

# St Dominic Catholic Primary School

## Inspection report

---

<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117478
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	326621
<b>Inspection date</b>	5 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Derek Watts

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.

---

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	236
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
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Dave Hartnett
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Elizabeth O'Brien
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 February 2006
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Southdown Road Harpenden Hertfordshire AL5 1PF
<b>Telephone number</b>	01582760047
<b>Fax number</b>	01582760424

---

<b>Age group</b>	3–11
<b>Inspection date</b>	5 March 2009
<b>Inspection number</b>	326621

---

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

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

- how well the school is using assessment and target setting to promote pupils' progress
- how well information and communication technology (ICT) is used to support teaching and learning
- how good provision is in the Early Years Foundation Stage and how well children are progressing.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations and a scrutiny of pupils' work and school documentation. Parents' questionnaires and discussions with pupils, governors 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 were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

St Dominic Catholic is an average size primary school. The vast majority of pupils in this popular and oversubscribed school are from a White British background. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The nature of these difficulties lie mainly in the areas of autism, speech, language and communication. A very low proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals. There is Early Years Foundation Stage provision for children in Nursery and Reception. The headteacher had only been in post for one month at the time of the last inspection. The deputy headteacher was appointed in January this year.

A private organisation provides before and after school care for pupils on site.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

St Dominic Catholic Primary is an outstanding school. Children in Nursery and Reception get off to a good start. In Key Stage 1 and 2, pupils achieve exceptionally well because of outstanding teaching and an exciting curriculum. By the end of Year 6, standards are exceptionally high. Excellent care, guidance and support, and a very positive school climate lead to outstanding personal development and well-being for pupils.

Outstanding leadership and management is the key to the school's success and to the considerable improvements made since the last inspection. A parent's comment that 'the headteacher and her team are doing a great job', is very accurate. The headteacher has focused relentlessly on ensuring high quality provision. As a result, teaching, the curriculum and care, guidance and support have all improved from good to outstanding thereby demonstrating the school's excellent capacity to make further improvements. The new deputy headteacher has settled well and leads by example in the classroom. Other key leaders are effective in their roles. School performance is systematically monitored and reviewed by leaders and managers. The school has a very clear understanding of what it does well and takes highly effective action to bring about necessary improvements. Community cohesion is promoted extremely well through the school's very positive ethos and the strong partnerships with the church, parents and partner schools. These partnerships enable the school to successfully meet the different needs of pupils and their families. As a parent astutely commented, 'In the school there is a real sense of community, inclusion and leadership.' Governors are more involved in policy making and evaluating performance than at the time of the last inspection. They have a clear understanding of the school's performance and this enables them to offer constructive challenge as well as great support. Some governors are new and are developing in their role.

Parents hold very positive views about the school and the vast majority are extremely pleased with both the care and education provided for their children. They are especially pleased with the school's ethos, the leadership, teaching, pupils' progress and the improvements made. Typical comments from the parents' questionnaire included: 'An outstanding school,' 'Teaching standards are high,' 'Perfect balance between great teaching and pastoral care,' and, 'Excellent school, our kids love it.' Pupils benefit from a very productive Parent Teacher Association which is particularly successful at raising funds for additional resources. Parents are delighted with the improved communication, such as the parents' forum.

Standards by the end of Year 2 are well above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Mathematics standards dipped a little in 2008 but the school has taken swift and effective action to remedy this. National test results and pupils' work show that by the end of Year 6, standards are exceptionally high in English, mathematics and science. The proportion of pupils who attained the higher Level 5 in 2008 was particularly high. Pupils who need specific help make excellent progress because of the well-targeted support provided.

Pupils make outstanding progress because of the high calibre teaching they receive. Teaching is frequently exciting and inspirational and this motivates the pupils and maintains their interest. As the pupils said, 'Our teachers make lessons fun and enjoyable.' Pupils respond extremely well to their teachers' high expectations of learning and behaviour. They participate in lessons with great enthusiasm and benefit from their teachers' clear explanations and instructions. Questioning is used skilfully by teachers to challenge pupils' thinking and check their understanding. Pupils are articulate and confident speakers because of the high quality

opportunities provided for discussion. Teaching assistants are well deployed and make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning, particularly those who need additional help with literacy and numeracy.

Learning is particularly effective when pupils are actively involved. For example, in an excellent Year 6 science lesson, pupils eagerly investigated how a football and a ping pong ball could cast the same size shadow. Inspired by their teacher's enthusiasm and strong subject knowledge, they planned their tests in small groups, changed variables such as the distance of the ball from the light source and accurately recorded their results. They showed an excellent understanding of making tests fair and used scientific vocabulary accurately in their explanations. Subsequently, pupils made exceptional gains in acquiring and applying scientific knowledge and skills.

