

Saint Bernadette's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117489
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326626
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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)	239
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 Jenny Carolan
Headteacher	Mrs Ann Cassidy
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Walsingham Way London Colney St. Albans Hertfordshire AL2 1NL

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2009
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is similar in size to other primary schools. Two thirds of pupils are of White British heritage; the remaining pupils include those from Irish, British Asian and more recently Eastern European backgrounds. Nevertheless, fewer pupils speak English as an additional language than in schools nationally. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also below that found nationally. Most of these pupils have specific learning difficulties, speech, language and communication difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school has gained the Active Mark Award. It is part of a School's Sports Partnership and Extended Schools Consortium. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of a Nursery classroom, separate from the main building, and a Reception class.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school that has seen many changes in staff in recent years. This has slowed the rate of improvement although the school has sustained strengths in the way it cares for pupils and promotes their good personal development. Most parents praise the school's warm, friendly atmosphere and the fact that their children enjoy school and belong to a community with strong moral values. One commented: 'My daughter is appreciated and encouraged; she is praised and rewarded, and feels valued and respected; she looks forward to coming each day'.

Children join the Nursery Year with attainment that is broadly in line with that expected for their age. Throughout the school, achievement is satisfactory and pupils reach average standards. Attainment in Year 2 has been above average in the last three years but standards are currently average in reading and writing and above average in mathematics. Standards in Year 6 have remained average overall, with some fluctuation between individual subjects. Attainment in Year 6 is average in English and science, and below average in mathematics. This represents an improvement in science, where standards were below average in 2008, but a decline in standards in English and particularly in mathematics. In recent years, boys have outperformed girls at both key stages, in contrast to the national picture where girls do better than boys.

The curriculum makes a sound impact on pupils' academic achievement and promotes their personal development well. The staff care for the pupils very well and value them as individuals. The school has introduced effective procedures for tracking pupils' progress and put in place a good range of support groups to help any pupils in danger of falling behind in their learning. The school ensures that pupils develop a good awareness of healthy living, know how to stay safe and have good opportunities to contribute to the community. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. The school prepares pupils satisfactorily for the next stage of their education: they develop good personal qualities and make satisfactory progress in basic skills.

The school promotes community cohesion well. The life of the school is an important part of the work in the wider parish and links with other community users are strong. For example, the school responded very positively to the needs of families newly arrived from Eastern Europe by encouraging a Saturday Polish school on its site. Through the support of a range of local and national charities, pupils appreciate other cultures and this has been extended internationally through the school's sponsorship of a child in Kenya.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since the last inspection, the school has had long spells with no deputy headteacher or with a member of staff fulfilling the role on a part-time basis. Recently, the headteacher and deputy headteacher have both been absent. Although the school has continued to provide satisfactorily for its pupils, staffing difficulties have led to inconsistencies in practice. Teachers' work has not been regularly and rigorously checked to make sure procedures are being followed, and school improvement has been patchy. Recognising the difficulties the school was experiencing, the local authority conducted a detailed review of its work in April 2009. This provided very clear information about the school's strengths and weaknesses. The local authority has put in place an experienced acting headteacher and acting deputy, who have already begun to have a positive effect on the school's work. Although most of the teachers have been in post for only one or two years, the staff team is enthusiastic and improvements in teaching have already begun to take effect. Teaching is satisfactory overall with some good lessons. The local authority is working closely with the governing body, the

diocese and acting senior leaders to bringing about the necessary improvements. Two new senior staff have been appointed to start work at the beginning of next term with particular responsibilities for raising standards in English and mathematics in Years 1 to 6 and improving the achievement of girls. The school is satisfactorily placed to develop further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children's achievement is satisfactory in response to teaching that is sound overall, with some good teaching in the Nursery. In 2008, children did less well than expected in writing, calculation and their knowledge of shape, space and measures. The school has increased children's opportunities to learn about letters and sounds, and attainment at the end of the Reception Year is now broadly in line with national expectations. Assessment is satisfactory and staff regularly observe children's learning. Planning ensures that experiences span the six areas of learning and children's personal development is promoted well. There has been insufficient investment in the Early Years Foundation Stage, however, and the learning environment in both classes is less stimulating and varied than it should be. In particular, learning resources do not support children's imaginative development or encourage learning through exploration as much as they should. A new Nursery classroom is being built for use from the beginning of next term. This will enable staff in the Nursery and Reception Years to work in closer geographic proximity and should help to promote greater cohesiveness between the two staff teams. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school is at an early stage in engaging parents as partners in their children's learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards throughout the school, especially in mathematics in Years 3 to 6 and by increasing the achievement of girls.
- Increase the rigour with which the school's work is monitored and evaluated by leaders at all levels, especially to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly by ensuring that learning resources are varied and stimulating and by developing partnership with parents.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

