

Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117493
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326628
Inspection date	6 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Helen Ranger

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)	157
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 Eileen Silcock
Headteacher	Mrs Teresa Leavy
Date of previous school inspection	11 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Broadmeads Ware Hertfordshire SG12 9HY
Telephone number	01920 461678

Age group	4–11
Inspection date	6 March 2009
Inspection number	326628

Fax number

01920 461418

Age group	4-11
Inspection date	6 March 2009
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school. They investigated how well pupils achieve, the current quality of teaching and the curriculum, and how leaders and managers evaluate the school and promote improvement.

The inspectors gathered evidence from records of pupils' progress, observations of lessons and breaktime activities, examples of pupils' work, discussions with pupils, staff and governors, and questionnaires and letters from parents. The main documents used by the school in its monitoring were examined. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors 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

This is a smaller than average size primary school. Pupils come almost entirely from Roman Catholic families and from a wide area, which includes the whole of Ware town and parts of the surrounding district. Around 20% of pupils are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds; very few are at an early stage of learning to speak English. Pupils' eligibility for free school meals is low and a smaller than average proportion of pupils has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. When children start the Early Years Foundation Stage in their Reception year, they have a wide range of skills and abilities which match the standards expected nationally for their age. In the past few years, there has been a considerable amount of staffing change. The school has had difficulty in recruiting a permanent headteacher and there has been a succession of short-term and temporary headteachers. However, an experienced new headteacher has been in post since January 2009.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that has dealt well with the turbulence in its senior leadership since it was last inspected. The staff and governors have worked closely with the local authority and the diocese to provide continuity for pupils and, at the same time, have been determined to make the right appointments for their school. Parents have been understandably anxious for stability to return and a large proportion of those who wrote to inspectors said how pleased they are that the school has a permanent headteacher again. A typical comment was that the new headteacher 'recognises the areas of strength and is immediately striving to address any areas of concern'. Staff and pupils too are very positive about the future. The early indications are that their confidence is well placed. The headteacher already has a clear grasp of what needs doing, whether as an urgent priority or for the school's longer-term development.

Staff changes have affected several classes but, in spite of this, pupils' academic achievements are good, including for those who need extra adult help with learning. In the Year 2 assessments in reading, writing and mathematics, standards have improved well in recent years when compared with the national picture. They have been, and continue to be, at least above average. Of particular note were the results for 2008 in both reading and writing, which were exceptionally high. Performances in the national tests for pupils at the end of Year 6 have also been consistently above the national averages and, at times, extremely high. Provisional information indicates that, in the 2008 tests, pupils at this school made much better progress across Key Stage 2 than in most schools. The pupils currently in Year 6 are on track to reach high standards again this year.

A strength of the school is that, in most years, a much higher proportion of pupils reach Level 5 in English, mathematics and science than in most schools. However, the school has identified through its pupil progress tracking information that some of its more able pupils can do even better. Where individual pupils are most at risk of any underachievement, it is too often because they are not challenged to reach their full potential. Because of this, the academic targets for individuals and year groups have not always been met. This also indicates that there is more scope for pupils to develop the key academic skills they will need for the next stage of education and their future lives. The headteacher and her immediate predecessor have done much to ensure that teachers now have more efficient tracking systems that clearly identify how well each pupil is getting on, who needs extra help and who can be stretched further. Staff have been well trained in the skills needed to administer these systems and speak very positively about the quality of information they have to support their planning as a result.

When the school was last inspected, pupils' personal development and well-being were judged outstanding and this is still the case. Their behaviour is first rate and their great enjoyment of school is evident in enthusiasm for learning and consistently high levels of attendance. Pupils show extremely high levels of spiritual, moral and social understanding. These are promoted by the strong ethos of the school, which builds on the maturity pupils often bring from home. Pupils' cultural and multi-cultural awareness are mostly very good and supported by strengths in their work in subjects such as the arts, humanities and personal and social education. They have an excellent understanding of how to live safe and healthy lives, exemplified by their commitment to physical activity and a good diet. They also have a good understanding of their roles as young citizens, through their school council and a wide range of work in the local area and with charities. This work includes very effective links with a school in Gambia and plans to

work with a school in a contrasting location in London. Such projects are making an effective contribution to the school's good efforts to promote community cohesion.

