

St Paul's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116487
Local Authority	Portsmouth
Inspection number	326408
Inspection dates	12–13 March 2009
Reporting inspector	David Marshall

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)	436
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	55
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Janet Lynch
Headteacher	Mrs Brenda Schouller
Date of previous school inspection	3 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Bourne Road Paulsgrove Portsmouth PO6 4JD
Telephone number	02392 375 488
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Paul's is a larger than average, Catholic, primary school. Although the school has a wide catchment area, most pupils come from the immediate locality. The majority of pupils are of White British background, although the numbers of pupils who are at an early stage of learning English is above average and rising. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average, and the proportion of those with statements of special educational needs is above average. The main groups include pupils who find learning difficult, and there are also some with emotional and behavioural problems. The present headteacher has been in post since January 2009 and was formerly the deputy headteacher. The school has been unable to appoint a deputy headteacher following two recruitment processes. The school has been accredited with the Healthy School and Artsmark Gold awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Paul's is a good school, where pupils achieve well. Pupils are extremely well cared for, develop mature attitudes and, for the most part, are keen to learn. Parents are generally very happy with the school. One, reflecting the views of the vast majority, commented: 'Our son has thoroughly enjoyed his school life at St Paul's. We have been very pleased, too: there is a lovely, caring atmosphere and plenty of opportunities for children to join in, grow and develop.'

When children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage classes, their level of skills and understanding is well below that typical of the age group in their language and social development. They make good progress, which provides a very secure base for subsequent years. A strong combination of good – though variable – teaching, a lively curriculum and good academic guidance means that pupils make good progress through Years 1 to 6. By the end of Year 2, standards are below average, but improving. Pupils build very well on this attainment through Key Stage 2, so that by the end of Year 6, standards are generally above average. Pupils who find learning difficult and those with physical disabilities are very well supported, and most meet the expected levels for their age. Pupils learning English as an additional language also achieve well. This is achieved by providing good support from the experienced teaching assistants wherever it is needed.

Pupils' good personal development is a product of friendly and open relationships with all staff. This enables any personal issues or misconceptions in their work to be quickly resolved. Pupils learn with confidence and are quick to say when they do not understand or need a bit of help. Enthusiasm for sport and their knowledge of how food affects their bodies help pupils to live healthy lives. Pupils recognise the importance of helping others less fortunate than themselves. They do a tremendous amount to raise funds for charities and make a good contribution to their school community. They diligently carry out the many responsibilities they have, for example as members of the school council, and as playground leaders. These good, and developing, attitudes, together with pupils' sound number, language and computer skills, provide a good grounding for their future education and beyond.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is securely underpinned by the school's Catholic ethos. Values such as responsibility, respect, and trust are promoted through a carefully designed programme. During an excellent assembly, pupils in Key Stage 2 showed a very good understanding of how cooperation can overcome disappointment in their daily lives. The school's work with external partners is excellent, and helps the school to cater for the wide range of pupils' needs. The school's excellent Community Liaison Officer has established many links that really bring the local community into close contact with the school. As a result, pupils are developing a strong awareness of local issues because the school is effectively implementing its well-designed policy for promoting community cohesion and rolling it out to include a wider perspective.

The quality of teaching is generally good, and at almost all times lessons are lively and move learning along at a good pace. However, on very few occasions, inconsistencies arise. For example, the pace of teaching and learning slows when pupils are kept on the carpet listening for too long, and their interest then wanes. The developing curriculum gives pupils increasing opportunities to practise and consolidate their literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. The school is aiming to augment links between subjects further, in order to enhance pupils' learning and enjoyment. The good academic guidance that

pupils receive is matched by first-class pastoral care. The work of the learning mentors is highly effective. Safeguarding procedures are robust and pupils soon build strong and trusting relationships, because they feel secure in the knowledge that adults will listen to them and respond to their needs; as one parent remarked, 'If we do have a problem, then there is always someone at hand to help out.'

Good leadership and management have successfully guided the school through staffing changes since the last inspection. The recently appointed headteacher is focusing the school sharply on where there is need for change, and has reinforced what is best about the school. As one parent wrote: 'My daughter has attended St Paul's since Reception, and has made really good progress during her time there. What we both love about the school is the caring environment and the amazing opportunities. Mrs Schouller was a wonderful Year 4 teacher and is turning out to be an inspirational headteacher.' Self-evaluation is accurate and realistic, and reveals strengths and areas for improvement. All staff and governors play a strong part in ensuring that the school maintains its good standards and pursues further improvement. The school's good capacity to improve is evident from the good progress made since the last inspection.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make a good start to their schooling in the Nursery and in the Reception classes, and achieve well. They settle happily into school because of good links with parents and because of the strong nurturing environment. Staff make every effort to make all children feel welcome, providing signs in different languages and encouraging parents to share their different cultures. They know the children very well, and the good parental relationships are maintained on a daily basis and through meetings, so parents understand how their children learn. The Early Years Foundation Stage is managed well, and clear priorities are set for improvement. Planning is generally good because careful account is taken of the regular ongoing assessments of children's progress, which are also recorded in their 'learning journeys' booklet. Adults work together well as an effective team, provide good routines, and have high expectations of behaviour and achievement; relationships are excellent. Consequently, children develop well personally and engage well with their learning. Teaching and learning are good. Stimulating and interesting activities are provided, and there is a good mix of teacher-directed and child-initiated activities. Children's language skills are being developed well, with a clear focus on vocabulary. The outdoor areas are used well to support learning but there is no cover over the Nursery outdoors to provide protection in all weathers. Consequently, opportunities for children to learn in aspects of the curriculum are missed. Strong links between Nursery and Reception ensure that children benefit from both continuity of learning experiences and preparation for the next stage of learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency in the quality of teaching, by ensuring that all learning progresses at a crisp pace so that all teaching is as good as the best.
- Improve the outdoor learning area for the Nursery and Reception classes.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Inspection evidence shows that by the time pupils left Year 6 in 2008, standards were above average levels in English, mathematics and science. The decline in standards recorded at Key

