welfare and robust procedures for child protection keep pupils safe and happy. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is inadequate because there is no up-to-date information to ensure that their learning needs are met. Support for pupils learning English as an additional language is satisfactory, with good use of outside agencies to develop their language skills. Academic guidance is weak. The school's assessment systems give a clear overview of pupils' progress as they move through the school. However, teachers do not use the information to set accurate and challenging targets that help pupils to know how to improve the quality of their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

The school has a pattern of starting new initiatives and then letting them drift without evaluating their effectiveness. Self-evaluation, while accurately showing both strengths and weaknesses, bases its judgement of effectiveness on future plans rather than on the impact of its actions. School improvement planning lacks rigour and the systems to check its effectiveness are inadequate. Similarly, the systems to check the quality of teaching and learning do not ensure improvement because points for development are imprecise and do not link to actions. Governance is beginning to ask questions but, without a strong focus on achievement and standards, is hampered in calling the school to account. With the help of the local authority, the school has made a start on improving planning, assessment, pupils' writing, aspects of mathematics and Foundation Stage provision. Unfortunately, progress has been too slow, even allowing for the diverse demands on the headteacher's time in a small school; those responsible for leadership and management do not prioritise and so time is wasted. Currently the headteacher is responsible for too many aspects of the school's work. Plans are in place for subject leaders to help check the work of the school but it is not clear how this links into effective action planning to promote high standards. The school provides inadequate 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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4

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	4

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	2
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Sacred Heart RC Primary School, Northallerton, DL7 8UL

Thank you very much indeed for talking to me so openly about your school. I enjoyed meeting you and observing you work and play and seeing older pupils taking responsibility around the school. Most of you seem to enjoy school and your attendance has improved. Although most of you behave well, you said that some children can be unkind to each other. I agree with you that the play leaders need more training in order to help with this. You have good relationships with your teachers and like it when they make you laugh.

However, some things need to be improved. You are quite right when you say that things start and then fizzle out, like the spelling logs. This means that your work suffers and some of you do not achieve as well as you should. Your school has been given a 'Notice to Improve', which means it has a short time to put right some very important things. This is what it needs to do.

- Improve the leadership and management so that the school has clear direction and ensures that you all do as well as you should.
- Make sure that teachers regularly check that those of you with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are learning as much as you should be.
- Check that those of you who find work quite easy are really stretched, especially in English lessons.
- Make sure that all teachers tell you exactly what you need to do to improve your work.

You can help by working hard, by asking questions if you do not understand, by checking your work to see if it could be improved and by saying if the work is too easy or too hard. I hope your school and class councils get a lot done this year.