Assessment information is used very well to plan teaching and to tailor activities and tasks to pupils' abilities and needs. As a result, pupils are challenged and extended so they make outstanding progress. Pupils are set specific learning targets in literacy and numeracy so they know what they need to do to improve. Individual targets are also used well in science and ICT. As pupils progress through the school, they become increasingly more confident in reviewing their own and others' learning. This is helped by the way teachers provide clear indicators or success criteria in lessons to guide pupils' learning. These also provide clear measures to help pupils assess their progress. The marking of pupils' work is effective. Teachers provide encouragement and praise for good work and constructive comments to help them improve.

An outstanding curriculum promotes exceptionally good progress for pupils and makes an excellent contribution to their personal development. Provision for English, mathematics and science is highly effective and contributes to the exceptionally high standards in these subjects. The school is particularly successful at developing the more advanced skills of investigation, problem solving and reasoning. Pupils have good opportunities to learn to play a musical instrument. The teaching of French adds to pupils' language and to their cultural development. Health and safety education are promoted extremely well throughout the curriculum. The school offers a very good range of additional activities such as clubs and visits. These are thoroughly enjoyed by the pupils and much appreciated by the parents. Popular clubs include choir, netball, football, recorders, street dance, computers and scrabble. Successful residential visits for Years 5 and 6 provide exciting outdoor activities as well as building pupils' personal and social skills.

The school has made considerable improvements in the use of ICT since the last inspection, as a result of high quality leadership. Teachers use interactive whiteboards very competently to illustrate key teaching points. For example, in a successful Year 2 English lesson, pupils acted out a short sketch of the princess and the frog by the school pond and videoed their performance. Year 5 pupils used spreadsheets and formulae to solve problems. Year 5 produce multimedia presentations on promoting healthy lifestyles. Throughout the school, ICT is used well by pupils to draft and edit writing, including poems and play scripts.

Pupils' care and support are outstanding. There are highly effective procedures to ensure that pupils are protected and safe. Pupils report that they are extremely well cared for at school. They are also confident that there is always an adult they can turn to if they are upset or have a serious problem. The exceptional care and support promote outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are very courteous and friendly. They show enormous respect for others. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and this is shown by their very keen participation in activities and their well above average attendance. High expectations by staff and the excellent relationships between adults and pupils lead to outstanding behaviour in

class and around the school. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles and show an excellent understanding of the importance of healthy eating and exercising regularly. They thrive on the additional responsibilities they are given and make exceptionally good contributions to the school and to the wider community. House captains and members of the school council take their roles seriously. Drama productions to parents and the local community successfully build pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Pupils raise funds for a variety of local, national and global charities. At St Dominic, pupils are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education. By the time they leave, they have exceptionally good literacy and numeracy skills. In addition to these, their personal and social skills are excellent.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 2**

The Early Years Foundation Stage is well led and managed. Children enter the Nursery with knowledge and skills above those expected for their age. Good teaching, outstanding welfare arrangements and an interesting range of learning activities enable children to make good progress. As such, by the end of Reception, children possess knowledge and skills which prepare them very well for entry into Year 1. Children settle into school really well because of effective induction procedures and the very strong partnership with parents. They make outstanding gains in their personal and social development because of the very positive relationships established between adults and children. They thoroughly enjoy their learning and possess very positive attitudes. In the main, there is an effective blend of adult led activities and allowing children to explore, be creative and work independently. The school has established an effective system for assessing and recording children's performance and this is used well to plan teaching and guide children's learning. Parent volunteers make a valuable contribution to children's learning, particularly in the areas of language and reading. However, children do not have sufficient access to outdoor learning opportunities to support their creativity and physical development. Senior staff have identified this as a key priority and there are plans to improve outdoor facilities.

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

- Extend the range of outdoor learning opportunities for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

**Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).**

## Annex A

**Inspection judgements**

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

**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?	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?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

**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

---

<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	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

<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	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	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**

6 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Dominic Catholic Primary School, Harpenden, AL5 1PF

Thank you so much for welcoming us into your school and showing us your work. We enjoyed our visit and would like to tell you what we found. Yours is an outstanding school and one you can be very proud of.

These are the main strengths of the school.

- You thoroughly enjoy school and your attendance is very good.
- Children in Nursery and Reception get off to a good start.
- Your school is a very friendly and positive place to learn in.
- You are making exceptional progress because of the outstanding teaching you receive.
- You benefit from an excellent range of learning activities, including clubs and visits.
- Your behaviour is outstanding in lessons and around the school.
- You have an excellent understanding of how to keep healthy and safe.
- Staff take excellent care of you and give you very good support.
- You make very good contributions to the school and the wider community.
- Your headteacher leads the school extremely well. She receives very good support from the deputy headteacher and other senior staff.
- Your parents are very pleased with the care and education provided and give the school great support.

We have asked the school to look at one area to make it even better.

- There should be more interesting outdoor learning activities for children in Nursery and Reception. Your school has plans to make this happen.

Finally, thank you once again for all your help. Keep up the outstanding work. We wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Derek Watts

Lead inspector