Pupils make good progress because teaching and the curriculum are good. Both these key aspects of the school have been successfully improved since the last inspection. At that time, the programmes of work in science and in information and communication technology had weaknesses. These have been addressed. Pupils comment that lessons are more enjoyable now because there are more practical and investigative elements and more chances to use computers in their work. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together and lessons take place in a pleasant atmosphere of mutual respect between staff and pupils. Staff increasingly link subjects together to make learning more enjoyable and relevant. Good progress has been made in ensuring that the 'intervention programmes', which target pupils who need extra help or a quick boost in learning, are tailored closely to the individual needs of the pupils who undertake them. The school is at a relatively early stage of targeting provision to pupils with particular gifts or talents but staff aim to do so, as part of their commitment to enabling all individuals to excel.

The pastoral care for pupils is very good and pupils comment that they feel confident that adults will help with any problems. Services such as the well-run breakfast club are valued by pupils and their parents. The school fulfils its duties to safeguard pupils. Staff work closely with parents and with external agencies where relevant, such as those that support pupils who need specialist help with learning. There are good links with the parish and with other schools locally. Pupils receive effective guidance about their progress and increasingly have opportunities to reflect on and improve their work. There are examples of excellent marking and written feedback, although this is not consistent across all subjects or classes.

The arrival of the new headteacher has been an important milestone for the school. Working closely with the staff and governors, she has made an excellent start on establishing a shared vision and plans for the future. Senior staff carry out detailed evaluations and analyses of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Based on these, the headteacher has produced a rigorous, well focused improvement plan for the rest of this school year and there is an appropriate timescale for extending this into a longer-term plan. Governors are active, questioning, well informed and led very well by their experienced chairperson. They have shown considerable commitment to securing the best possible provision for pupils in spite of the challenges posed by staffing and financial constraints. Middle managers such as subject leaders have now been trained well in the skills needed to check and improve the quality of provision. For some, this is a relatively new area of management. They recognise that they need to monitor standards and provision more rigorously than in the past to inform their practice, support senior leaders' plans for further development and help the school meet its targets.

In general, the school has continued to provide well for its pupils since its last inspection. With its current team of staff and governors, it is well placed to make further improvements in the future.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Outstanding provision in the Reception class ensures that children make an excellent start to their primary education. Detailed assessments of individual achievements show that children make outstanding progress to reach standards that are well above those expected by the time they transfer to Year 1. The class is extremely well led and managed by an experienced

practitioner. She promotes very effective teamwork with other adults in the class. She has established very useful links with the pre-school settings that most children attend. Children start school with very positive attitudes to learning and good social awareness, eager to make a start on learning basic academic skills. Parents' views are very positive and they appreciate how quickly their children settle into school. The staff work very closely together, and with parents, in planning a rich variety of enjoyable and purposeful activities to nurture children's progress in all areas of learning. The available accommodation is used extremely well, both indoors and out. Stimulating resources, such as the role play areas and the vegetable plot, foster interest and excitement. Children's personal development is excellent. They are well behaved and considerate to others. They have frequent opportunities to choose and plan their own learning, as well as learning directly with an adult. They are very well motivated and receive high levels of care, while being successfully encouraged to become independent and confident learners.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the success of the initiative to provide greater challenge in lessons for the more capable pupils and those with particular gifts or talents.
- Enable middle managers to evaluate provision and standards rigorously and to secure improvements that ensure the school's challenging targets are consistently met.

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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?	2
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?	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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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?	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	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	3
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**

9 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Primary School, Ware, SG12 9HY

This letter is to thank you all for your help when inspectors visited your school recently. We received a very friendly welcome from you and you told us a great deal about your school. Many of your parents wrote to us too, so please thank them for their help. Both you and your parents told us that your school is a good place to learn. We agree with you.

We saw a school where pupils enjoy their education enormously, right from the start in Reception, and reach standards that are considerably higher than in many schools. This prepares you well for your move to secondary school. The adults who work with you want you to keep on learning efficiently. They teach you well and provide an interesting range of lessons and other activities to keep you busy. We agree with them that some of you can probably be stretched even more in your learning. So we hope you are ready to be challenged to an even greater degree by your teachers!

We were particularly impressed by the ways you grow into mature young people. Your behaviour is excellent and you get on extremely well together. You have a really good understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives. You do a great deal to help your school community, such as through the school council. You also help with projects in the local area and are developing links in other countries. The children in Reception told me all about your contacts with the school in Gambia.

One of the most important things people told us about your school was how pleased you are that Mrs Leavy has joined you. It is excellent that you have such a good new headteacher after waiting so long. Mrs Leavy has only been with you a short time but she certainly knows how she would like the school to be even better. There are good plans for all the staff and governors to do this. We have asked the teachers in charge of some subjects to make sure that they check really thoroughly that any plans they make for improvement are successful in helping you to make even faster progress.

We hope you keep on enjoying all that your school offers you.

Best wishes

Helen Ranger

Lead inspector