

# St Helen's Catholic Junior School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115293
<b>Local Authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	326174
<b>Inspection date</b>	22 January 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Ruth Frith

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Junior
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	337
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Trevor Horton
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Bozena Laraway
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	2 March 2006
<b>School address</b>	Sawyers Hall Lane Brentwood Essex CM15 9BY
<b>Telephone number</b>	01277213962
<b>Fax number</b>	01277214589

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- pupil's progress and achievement
- the effectiveness of assessment, teachers' marking, the tracking of pupils' progress and the setting of targets
- the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation.

The inspector gathered evidence from the school's self-evaluation form, lesson observations, discussions with staff, governors and pupils, pupils' work, information that the school keeps on how well pupils are doing, the school development plan and an analysis of the parents' questionnaire responses. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector 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 Helen's Catholic Junior School is larger than many junior schools. It serves the Catholic community of Brentwood, Doddinghurst, Ingatestone and Ongar. While many pupils come from St Helen's Catholic Infant School, others come from a variety of local schools or arrive new to this country. Information supplied from the school and inspection evidence indicates that pupils' attainment at the beginning of Year 3 is broadly in line with that expected nationally. The percentage of pupils receiving free school meals is low. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below average as is the proportion with a statement of special educational needs. Most pupils are White British with a small number coming from a range of different cultural backgrounds. A few speak English as an additional language with some at the early stages of learning English. The school supports a small number of children who are looked after by the local authority.

The school has received Healthy Schools' accreditation and Investors in People status.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school, where the excellent teaching, curriculum and care, guidance and support given to pupils results in their excellent personal development and well-being and high standards. Key features of the school's success stem from the strong Catholic community ethos and teamwork of staff who are all working well together to develop their practice and raise standards further. New, improved systems to track pupils' achievement are in their infancy but allow teachers to identify more quickly those in danger of falling behind, so that appropriate additional support can be provided and challenging targets set.

Pupils achieve exceptionally well because teaching is consistently at a high level. The atmosphere in lessons is calm yet stimulating and all pupils respond very well to the challenges set. The 2008 Year 6 national test results provided by the school show a continuation of consistently high standards in English, mathematics and science with an above average percentage of pupils gaining a grade higher than that expected for their age. Those pupils, who find learning easier than others do, make particularly good progress because work is given which matches their abilities and maintains their interest. Staff are not complacent in relation to standards. They are currently focusing on raising levels of attainment further by improving provision for those who find learning difficult and for those who need additional support to learn English. Effective additional specialist individual and group support is given to those pupils learning English as an additional language and together, with very effective pastoral care, helps these pupils to settle quickly and progress particularly well. The school also benefits from staff speaking a range of languages other than English to support these pupils. Assessment data and pupils' current work show that all groups of pupils make excellent progress and are on course to meet their challenging targets in English and mathematics. Standards are high.

A key feature of the successful teaching is the consistent high expectations of work and behaviour to which pupils respond very well. Pupils are eager to learn and do their best. Planning is good. Teachers have a clear understanding of what they want pupils to learn and share this with them so pupils are clear about what is expected of them and how they can achieve this. Staff use a good range of teaching styles and activities which match well to the preferred learning styles in each class. They are particularly effective in their use of information and communication technology (ICT) to outline teaching points, capture pupils' attention and motivate them to learn. Pupils too, thoroughly enjoy regularly using the computers and interactive whiteboards and this particularly helps to develop their learning across a range of subjects as well as their ICT skills. The teachers' use of questioning is very effective in developing pupils' thinking and assessing their understanding, for example, in mathematics when pupils are asked to explain how they work out the answer and whether they could do it another way. This supports the exceptional progress of all pupils, especially the more able. Pupils are well supported by teaching assistants who are very effective at helping those who find some aspects of English and mathematics difficult. Teachers have improved the way they assess pupils' learning and assessment is now very good. Teachers make useful comments in books so that pupils know what they have done well and how they can improve. Challenging targets are set and pupils work hard to achieve them. Staff are becoming more familiar with evaluating the evidence provided by the new tracking systems so they have a clear understanding of the impact of their work on pupils' progress.

