

St Vincent's Roman Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 109631 |
| Local Authority | Bedfordshire |
| Inspection number | 324992 |
| Inspection date | 10 February 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Keith Sadler |

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 223 |
| Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS | 0 |
| Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years | 0 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Danny Murphy |
| Headteacher | Mrs Pauline Cotton |
| Date of previous school inspection | 22 February 2006 |
| Date of previous funded early education inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Date of previous childcare inspection | Not previously inspected |
| School address | Hammersmith Gardens Houghton Regis Dunstable Bedfordshire LU5 5RG |

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| Age group | 3–11 |
| Inspection date | 10 February 2009 |
| Inspection number | 324992 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and the Early Years Foundation Stage. In addition, the following issues were investigated.

- Do pupils achieve as well in science as they do in English and mathematics?
- How well are the Year 6 pupils progressing and are they on track to continue good achievement?
- Has the school ensured that the satisfactory teaching found at the previous inspection has been improved?
- Are all necessary child protection and safeguarding procedures in place?

Evidence was gathered from the school's analysis of pupils' progress, a scrutiny of samples of their work and observations of lessons. Discussions were held with staff, governors and pupils. In addition, the responses of parents' questionnaires were analysed and their comments taken into account. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors 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 this report.

Description of the school

St Vincent's is an average sized primary school. It serves the Catholic community of Houghton Regis, Dunstable and surrounding villages. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of the Nursery class, which provides for children on a part-time basis, and a Reception class. The school gained primary status from September 2007 which enabled pupils to remain in the school for Years 5 and 6 with the current Year 6 pupils being the first cohort in that year group.

A large majority of pupils are of White British heritage and there are a small number from a range of other ethnic backgrounds. There is an increasing number of pupils who join the school at an early stage of learning English, although numbers are small. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. Most of these have learning difficulties relating to literacy.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Vincent's provides a good and rounded education for its pupils. It is effective because it has good leadership, management and teaching and a well-planned curriculum. There is good provision to promote the pupils' personal development. It has shown good improvement since the previous inspection and this demonstrates a good capacity for further improvement.

Throughout the school, pupils achieve well and make good progress. Those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because their learning needs are quickly identified and skilled teaching assistants give them good quality support. Similarly, pupils who speak English as an additional language are given good support and they quickly integrate into the school and make good progress. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive and are pleased to have chosen the school for their children. 'I believe that St Vincent's provides well for my children. I feel that all of their needs are met and they have thrived and achieved well.' This typifies the many positive comments received from parents.

Children enter the Nursery with skills that are slightly below those typically found, particularly in their communication and language skills. Because provision is good, they achieve well and, by the time that they enter Year 1, most children attain the expected goals. Progress is steady in Year 1 and accelerates in Year 2 and standards in national tests for Year 2 pupils in reading, writing and mathematics are above average. Good progress continues in Years 3 to 6. Standards have been consistently well above average at the end of Year 4. Because the deputy headteacher has led and managed the new Year 5 and 6 classes so well, she has ensured that these pupils continue to achieve well. Current Year 6 pupils are on track to attain standards that are well above average.

The headteacher is much admired by parents and governors because she is deeply committed to the school and its improvement. She is supported well by the excellent deputy headteacher and together they provide clear direction for the school. There have been improvements in leadership and management since the previous inspection. The governors, for example, are now much more involved in the checking of the school's provision. This is because the chair of governors provides clear and positive leadership and ensures that governors' roles and responsibilities are shared and that they are well trained. In addition, the responsibilities of subject leaders have been strengthened. For example, the science subject leader has led a successful improvement project to strengthen pupils' investigative skills. This was because analysis of work and the curriculum showed that too little opportunity was being provided for practical work. This is not now the case. Standards in science are equally as strong as those for English and mathematics because teachers now ensure that work builds on pupils' previous learning well. The school development plan contains too many priorities and there is not enough detail provided to evaluate progress.

The inspection confirms the school's view that the quality of teaching is most often good. There have been improvements, particularly in the quality of pupils' learning, since the previous inspection. Teachers ensure that there is always a positive climate for learning because they manage the pupils' behaviour exceptionally well and ensure that relationships are consistently positive. As one school councillor said: 'We have a close bond with our teachers. They treat us like we should be treated and they are always enthusiastic.' In most lessons, teachers' questioning skills are of high quality and this enables them to ensure that activities are matched well to

pupils' learning needs. This is aided by teachers' good quality lesson plans in which work provides challenges for pupils of different levels of ability.

