

Our Lady Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117476
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326619
Inspection dates	11–12 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Ian Jones

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)	213
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 Ian McBain
Headteacher	Mrs Susan Brown
Date of previous school inspection	25 April 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Old Hale Way Hitchin Hertfordshire SG5 1XT
Telephone number	01462 622555
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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

The school is of average size and serves the town of Hitchin and surrounding areas. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds although there is a wide range of children from minority ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or difficulties, including pupils with a statement of special educational needs, is broadly in line with that found nationally. The children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a Reception class. The school has gained a number of awards including Basic Skills, Arts Mark Gold and Activemark and National Healthy School 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. Pupils achieve exceptionally well and leave school with well developed skills and attitudes together with an appetite for the learning challenges of the future. Parents strongly support the school and appreciate the excellent care and encouragement their children receive. As one, echoing the voice of many, said 'The school is a wonderful, nurturing, caring community where children receive an excellent education'. However, the school is far from complacent, and strives to do even better. It has an excellent track record of swiftly moving forward and its capacity to continue doing so is outstanding.

From broadly average starting points, pupils make exceptionally good progress. By the time they leave school in Year 6 they reach exceptionally high standards. There are many reasons why the school is particularly successful. One of the most important factors that contribute to this success story is the pupils. They are great ambassadors for the school, their behaviour is exemplary and their desire to do well shines through. Being a healthy school has a high profile and pupils benefit enormously in understanding how to stay healthy, eat well and how to manage risks in their lives. They contribute extremely well to the school as a community and their contributions and suggestions are highly valued by the staff.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Lessons motivate and enthuse pupils who demonstrate particularly mature attitudes to learning. There is the highest level of respect between all adults and pupils so that staff are consistently effective at building up pupils' confidence. As a result, pupils are eager to participate in lessons, confident that they will receive the highest level of support. The curriculum provides excellent learning opportunities both within and outside of the school day, and the personal and social education programme is excellent in its support of pupils' personal development. The school has recognised the need to further develop cross-curricular links between subjects to make learning even more meaningful for pupils. Excellent development of literacy, numeracy and scientific skills complement the very high standards reached in other important areas such as the arts, a modern foreign language (Spanish) and information and communication technology (ICT). The outstanding range of enrichment activities and after school clubs support pupils' social skills as well as their love of school.

Meeting the individual needs of all pupils is valued above all as an integral element of the school's work. Pastoral care of pupils is excellent because pupils feel safe and trust their teachers. Staff go out of their way to ensure that pupils thrive both socially and academically. Key to this is the high level of academic guidance pupils receive. Marking is of the highest standard, resulting in an impressive dialogue between teachers and pupils, particularly in their writing.

Leadership is excellent at all levels because it is dynamic, committed and has the highest expectation of what the school can achieve. The driving force behind the school's success is the headteacher. With the enthusiastic and capable support of the staff and governors, she has successfully built on the school's many achievements and developed a reputation for excellence which it so richly deserves. The future of the school is in very safe hands.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage in enabling all children to make significant gains in their learning in relation to their starting points is outstanding. Children start school with skills and knowledge which are broadly in line with national expectations. They receive an

excellent start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and by the time they leave attainment is above expectations. Children respond enthusiastically to challenges and develop high levels of independence, imagination and concentration. They are encouraged to use all their senses, for instance when oats were used to explore textures and fluidity. The systems for identifying children's individual needs are exemplary, as are the support systems and engagement of parents which ensures that these children make excellent levels of progress. The high levels of respect for each other is fundamental to the good relationships, appropriate choices and decisions that children make in developing their group interaction and problem solving skills. Exceptional organisation and a stimulating learning environment provide ideal opportunities for active learning through play and exploration. The skills of all staff in observing, evaluating and assessing children's learning contribute very well to the attainment of high standards. The very high aspirations of the leadership team ensure that the learning environment is of a consistently high quality and the safety and security of the children is paramount. All children receive a supportive and welcoming introduction to the school which is firmly based on the desire for every child to succeed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further develop links between subjects to make learning even more meaningful and to broaden pupils' perspectives of the world in which they live.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The excellent start in the Early Years Foundation Stage is built upon well in Key Stage 1 with pupils making outstanding progress to reach exceptionally high standards by the end of Year 2. Progress continues at a very good rate at Key Stage 2 so that, by the time pupils leave school in Year 6, standards in English, mathematics and science are exceptionally high. High standards attained in art, music, ICT and Spanish is further evidence of the outstanding overall achievement and progress of all groups of pupils. Pupils who need additional support or those who find learning more difficult make outstanding progress in line with the other pupils in the school.

