

St Teresa's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115143
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326133
Inspection dates	9–10 September 2008
Reporting inspector	John Messer

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)	197
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 Rosemarie Hall
Headteacher	Mrs Frances Booker
Date of previous school inspection	5 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Clairmont Road Lexden Colchester Essex CO3 9BE

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	9–10 September 2008
Inspection number	326133

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Age group 4–11

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is smaller than most primary schools. Pupils come from a wide area. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. A small number are from minority ethnic families and, of these, several speak languages other than English at home. Children's attainment on entry is typical for their age. The proportion of pupils who enter or leave the school part-way through this phase of their education is well above average. It has proved difficult to recruit a permanent headteacher and so, as an interim measure, the governing body have appointed a part-time acting headteacher to lead the school. The school has been awarded the Activemark.

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. It is emerging from a challenging period caused by a succession of staffing difficulties, due mainly to staff illness. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Teaching and learning have improved and standards are rising. The acting headteacher gives clear direction and sets high standards. Under her outstanding personal leadership, the school is going from strength to strength and is on course to improve further. Pupils' achievement is good and, by Year 6, standards are well above average. Pupils attain exceptionally high standards in reading.

Pupils' personal development is good and is a strength of the school. Pupils are happy and well behaved. They are courteous and sensitive to the needs of others, one commenting that 'We really are like one big family where everybody matters and everybody looks out for each other.' Good care, guidance and support help pupils to feel safe and secure. Paying close attention to maintaining pupils' welfare is central to the daily work of the school. Safeguarding procedures are robust. Pupils know how to lead healthy lifestyles. Their well-developed social skills, coupled with their academic achievements, prepare them well for the next phase of their education and for their future economic well-being.

Good teaching helps pupils to learn effectively. Pupils respond well and are enthusiastic learners. Leaders have been successful in improving the quality of teaching by developing consistent approaches to lesson planning and classroom organisation. However, because of a lack of clarity about exactly what is to be learned during lessons, it is not always easy to evaluate what new skills, knowledge and understanding each group of learners has mastered.

The curriculum is relevant to pupils' needs and includes a good range of extra activities to enrich learning, such as educational visits and after school clubs. A good start has been made on linking subjects together to provide a thematic approach designed to stimulate interest and enjoyment. However, curricular planning does not always identify what new skills these projects are intended to impart, so it is difficult to evaluate exactly what expertise has been gained.

Leadership and management are good. The governing body provides effective support for leaders. Governors monitor the work of the school closely. Working with school leaders and members of the local community, they have helped to transform the learning environment so that it is bright, colourful and fit for purpose. There is still work to do to make the library more inviting and to provide a better outdoor learning environment for the younger children. The school promotes community cohesion well, both locally and in the way that it reaches out to the global community through its links with Uganda.

The governing body has wisely employed the services of an educational consultant to support leaders and provide staff with clear guidance. The acting headteacher and the educational consultant have strengthened the roles of the deputy headteacher, subject leaders and leadership of provision for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities. Morale is high due to the clear direction and sense of purpose that leaders have established. Accurate self-evaluation has enabled the creation of good plans for further improvement. The school community is ambitious and welcomes the challenging targets that have been set for further improvement. Parents are pleased with recent developments. One comment was typical, 'The school has been transformed over the past year and is going from strength to strength.'

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children receive a warm welcome when they start school. Staff already know a great deal about the new children, who arrive confidently and happily. This is because arrangements for parents and children to visit before starting full time are effective. Hence, children are already confident about classroom routines. Children are encouraged to make choices, and develop self-confidence and independence in a secure and challenging environment. They are looked after with utmost care and attention. Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding, especially when children are required to explore and discover for themselves. Adults carefully match work to children's interests and learning needs, creating a good balance between activities directed by adults and those chosen by children. Although the outdoor learning environment is used well, it is small, and lack of a covered area means children cannot work outside in all weathers. Children achieve well in all areas of learning and, by the end of the Reception year, most exceed expectations for their age. The Foundation Stage is led and managed well, with knowledge and enthusiasm. Parents are given good information about the curriculum and so are able to support their children's learning well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that it is clear what pupils are expected to learn in lessons and that this learning is evaluated accurately.
- Identify clearly the skills and expertise that pupils will gain from the introduction of the new curricular projects.
- Develop the outside learning areas for younger children and make the school library more inviting.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities, those who speak English as an additional language and newcomers, make good progress. Children in the Reception class achieve well and, by the end of the Reception year, children's development is above average in all areas of learning and well above in communication, language and literacy. The strong emphasis on teaching children the links between letters and the sounds they represent gives them a flying start in learning to read. Pupils make good progress in Years 1 and 2 and, by the end of Year 2, standards are above average in writing and mathematics and exceptionally high in reading. Staffing difficulties, now resolved, and high levels of pupils' mobility, have interrupted the learning of some pupils in Years 3 to 6.