All child protection procedures and safeguarding arrangements are in place and meet current regulations. Pastoral support is good because the staff know the pupils well and they care for them particularly well. There is a very positive atmosphere, based on the school's positive Christian ethos, and the school provides a safe learning environment for pupils. Taken together, these factors enable pupils to achieve well in their personal development. Behaviour is good both in classes and around the school. Pupils enjoy school and they have an excellent understanding of the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle. They are given a good grounding in citizenship and in contributing to the school community through taking on responsibilities, such as being members of the influential school council. Within the local and the wider communities, pupils make good use of the many opportunities provided for them to make a useful contribution. These range from regular charitable fundraising to supporting and developing links with a school in Nigeria. Pupils are prepared well for their move to secondary school.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Children make good progress in both the Nursery and Reception classes because the teaching by all adults is good and activities are well planned and interesting. Assessment of the children is thorough and ongoing and leads to interesting and wide-ranging activities that are matched well to the children's abilities. No time is wasted and there is a good balance between activities which are led by adults and those that the children choose to do themselves. Good transition arrangements are in place for when children join the Nursery and also when they later move into Reception and this means children settle very quickly into learning. Adults move between classes which enables them to know the children well and what they are capable of. All adults have high expectations and this is shown in the rapid development of children's personal and social skills and mathematical knowledge.

Adults, quite rightly place a high emphasis on good listening and speaking skills and, as a result, children can concentrate for longer periods of time and start to have more meaningful conversations, something they can't always do when they first join the school. Another reason why children do well is because of the good relationships which exist between them and the adults who teach them. There is a genuine love for children and sense of team spirit which the Early Years Foundation Stage Leader has created and there is a common sense of purpose among the staff. Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are good. The leader has a very good understanding of what children of this age should be learning and she has developed a close team of practitioners who are all committed to providing good quality education and care. However, she is aware that there is a weakness in provision. Outdoor learning is limited for the Reception class children partly because access to the outdoors is limited and, as a result, they cannot use the outdoor space until the Nursery session ends at 11.30 each morning. In addition, there are too few resources to enable all areas of learning to be provided in the outdoor space. The headteacher and governing body have ensured that there are good plans in place to address this issue.

What the school should do to improve further

- Sharpen the school development plan by reducing the number of priorities being addressed and provide closely tailored plans to meet them.

- Ensure that access to the outdoor learning area near the Reception class is improved and provide an enhanced range of resources to meet children's learning needs outdoors.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
|---|----------------|

Overall effectiveness

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| 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 capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

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|---|---|
| How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS? | 2 |
| How well do children in the EYFS achieve? | 2 |
| How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS? | 2 |
| How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop? | 2 |
| How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted? | 2 |
| How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed? | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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| 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/or disabilities make progress | 2 |

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| How good are 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 | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| 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 | 2 |

The quality of provision

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| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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 |

Leadership and management

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| 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 eliminated | 2 |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion? | 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 |

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

11 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Vincent's RC Primary School, Houghton Regis, LU5 5RG

I am writing to let you know what we found when we visited your school. Thank you for helping us so well and making us welcome. We really enjoyed talking with you and I was particularly impressed with your school council who made an excellent presentation for me. It was also good to hear how pleased you are that you can now stay in your school until Year 6. You are very lucky to have the church so close to your school. We can see why you enjoy school so much because yours is a good school. These are the things that we liked the most.

- You make good progress in your learning, enjoy school, behave well and want to do your best.
- The staff support you well and those of you that do not find learning easy are given good support.
- The school makes sure that you are safe and very well looked after.
- You know the importance of eating the right things and staying fit and healthy.
- Your teachers do a good job. Teaching is good and you enjoy learning.
- Your headteacher is also doing a good job. She is supported very well by all the other adults in the school and your deputy headteacher in particular.

We have asked the school to continue to focus on two particular things.

- To make sure that the children in the Reception class can have access from the classroom directly to the outside area at all times and to have more resources for outdoor learning.
- For your headteacher and governors to make sure that they do not have too long a list of things that they will be working on to make your school better and to make sure that there are good plans in place to help this happen.

You can help by making sure you work as hard as possible to meet your targets.

With best wishes.

Yours faithfully

Keith Sadler

Lead inspector