Stage 1 in 2008 has been reversed, thanks to rigorous assessment and better teaching. Although standards are below average in Year 2, particularly in writing, pupils' progress has improved overall this year. Pupils are now making good progress from their starting points at all stages. There is no significant difference in the relative attainment of minority ethnic groups. Pupils for whom English is an additional language, and those with learning needs, perform particularly well because they are supported skilfully in their personal development and learning. Very good progress is made towards meeting challenging targets in individual education plans. Pupils' especially good progress in music and art is based on a very well-structured programme, and has led to the school being awarded the Artsmark Gold.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school, most attend regularly, and all have positive attitudes to learning. The school has worked very hard to improve rates of attendance, which are now average. Pupils know how to stay safe and always have an adult to turn to if they have a problem. The Healthy School Award has ensured that pupils appreciate the importance of staying healthy and are aware of the benefits of a healthy diet. High numbers take part in sports and physical activities. Through the school council, pupils have an increasingly influential voice in the school's running. They like taking responsibility, and this is reflected in the mutual respect between pupils, and between staff and pupils. Pupils also make a good contribution to the wider community through a range of activities, including fund-raising and charity events. Pupils prepare well for the next stage of their education through well-managed transition procedures and through their good progress in basic skills. Although pupils understand the rules for good behaviour and generally behave well, a few find it difficult to sit still and listen in class when the teaching is less effective.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching is inconsistent and varies from inadequate to outstanding, with most being good. In the best teaching, lessons proceeded briskly, work was well matched to pupils' needs, teachers had high expectations, and pupils were enthusiastic and eager to learn. Where, very occasionally, teaching was less successful, progress slowed because work lacked challenge and pupils were kept too long on the carpet listening, when they were ready and eager to begin the activities. In almost all lessons observed, learning objectives were made clear, and planning indicated that time would be allowed to evaluate pupils' progress before the end of the lesson. There is evidence that teachers use information about pupils' knowledge and understanding effectively by consistently building well on what they know and can do. More-able pupils are generally well challenged, and this enables good opportunities to be presented to them to make good progress. The pupils who find aspects of English and mathematics challenging make good progress because their needs are clearly identified. They receive good support from skilled learning support assistants, and their progress is closely monitored.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils appreciate the exciting range of work and activities provided by the school. They particularly enjoy visits to places of interest, which link well with their work in the classroom

and enhance their social and cultural experiences. A very broad range of before- and after-school activities enriches the curriculum and contributes well to pupils' personal development. There are good opportunities for pupils to develop their skills and capabilities in ICT and to apply these to their learning in other subjects. The change in emphasis on speaking and listening in the curriculum in Key Stage 1 is already beginning to show in pupils' improved literacy standards. The school is now embarking on a scheme, known as the 'Change School programme', to enable teachers to make even more effective use of their teaching time. The school has correctly identified the value of developing this more creative curriculum to ensure that a consistently good rate of challenge and interest is maintained for all pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care, guidance and support are excellent. The school has very thorough procedures in place for safeguarding pupils. Staff are vigilant as regards pupils' needs, enabling them all to learn and play in a safe and secure learning environment. Staff deal well with any bullying that arises in a very caring and professional manner. Pupils say that they are safe in school, and know who to go to if in need of help. The school provides very good support for vulnerable pupils, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those learning English as a new language. Academic guidance is good, and systems enable the progress of pupils to be tracked closely. However, many of the assessment systems which will enable pupils to be provided with more personalised learning targets, or 'Next Steps', are new and yet to be embedded.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The outstanding headteacher's open-door approach involves all adults in moving the school forward. She gives an exemplary lead in relating effectively to pupils, parents and the local community. She is given good support by the knowledgeable and hard-working team of managers and subject leaders. Teamwork is of the highest quality. Many coordinators are new to their roles, but management at all levels is good due to the staff's enthusiasm and the developing systems that are in place to monitor pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and learning. The administrative team, caretaker and lunchtime supervisors are considerable assets to the school and are very much appreciated by all concerned.

There is a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas that need more development. The school's self-evaluation is very effective. The interim improvement plan sets out the school's challenging targets and provides clear guidance for raising standards. This has provided the school's leaders with the drive to improve the curriculum, particularly in respect of using their excellent relationships with the local community to make pupils more aware of their place in multicultural Britain. The governors bring a wide range of skills to their role as critical friends. They hold the school to account by challenging decisions and requesting explanations.

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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?	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	3
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	3
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

25 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Paul's Catholic Primary School, Portsmouth, PO6 4JD

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. I promised that I would write to let you know what we found out.

We agree with what you told us: St Paul's is a good school. I am going to tell you what needs to happen so that next time the inspectors visit you they will say your school is even better.

Your good behaviour and positive approach to work are important strengths of the school. The school is a very caring place, and the staff work hard to make learning fun. The teaching is good, and the curriculum is exciting and really helps to make learning interesting. We were very impressed by your enthusiasm for all of the extra activities you join, and by the sensible way you discuss your work. The school is well organised, and your headteacher and the staff make sure that everything runs smoothly. You play your part well in making decisions through the school council.

We have asked your teachers to make sure that no matter which class you are in, all your lessons are good. You can help them best by continuing to work hard and by making the most of everything your school has to offer. It is important that the younger ones among you, in the Nursery and Reception classes, should have the opportunity to work and learn outside as often as possible. So we have asked the staff and governors to look at how the outside areas are organised to help this to happen.

With best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

David Marshall

Lead Inspector