Nevertheless, they have all achieved well. By Year 6, standards are well above average in English, mathematics and science and exceptionally high in reading.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are cheerful, well mannered and full of fun. They take their work seriously and strive to do their best. They are keen to earn points for their 'houses'. They have a strong sense of responsibility towards one another. They keep an eye open for anybody who seems lonely and is not joining in so that they can invite them to participate. The Catholic ethos supports spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils learn about different faiths but opportunities

to engage with people from other faiths are infrequent. They understand the benefits of living healthily, eating nutritious food and drinking plenty of water during the day. Pupils' views are sought and respected. An active school council shows initiative and gets things done. Pupils contribute well to the local and wider community, taking part in recycling initiatives and supporting a number of charities. They show great consideration for those less fortunate than themselves, for instance by raising money to establish a school for St Mary's Parish in Hoima, Uganda. They are so sensible and well behaved that they are capable of shouldering a little more responsibility for their learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Classrooms are bright, colourful and well organised for learning. Clear displays include useful learning prompts. Teachers maintain high expectations of pupils' performance and insist on neat presentation of work. Work is marked carefully. At its best, marking shows pupils what they need to do to reach the next steps in their learning. However, progress is sometimes slower when it is not clear what pupils are expected to learn. Teaching assistants provide valuable support but, during lesson introductions, they are not always engaged enough in supporting learning. Parents support their children's learning well and contribute to their success, particularly in reading.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good, with teachers successfully making learning exciting. Special events, such as creative arts week, make learning 'come alive'. Pupils develop a high level of confidence and skill in using computers and other devices, such as digital cameras. Provision for personal, social and health education is also good. Plans to improve the curriculum, particularly by ensuring clarity of purpose in project work, have yet to be implemented. The wide range of extra-curricular activities is well attended. It provides many opportunities for personal success and contributes to high levels of enjoyment and good personal development. The school modifies its curriculum effectively for pupils with learning difficulties so that they consistently experience success.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils feel happy and safe because the school provides a very caring and supportive environment that contributes well to their personal development. Pupils get on well together and incidents of bullying and racism are rare. Academic guidance is good. The targets displayed in each classroom help pupils to understand what they need to do in order to improve in English and mathematics. The achievement of any pupil who does not make the required amount of progress is analysed and extra help is provided. Support for pupils new to the school, those with learning difficulties and those who speak English as an additional language is good.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The governing body has supported the school effectively through a difficult period during which school development faltered. Thanks mainly to the inspirational leadership of the acting headteacher, the school is now back on track and is improving rapidly. There is a renewed buoyancy about the school. Subject leaders are confident about how to monitor standards, evaluate provision and identify areas for improvement. Challenging targets are set for raising the attainment of individual pupils and for the school's overall performance. Good avenues of communication help parents to support their children's learning. Effective links with other local schools enable expertise to be shared effectively. Financial management is good and money is spent wisely.

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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?	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?	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

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

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	2
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

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

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 September 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of St Teresa's Catholic Primary School, Colchester, CO3 9BE

Mrs Davies and I really enjoyed visiting your school. Thank you for being so friendly and helpful. I am writing to you because I thought that you might like to know what we think of your school.

Well, above all other things, we think that you go to a good school where everybody works and plays happily together. Teachers and support staff help you to make good progress in lessons. You enjoy books and are particularly good at reading. You are also good at writing, mathematics and science. You are learning how to use computers to help you in your learning, especially for finding things out on the internet. You enjoy games and sport and understand that regular exercise helps you to stay healthy. You know how to stay safe and look after yourselves. You are kind and thoughtful. You are also sensible, polite and well behaved. Your school is led well and a great deal has been done to make the school buildings more attractive.

There are several things that we think might help you to do even better. We think that teachers should now concentrate on checking just how much you learn in lessons to make sure that you are developing as many new skills as possible. You work on some interesting projects but we think that your studies would be even more useful if they included opportunities for you to master specific skills. We also think that the outside play area for the younger children should be extended and the school library made more inviting.

We wish you all every success in the future.

Yours sincerely,

John Messer

Lead inspector