Key features of the school's successful curriculum are the way in which it engenders enjoyment in learning and supports pupils' progress. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and attendance has

improved to above average since the last inspection. Effective links between subjects make learning easier and relevant. Pupils also appreciate the wide range of visits and visitors to the school, which offer them a more practical 'hands on' approach to learning. As one pupil said, 'When you see something or feel something it makes learning easier, it sinks in a bit better.' A very good range of popular clubs develop pupils' skills and offer them opportunities to develop new skills such as knitting, playing chess and learning Latin. The school places much emphasis on music and the physical education curriculum. The orchestra and choir successfully develop pupils' skills and help them to contribute to the local and church communities very well. The school's ethos, teaching and curriculum are used very effectively to increase pupils' understanding of Britain and international communities: to help them understand others, value diversity and promote shared values. The involvement of pupils and staff with a school in China is a good example of their work in bringing communities closer. This reflects the school's excellent promotion of community cohesion.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Assemblies make a very positive contribution, celebrate pupils' achievements and help to create a strong sense of community. The personal, social and health education programme is very effective in developing pupils' awareness of themselves and their actions on others. This results in exceptional behaviour and helps to create a harmonious community in which learning can successfully take place. Pupils show high levels of respect for others and are developing as confident young citizens. They make a very positive contribution to the school and wider community and show this through their consideration for others, whether it be by becoming members of the school council, helping each other or raising funds for charities. Pupils have a good understanding of their place in a culturally diverse society and are aware of issues such as racial harassment and bullying, although they say that such incidents do not happen in school. As a result, they feel exceptionally safe. They have an excellent understanding of how to live healthy lives through eating a balanced diet and taking part in plenty of physical activities. The regular use of the school's swimming pool encourages good swimming skills and water safety. The combination of particularly good literacy, numeracy and ICT skills with their highly developed personal skills equips pupils extremely well for the next stage of education and beyond.

The outstanding quality of care for pupils is seen in the high level of commitment of staff to pupils' welfare. Central to the ethos and vision of the school is the focus on promoting equality of opportunity and creating an enjoyable learning environment where all pupils do well. Those at risk of underachieving are identified quickly, and the school is successful in supporting pupils who join the school part way through the junior phase of their education. Staff are also effective in supporting pupils who are looked after by the local authority so that they settle into school and do very well. The school's work in partnership with a wide range of agencies to support pupils is excellent. Arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are robust and regularly reviewed, and health and safety are managed carefully.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher has an exceptionally clear vision for the school's future. She is supported very well by a strong team of staff who share this vision and are fully committed to the school and community. Since the last inspection, the management structure has improved and individual members of staff have been given greater responsibility and accountability. Those with management responsibilities fulfil their roles very well and all staff are fully involved in the school's self-evaluation process, which is highly accurate and insightful. Governance is excellent. Governors fulfil their responsibilities particularly well and have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They successfully monitor the school through regular visits and their work in committees.

Together with staff they make a very strong contribution to community cohesion through their roles with partners in the Catholic and local communities. The vast majority of parents are very positive about the school but a few say they would like to be more involved in the school's work. The headteacher has greatly improved the way information is given to parents and asks for their contributions towards the school's self-evaluation and development. Excellent leadership, management and self-evaluation, and particularly good improvement since the last inspection, indicate that the school has excellent capacity to improve further.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Consolidate the implementation of the new tracking systems so that staff can more easily evaluate how well pupils are doing and consequently ensure their best possible progress from year to year.

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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?	1
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	1

**Achievement and standards**

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

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<sup>1</sup>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.



## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	1

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	1
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

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
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	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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**

23 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Helen's Catholic Junior School, Brentwood, CM15 9BY

You probably remember that I recently visited your school and talked to you about your work. I really enjoyed my visit, and would like to thank you for making me feel so welcome. I agree with you and think that St Helen's is an excellent school. This is down to you, your parents, staff and governors. If you read on you will see some of the things I found out.

- You make exceptional progress and focus on your learning very well. This is helping standards to rise.
- You thoroughly enjoy school and behave exceptionally well. You get on extremely well with each other and make good friends.
- You are trying hard to come to school regularly and on time and consequently attendance has improved since the previous inspection. Well Done! Please keep it up so you do not miss any important learning.
- You have an excellent understanding of how to keep healthy and I am very pleased to see that this is influencing what you eat and how much exercise you take.
- You take on responsibilities well and contribute very significantly to the school, local and wider communities.
- Because much of the teaching is outstanding, you develop exceptionally good literacy, numeracy, ICT and personal skills which prepare you extremely well for secondary school.
- You feel very safe in school because staff look after you exceptionally well. I was pleased to hear that you know what to do if you have a problem.

Leadership and management of the school are excellent. Staff and governors have agreed to make your learning even better by more closely tracking how well you are doing so that you make the best possible progress. I know you will help them by trying as hard as you can.

I wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Frith

Lead inspector