

English Martyrs' Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110004
Local Authority	Reading
Inspection number	325078
Inspection dates	14–15 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Rob Crompton

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.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	329
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	Mrs Catherine Woodhouse
Headteacher	Mr Anton Dworzak (Acting)
Date of previous school inspection	6 March 2007
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Dee Road Tilehurst Reading RG30 4BE
Telephone number	0118 901 5466
Fax number	0118 901 5467

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is larger than average. Most of the pupils are from White British or Irish backgrounds but just under half of them come from a range of other ethnic backgrounds. The largest of these groups is of Black African heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language has increased rapidly in recent years and is now above average. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. These include pupils who are falling behind in their work and some with emotional and behavioural problems. The school has provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage in two Reception classes. As they start school, children's skills and understanding are below that typical of the age group. After school childcare is provided by an outside organisation. In recent years, there has been a high turnover of headteachers. At the time of the inspection, the school was led by an acting headteacher and an acting deputy headteacher. The school has appointed a new headteacher, who will take up his post in September 2009.

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 provides a satisfactory and rapidly improving quality of education. It is a vibrant community with an ethos that reflects its Christian values. This is apparent in pupils' outstanding personal development and the family atmosphere that permeates the school. The acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have had a significant impact on moving the school forward during a turbulent period. They have been very well supported by governors and senior staff. This is much appreciated by parents, one of whom commented, 'Despite the changes in headship over the last couple of years, the school has continued to improve and has always had the children's well-being at heart.'

Children get off to a good start in the Reception classes and build well on this during Years 1 and 2, although boys do not do as well in writing as girls. Pupils' rate of progress accelerates through Key Stage 2 and standards are generally average by the end of Year 6. In previous years, pupils did not make sufficient progress through Years 3 to 6. Due to improvements in teaching and learning, they are now making good progress in lessons. Gaps in their previous learning mean that some pupils have a lot of catching up to do. Their positive attitudes to school and willingness to work hard, together with the effective support of staff, are helping to speed up their progress. Teaching is generally good, but some inconsistencies in its quality remain which means that achievement is variable through the school. Sensitive and effective support for pupils who have learning and behavioural difficulties enables them to progress well towards their individual targets. Similarly, pupils with English as an additional language make very good headway due to the effective support they receive. However, some more able pupils are not progressing as well as they should because the work is not challenging enough. Boys' writing requires improvement in Years 1 and 2. Overall, achievement and standards are satisfactory.

Pupils from a wide range of backgrounds get on extremely well with one another. They behave exceptionally well and are mutually supportive. This was evident during a laudate (praise) assembly during which pupils showed genuine appreciation of those receiving awards for good work and courtesy. Pupils enjoy lessons and participate eagerly in the many extra activities available. They know how to keep themselves safe, and have an excellent awareness of the benefits of a healthy diet and exercise. They make an excellent contribution to the life of the school and spontaneously help one another.

The school provides a high level of care which benefits all pupils, particularly the most vulnerable. One parent's comment that, 'Any concerns have been dealt with promptly and fairly' reflected the views of the overwhelming majority. A watchful eye is kept on individual achievement, so support can be provided where necessary. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and some provide specific pointers for improvement, but this is not consistent across all classes.

The curriculum is satisfactory. Work is carefully planned, but the school is aware that there is scope for more challenging work in some lessons in order to extend fully the learning of the more able pupils. Pupils' enjoyment of learning is enhanced through a broad range of enrichment activities.

Community cohesion is promoted well. Pupils develop a strong sense of their role in the community. Work in geography, French and religious education, supports pupils' understanding of the wider world and their awareness of global issues.

