

St Finian's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110037
Local Authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	325085
Inspection date	25 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Peter Thrusell

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)	173
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 John Stevens
Headteacher	Mrs Elizabeth Housden
Date of previous school inspection	28 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	The Ridge Cold Ash Thatcham RG18 9HU
Telephone number	01635 865 925
Fax number	01635 874 892

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the impact of leadership and management on the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress
- the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage
- confirmation of the strengths in personal development and well-being and the care, guidance and support of pupils.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and documents. Parents' questionnaires and discussions with children, governors, other leaders and staff also contributed to the judgements. 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 Finian's is a smaller than average Catholic primary school. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. A very small proportion is known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. These pupils have a variety of needs, but especially moderate learning difficulties. The school has received a number of awards, including the Activemark award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Finian's is a good school. The headteacher is well supported by the deputy headteacher and the newly formed improvement team, which has a much sharper and shared focus on all aspects of school improvement. She works very closely with the governing body and has encouraged and developed it to realise its full responsibilities. As a result, governors have an excellent understanding of the school's performance and fully challenge the school in its drive for further improvement. The school has very successfully addressed the areas for improvement from the previous inspection, in particular the teaching and learning of mathematics, especially for more able pupils. This is shown in the very high proportion of pupils now working beyond the levels expected of them in this subject. Further improvements have been made to the curriculum, which is now outstanding. There are numerous opportunities that challenge pupils to draw on and develop their different subject skills, so as to make their learning more purposeful and interesting. This very broad curriculum has been recognised in the Gold Artsmark award.

Pupils greatly appreciate the many enrichment opportunities provided, often drawing on excellent links with other local schools. For example, during the recent 'history week', pupils joined others from local schools to start work on the plays of Shakespeare. Year 5 pupils are well on the way to staging their production of Hamlet, showing an excellent level of enthusiasm and cooperation. These qualities reflect an outstanding level of personal development and well-being, including pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, throughout the school. This is supported by an exceptionally high level of pastoral care, drawing very effectively on the support of the school's faith based community and excellent links with parents.

Pupils enjoy everything about school, as is shown in their excellent attendance. One parent commented on the 'extreme happiness his child had in attending school'. Relationships between pupils and pupils and adults are excellent. They appreciate that they can talk with adults not only about personal concerns, but also about their learning. Pupils particularly enjoy the range of clubs they can attend and the different sporting opportunities these provide, as recognised in a national award. They understand fully the importance of physical activity and a balanced diet as key elements of a healthy lifestyle. Pupils are extremely keen to take on responsibilities. Their contribution to the Play Leader Scheme has been recognised beyond the school. School councillors take on board suggestions from their classmates. As a result, there is now more equipment for lunchtime and PE. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and they have very positive attitudes to learning, contributing to the good progress they make in their studies.

All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve well from their starting points and standards at the end of both key stages are exceptionally high. In 2008, at the end of Year 6, all pupils reached the expected levels in English, mathematics and science, with very high proportions exceeding them. Opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own writing, and to discuss ways to develop and improve it, have helped to raise standards further. In mathematics, a focus on problem solving and mental calculation has been especially effective. Although the quality of teaching and learning is good overall, there is some inconsistency. This results in some pupils not fully meeting the challenging end-of-year targets set for them. The school has identified this and is providing further guidance and support for staff to strengthen teaching and learning. Pupils' progress is carefully monitored and provides teachers with starting points on which to base their lesson planning. Pupils have individual targets to aim for and they understand well how these are designed to help them improve their work. They are especially effective in Year 6, where pupils recognise their importance in guiding them towards

the levels they aspire to at the end of the year. One pupil commented that targets 'push me even more'. Progress is further accelerated in Year 6 through well-focused teaching that takes particular account of these levels.

The school is extremely inclusive and ensures that all pupils can play their fullest part in the life and learning of the school. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and the provision for them carefully mapped out. The school's teaching and curriculum promote pupils' understanding of different cultures, faiths and communities well, both locally and worldwide. The school's self-evaluation is very accurate, leading to school improvement planning that is comprehensive and shared by all. Along with improvements since the last inspection, it demonstrates the school's good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children get off to a very good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Well-established systems are in place for home visits and liaison is good with feeder nurseries. The success of these induction arrangements and very strong parent partnerships is evident in the calm, happy, settled atmosphere throughout the unit.

Children enter Reception with a level of skills that is above those expected for their age. They make excellent progress and at the end of the Reception Year the majority of children are working securely within the learning goals expected of them, with a considerable number fully meeting or exceeding them. Children respond extremely positively to the activities prepared for them. The coordinator ensures that a careful balance between teacher-led and children's self-selected activities is maintained. A strong emphasis on the development of personal and social skills means that children grow in confidence and learn to work and play happily together. Children make especially good progress in their communication skills. They enjoy singing action songs and share their ideas confidently with each other and adults. The Early Years Foundation Stage is extremely well organised and managed. Assessment procedures are robust and are used very well to plan the next steps in learning. Staff are approachable and very caring, demonstrating an excellent regard for children's welfare. Teaching assistants work closely and thoughtfully with small groups and individuals, although occasionally their questioning skills do not draw out responses well enough from children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that any identified weaker teaching continues to be supported, so that the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school becomes consistently good or better.

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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?	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?	1
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?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
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?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
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

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	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 learners' needs?	2
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

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 eliminated	1
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	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

10 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Finian's Catholic Primary School, Thatcham, RG18 9HU

On behalf of your inspectors, I am writing to let you know what we found when we visited your school. Thank you for taking part in the inspection. We spoke with some of you during our visit and you were always interesting to talk to, extremely polite and helpful. You spoke very enthusiastically about enjoying school and all of the things in which you take part. St Finian's is a good school.

We liked these things the most.

- Children get an excellent start to school in Reception.
- You work hard in your lessons and your behaviour is excellent.
- You are rightly proud of your school and of all of the excellent opportunities that are provided.
- The school makes sure that you are very safe and well looked after.
- You are all keen to keep fit and eat the right things.
- You are very keen to take on responsibilities and want to make the school even better.
- Your headteacher is doing a good job; she is well supported by staff and governors.

We have asked the school to improve on one area of its work.

- Most of your lessons help you to make good progress. The school must check that where it has identified any weaker teaching, support is in place to bring about improvements.

We did enjoy visiting your school and watching you learn.

Yours faithfully

Peter Thrussell

Lead Inspector