The exceptional rate of pupil progress is achieved through outstanding leadership, a wide range of exciting and interesting activities, highly effective teaching, excellent academic guidance and the contribution of pupils who have mature attitudes to school and a passion for learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils of all ages contribute significantly to the many successes of the school. They add much to the school's family ethos and care deeply about their teachers and friends. Behaviour is excellent and pupils have a great enthusiasm for learning. Pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school as reflected in their excellent attendance rates. They show a very mature sense of justice and fair play. They are keen to succeed but also demonstrate the highest respect for the feelings and beliefs of others. Pupils have a good understanding of cultural and ethnic diversity through the themed weeks and the range of visits and visitors. The contribution pupils make to the school and wider community is excellent. Older pupils relish the opportunities to act as 'buddies' for the younger children. The school council is proactive and helps make improvements to the school such as the quiet garden where pupils can spend time in contemplation and prayer. Pupils are enthusiastic to take on a range of responsibilities in the school and help raise funds for local, national and international charities, often instigating initiatives themselves. Add to

this pupils' outstanding awareness of how to keep fit, healthy and safe, and it is little surprise that pupils leave the school extremely well prepared for secondary school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Lessons are characterised by very good relationships between adults and pupils which strongly supports pupils' learning. Teachers use their subject knowledge to very good effect so that pupils make outstanding progress. Classroom assistants support pupils who find learning more difficult very well and are a highly effective aspect of provision. Lessons move forward at a good pace and work is well matched to the varying needs of learners. Pupils enjoy this level of challenge and make rapid progress accordingly. They demonstrate a love of learning and are patient to consider alternative ideas and suggestions from their peers. Marking of pupils' work is regular and detailed so that it often refers to the shared lesson objectives and personal targets. By successfully encouraging a response to the marking comments, not only are pupils helped to understand what needs to be done to improve, they appreciate their role in the learning process and that their participation is both valued and important.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school places a real emphasis on the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and helps them prepare extremely well for their future economic well-being. The recent emphasis on boys' writing across all subjects has seen high standards improve further. ICT is often integrated well into lessons and adds significantly to pupils' learning and enjoyment. Pupils are given many high quality opportunities to participate in practical activities in science and mathematics and to learn Spanish and play musical instruments. Activities are very well planned so that pupils of all abilities benefit from activities across the curriculum that are both challenging and thought provoking. A wide programme of extension activities maintains a highly effective challenge for the gifted and talented, who regularly attend 'master class' sessions at the local secondary schools. Although lessons often identify links between different subjects, the school is looking to expand such initiatives and adopt a more cross-curricular approach to learning to broaden pupils' perspectives of the world in which they live. The curriculum includes an excellent personal and social education programme as well as outstanding enrichment activities that include themed events, residential and day visits, visitors to the school and a diverse range of school clubs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Excellent systems are in place for making sure that pupils' health and safety is of paramount importance. The very high level of commitment and conscientiousness of all staff ensures these systems are strictly adhered to. Pupils' social and emotional well-being is of very high importance to all staff who take collective responsibility to enable the needs of every pupil to be met. The very robust systems for safeguarding pupils are effectively managed and respected. The safe, supportive and stimulating environment enables all pupils to attain challenging targets. Early identification of any barriers to learning, together with careful monitoring of support enables

most pupils to develop their own strategies to overcome their difficulties. Excellent relationships with parents ensure that all pupils learn within a supportive and enabling environment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher provides innovative, dedicated and forward thinking leadership. She has delivered continued improvement since the last inspection and is resolute in her determination to achieve academic excellence whilst retaining the strong family ethos which makes this school so successful. She has been highly successful in building together a team of staff who are committed to the vision and who work vigorously in making the vision a reality. The recently formed leadership team are proactive and relish the opportunities given to take the initiative. Highly effective procedures for analysing data are in place, as are processes to track pupils' progress, set challenging targets and for monitoring and improving teaching. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and all stakeholders play their part in analysing progress and identifying aspects for further improvement. Governance is excellent because governors are knowledgeable, challenging and committed to the school's continued success. The school's excellent drive for community cohesion is particularly well reflected in strong links with parents and the community.

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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

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?	1
The standards ¹ 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

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?	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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	1
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

13 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Our Lady Catholic Primary School, Hitchin SG5 1XT

Thank you for making us so welcome during the recent inspection. We were very pleased to find how keen you were to share your thoughts about your school. We really appreciated the opportunities to talk to you about work and school, and a special thanks to the pupils who met with us to discuss their views. It was great to hear how much you like school and all the super activities you take part in both during and outside of the school day. It was good to hear how safe and secure you feel, that bullying is not an issue and that there is always someone to talk to if you have any concerns.

Our Lady Catholic Primary School is an outstanding school and a fun place to learn. All the teachers and other staff make learning exciting and in doing so help you achieve exceptionally well. The curriculum is excellent with many interesting activities on offer and lots of visits, visitors and after school clubs. The school is outstanding at helping you keep safe, fit and healthy. Mrs Brown is a first-rate headteacher and the teachers, staff and governors work very successfully to provide a high quality of education for all of you. One of the greatest strengths at the school is you! Your behaviour, enthusiasm and desire to do well were all outstanding. The way you support each other and contribute to the life of the school is something very special. You are excellent ambassadors for the school. Well done!

To make your school even better I have asked Mrs Brown and the staff to find more ways to link subjects together. This will help you to learn at an even faster rate and give you an even broader view of how the world works. I know you will want to continue playing your part in the success of the school by continuing to work as hard and behave as well as you do now.

It was a pleasure and privilege to meet you.

Ian Jones

Lead inspector