Leadership and management are good. Underpinned by excellent self-evaluation, school leaders have a clear view of the school's strengths and areas for development. Since the last inspection, there have been improvements in teaching and learning, in the Foundation Stage, and in pupils' personal development. As a consequence, pupils are making better progress and standards are rising. The school is ambitious for its pupils and there is a commendable commitment to ensuring that they feel valued and do as well as they can. These factors indicate that the school has a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in the Reception classes, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development. Most children reach the goals set for them by the end of Reception and some exceed them. This is because children are provided with good experiences, supported through positive relationships. Adults welcome children warmly and help them to settle in quickly by getting to know them well, helping them to feel safe and secure and to grow rapidly in confidence and independence. Home visits and meetings with new parents build positive relationships with the staff team and help to identify any children who have particular learning needs. Links with feeder nurseries are developing. Children experience an appropriate balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities and staff carefully assess individual children's needs and check the progress they are making. Children enthusiastically explore the activities that staff plan. For example, their fascination with a sea habitat set-up was tangible as children felt and smelt a real fish. The indoor classrooms and outside area are stimulating and colourful and support opportunities for developing and extending pupils' vocabulary. The leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are good and staff work well together as a team. This is reflected in a comment by one parent, typical of others: 'My child has a fantastic start to school life.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide further challenge for the more able pupils, particularly in Years 3 to 6.
- Raise standards in boys' writing at Key Stage 1.
- Improve feedback to pupils by creating greater consistency in teachers' marking.

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

Pupils enter Year 1 with a secure grasp of basic skills in language and numeracy. They make good progress through Years 1 and 2, reaching standards that are above average by the end of Year 2. Although the proportion of pupils attaining the higher levels in writing is above average overall, girls generally do much better than boys. The standards reached by Year 6 pupils have risen year on year and are now broadly average. However, over this period some pupils were not reaching their potential. In particular, several pupils whose level of attainment was broadly average as they started in Year 3 did not build well enough on their starting points. This legacy of underachievement is being addressed successfully and the progress of some pupils is increasing rapidly. Achievement is satisfactory overall. Accelerated progress is now evident in most lessons throughout the school, reflecting the considerable efforts of staff, and

pupils' increasing motivation to do as well as they can. Pupils from minority ethnic groups, including those with a Black African heritage, generally do at least as well as their peers. There is a way to go before all pupils achieve their potential, particularly those who have the ability to reach higher levels.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The school's strong Christian ethos and the caring atmosphere, where each individual is treated as a valued member of the school community, contribute significantly to pupils' outstanding personal development. Pupils attend regularly. They enjoy school, have a strong work ethic and are confident in their own abilities. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. During assemblies and lessons, pupils reflect on their feelings and emotions, and gain an excellent understanding of how to respect others. They have a very good understanding of different cultures. Pupils talked enthusiastically about the recent 'cultural week' and what they had learned during work on comparing and contrasting African countries. Behaviour is exemplary throughout school. Pupils say they feel safe in school and bullying is not a problem. They have an excellent understanding of a healthy lifestyle. They take on their responsibilities as school council members, house captains and play leaders seriously and help to make the school a happy and enjoyable place for everyone. They have a high profile in the local community through the choir and their links with older people. Their excellent interpersonal skills, along with their secure literacy, numeracy and computer skills, prepare them well for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Despite good teaching, which is effectively raising pupils' rate of progress, it is taking time to ensure all pupils achieve well. Significant progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Improvements have had a positive impact on how well pupils engage with their learning and the progress they make in lessons. Teachers explain tasks well so that pupils know what they are meant to learn. They make good use of resources, such as the interactive whiteboards, to enliven their teaching. Some teachers are highly skilled at drawing on what pupils already know and understand to move them forward quickly. During an outstanding Year 6 science lesson, for example, the teacher successfully encouraged pupils to reflect on their own knowledge, when investigating saturated solutions. In the most effective lessons, teachers set challenging work and provide bespoke guidelines and prompts for all ability groups. Occasionally, work is pitched at a level that some pupils find too difficult or too easy.