In 2008, standards in Year 2 were exceptionally high in reading and above average in writing and mathematics, but whilst boys did exceptionally well relative to boys nationally, girls reached only average standards. Standards in Year 6 in 2008 were average overall, above average in English, average in mathematics and below average in science. Pupils made very good progress in English, satisfactory progress in mathematics and inadequate progress in science. A review conducted by the local authority in April 2009 found that attainment was average and achievement satisfactory throughout the school. Inspection findings confirm this view. All groups are now making satisfactory progress, although the school's own data shows that a minority of girls have made insufficient progress in mathematics in Years 3 to 6. Standards in science have risen this year as a result of an increase in practical investigation and additional support for pupils acquiring English as an additional language.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school and say how much they like the clubs and the opportunity to work on the allotment. Behaviour is good and relationships are very positive. Pupils contribute maturely and confidently to class discussion, are keen to do their best and are very responsive to the needs of others. Attendance is above average and most pupils arrive at school promptly. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Their spiritual awareness is developed very well through prayer and reflection, and pupils are pleased with the opportunity to use the quiet prayer garden. They have a good understanding of right and wrong and have mature views on issues such as the importance of reconciliation and deforestation. Pupils have a very clear sense of belonging to a school community and older pupils readily accept responsibility as school councillors, 'buddies' to younger children, play leaders and 'playground pals'. Pupils are very well involved in the local community through links with the church and sporting activities with the local secondary school. They have a good appreciation of citizenship and of different cultural and faiths groups; and they raise funds to support a pupil in Kenya.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The local authority review and mentoring for less experienced teachers have done much to raise teachers' awareness of what constitutes effective teaching. Positive changes have taken place in lesson planning, though there is more work to be done in this area. Planning in English, mathematics and science now identifies different activities for groups of pupils based on their prior attainment. It also includes the criteria on which pupils' success will be judged. Displays in classrooms have improved and there has been an increase in investigative activities in mathematics. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning, especially that of pupils who find learning more difficult or who have English as an additional language. Teachers nearly always manage behaviour well and in the best lessons they ask probing questions that encourage pupils to think for themselves. Teachers are beginning to take more responsibility for the progress of pupils in their class through tracking their achievement and setting targets for individual pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum provides an appropriate balance between the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills and work in other subjects. However, the promotion of basic skills, particularly in numeracy, is not yet successful in ensuring that pupils make the best possible progress. Work is still being done to strengthen links between different subjects, including the use of information and communication technology. The curriculum places strong emphasis on the spiritual and emotional well-being of pupils and is carefully and sensitively modified for vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The most able pupils have had some opportunities to take part in special events, but overall provision for pupils with particular gifts and talents is at an early stage of development. The curriculum is made interesting by a good number of clubs, musical tuition, visits and visitors and sporting opportunities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school has a strong, caring culture which is shared by all adults so that there is an impressive consistency of approach. Procedures for child protection and checks on the suitability of adults working in the school are secure. Careful attention is given to minimising risk and ensuring pupils' health and safety. Pupils who may be vulnerable or distressed are looked after and supported well. There are a good number of opportunities for pupils to share their concerns. For example, pupils can visit 'the hut' for 'time to chatter about things that matter' in a confidential setting. The school works closely with other agencies such as the educational welfare officer, behaviour support staff and speech therapists. Sound systems are in place for checking how well pupils are doing and pupils receive satisfactory guidance about how to improve their work. Marking has improved but pupils' individual targets in English and mathematics are not used as actively as they should be to raise achievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Since the last inspection, senior leaders have been successful in promoting high quality care but staffing difficulties mean that there has not been a continuous and systematic drive to raise standards. Senior leaders and individual subject leaders have undertaken some detailed monitoring but staff changes mean that this has not been part of a coherent approach. A number of subject leaders are relatively new to their roles and subject leadership is now satisfactory overall. The acting headteacher and acting deputy head are providing effective direction to the school's work. The positive impact of their support to teachers is already evident and they are working very closely with the local authority to raise achievement. Governance is satisfactory. Governors have not always held the school to account sufficiently by checking its work for themselves. The governing body is developing its role and governors are now closely involved in efforts to tackle the issues raised by the local authority review.

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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?	3
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	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
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?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

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	1
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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**

10 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Bernadette Catholic Primary School, London Colney, AL2 1NL

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed coming into your lessons and talking to some of you about what it is like to be a pupil at St Bernadette. Now I am writing to let you know what we found out about your school.

We found that you go to a satisfactory school. We agree with you and your parents that the school is a friendly place where the staff care for you very well. You get on well together, your behaviour is good and you say that you enjoy school. We were particularly impressed by how thoughtful you are, especially during prayers and reflection. You have some interesting things to do, such as taking part in clubs, going on school visits and joining in with other local schools in sports competitions. You make satisfactory progress with your work, but you sometimes do better in some subjects than others. Having more chance to investigate topics in science has made learning fun and increased your knowledge. In Years 1 and 2, you are doing well in mathematics but not quite so well higher up the school. Boys generally do better in this school than girls, which is unusual: in most primary schools, it is the other way round.

Some of your parents wrote to say they were worried because there have been a lot of changes in teachers. We agree that this has made it difficult for the school but we are confident that things are beginning to get better. The school is working closely with people from the local authority to improve your school and the staff want to make it better for you. We have asked them to:

- raise standards, especially in mathematics in Years 3 to 6 and by helping girls to make more progress
- check the school's work carefully to make sure everything is as good as it should be
- improve the toys and other learning materials in the Nursery and Reception classes and involve parents there in a closer learning partnership.

Keep working hard and enjoy the rest of your time at the school.

Yours faithfully

Margaret Goodchild

Lead inspector