Teaching assistants make an important contribution to most lessons when supporting individuals or small groups. Their work with pupils who have learning difficulties is particularly valuable. Occasionally, when teachers introduce lessons to the whole class, the skills of support staff are underused. There are missed opportunities for them to work with small groups from the start, particularly with the more able pupils who might tackle more challenging work from the outset. Although pupils' progress is accelerating, there remain some gaps in their past learning which teachers are systematically addressing.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

There is a strong emphasis throughout the school on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy basic skills. Although cross-curricular links are in their infancy, a themed approach to lessons is being developed; this is making learning more meaningful and helping pupils to develop their thinking skills. Information and communication technology is taught as a discrete subject, but is not used as effectively, to support the wider curriculum. Planning spells out in detail what is to be taught, but there is often insufficient reference to how the more able pupils are to be challenged. Provision for personal, social and health education is good, and is reflected in the positive attitudes to learning of the vast majority of pupils. Pupils have many opportunities for enrichment through a variety of after school clubs, such as Gaelic football, knitting, French, recorders and netball, all of which contribute well to their personal development. An interesting range of visitors, visits and special events extends learning beyond the classroom and helps to inspire pupils. For example, the residential visits in Years 4 and 6 provide opportunities for social development, exploration and adventure.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

'This is a good school because every one looks after you through good times and bad, and makes you feel confident and happy.' This quote from one of the pupils sums up the outstanding pastoral care the school provides. Pupils know that they can count on adults to get them through any personal problems. The school has excellent links with external agencies, for example speech therapists. Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who learn English as additional language receive excellent support. Staff are good at promoting their self-confidence and reducing their anxieties. Provision is well planned and progress is carefully monitored so that these pupils make good progress. Teachers increasingly involve pupils in checking their work against specific success criteria. This means pupils are becoming more confident in evaluating their own progress. Some feedback that pupils receive through marking is highly focused and provides specific guidance about the quality of their work and what they could improve. However, teachers' comments are sometimes a little cursory and do not include the next steps that pupils should take.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Strong leadership and management have led to good improvement since the previous inspection. The acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have successfully shared their determined commitment and clear vision with all staff. Many parents paid glowing tributes to the leadership of the acting headteacher. Their comments included, 'His leadership has been fantastic', 'Professional and approachable at all times', and, 'Doing a great job'. The acting deputy headteacher and the subject leaders in English, mathematics and science play a significant role in driving up standards through their rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning. They provide excellent role models through their own teaching, and their passionate enthusiasm and commitment are infectious. Community cohesion is promoted well by the very good relationships established across different ethnic and religious groups. Pupils' global awareness is promoted

successfully through the study of different countries and, every term, teachers introduce a new language for greeting and registration. Recently, these have included Arabic, Greek and Polish.

The school has a strong caring ethos where all pupils are valued and included. The school's self-evaluation is excellent and accurately identifies strengths and areas for improvement. The school improvement plan is very thorough in setting out a well-focused agenda for action. Senior staff are aware of the main issues for improvement, and provide good advice and guidance to their colleagues on the need to ensure that more able pupils are sufficiently challenged, to improve boys' attainment writing in Years 1 and 2 and to ensure marking is effective throughout the school. Governance is good. Underpinned by a common determination to move forward, governors have played a pivotal role in sustaining improvements during the many changes in leadership over recent years.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

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?	1
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

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/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

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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 learners' needs?	2
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

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	1
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**

28 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of English Martyrs' Catholic Primary School, Reading, RG30 4BE

Thank you for the friendly way you welcomed us when we inspected your school. We enjoyed meeting you all and talking to you about your work and the things you enjoy doing. This is what we found out about your school.

Your school is continuing to improve and provides a satisfactory education. There are lots of good things happening. These are some of the good things about your school:

- you behave extremely well and watch out for one another
- there is a great family atmosphere and staff take excellent care of you
- the children in the Reception classes have a happy start to school and learn to play and share together well
- you enjoy your learning and the other activities the teachers plan for you and you try to do your best
- most of you are now making good progress in lessons
- the acting headteacher and governors have clear plans on how to improve the school
- all the adults work extremely hard to help you get the best out of school life.

To help the school improve further, we have asked the school to:

- make sure that teachers give you work that is at just the right level for you, especially those of you who can do harder work
- help the boys in Years 1 and 2 to improve their writing
- give you more help in seeing what you need to do to improve your work.

We hope that you will continue to enjoy school. We also hope that you will help your teachers as they work hard to make your school even better.

Yours faithfully

Rob Crompton

Lead Inspector