

Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120609
Local Authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	327322
Inspection date	26 November 2008
Reporting inspector	George Derby

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)	154
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	Ms Patricia Matthews
Headteacher	Mrs Sarah Weldon
Date of previous school inspection	22 September 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	The Drove Sleaford Lincolnshire NG34 7AT
Telephone number	01529 304373

Age group	4–11
Inspection date	26 November 2008
Inspection number	327322

Fax number

01529 415490

Age group 4-11

Inspection date 26 November 2008

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. The overall effectiveness of the school was evaluated and the following issues investigated: pupils' progress across the whole school and the impact of staff's work, especially on the challenge presented for more able pupils; how the school assesses and tracks pupils' progress; and how leaders at all levels across the school are improving the school's work, especially those who have responsibility for subjects and other areas.

Evidence was gathered from the school's data, evidence of pupils' progress, observations of teaching and school life, analysis of parental questionnaires, discussions with staff and evidence from displays around the school.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average Catholic primary school situated on the edge of Sleaford. Pupils are drawn from a wide area and the intake is relatively advantaged. The school roll has been falling over past years. Only a small number of pupils are entitled to free school meals and the percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below average. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. Pupils enter the school in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) with skills, knowledge and understanding that are generally above the level expected for their age.

From September 2008, the school has been led by a new headteacher, appointed from within the school.

The school has many prestigious awards including the Basic Skills Quality Mark, Investor in People, the FA Charter Standard, the Rooted in Reading Award and a Healthy Schools Award.

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. The new headteacher has done much to transform it in the last few months and set it on the right path to improvement.

Our Lady's has a strong ethos of promoting Christian values and discipline, of care and concern for the individual, and embraces a spirit of welcome, fairness and understanding. Empathy and reflection are successfully at the heart of the school's support for pupils. These aid their good personal development, especially their spirituality. During the inspection, an outstanding assembly led by Year 3 and 4 pupils helped the rest of the school and the parents watching understand the feelings of World War II child evacuees, through their compelling poems and diary readings.

Pupils have an excellent understanding and range of opportunities to keep healthy, especially through the many sports based activities after school. They know how to keep themselves safe and make a good contribution to the local community. They are well supported to live harmoniously, respecting the views of others and forming good relationships with their peers. They behave well, although, occasionally, a few pupils can be boisterous. At times, some more able pupils dominate activities and discussions in lessons, which leads to a minority becoming passive. Pupils are prepared adequately for the next stage. They generally attain good basic skills, although because of their above average starting points the development of these is only satisfactory. In addition, older pupils have few opportunities to develop work related skills through enterprise initiatives.

The school is led well by a new headteacher who has clearly begun to make a difference and is bringing the school and pupils' learning to life. The satisfactory curriculum is being developed by, for instance, the addition of French, links between subjects and a greater range of activities outside lessons. The initiatives are too new to yet have a full impact but they are clearly bringing an excitement to learning.

Staff morale is high and teachers are motivated because their skills and talents have been recognised and they are deployed to their strengths. They are now benefiting from the opportunity to develop their roles, for instance as subject leaders, which was an issue to be addressed following the last inspection. The headteacher is steering the school in the right direction and responding swiftly to issues which arise, rectifying deficits and building capacity in the staff to move the school forward. The headteacher's ability to do this is good but given the under-developed nature of some of the leadership at other levels, the school's capacity for future improvement is satisfactory overall. In addition, the school's view of itself has not been entirely accurate but the ongoing work of the headteacher and subject leaders is now bringing a greater clarity and understanding of its present strengths and weaknesses.

Parents are very positive about the school and have lots of praise for the headteacher and her initiatives, especially how their children are involved in decisions about school life and that parents feel informed and included. They also feel there is more going on in the school community. Pupils also think the school has changed for the better. Although the headteacher has achieved a great deal in a short time, there is still a considerable amount to do.

Pupils make satisfactory progress overall, which is similar to the judgement at the time of the last inspection. During their time in Reception, children do well. Through Key Stages 1 and 2 they make satisfactory progress, although some of the school's evidence shows the pattern of progress to be uneven. Although standards at the end of Key Stage 2 in English, mathematics

and science have been consistently above average in past years, the percentage of more able pupils reaching the higher level (Level 5) has not always been high enough. Pupils did well in 2007 but in 2008 the unvalidated results in reading and writing indicate that attainment at the higher level was broadly average and in mathematics was below average. In addition, the school's targets for attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2008 were just missed in English, but met in mathematics. However, given the performance of this group when they were in Year 2, the targets were not sufficiently challenging. The 2009 targets are better, with a reasonable level of challenge at the higher level.

Since the last inspection, at the end of Key Stage 1 standards have fallen successively each year from well above average, with a sharp drop in 2008 to broadly average. Also in 2008, the percentage of pupils reaching the higher level (Level 3) was broadly average, with a below average number attaining this in mathematics. This trend is further complicated because the school's view, based on its subsequent assessment, is that some of the past assessments have been inaccurate and too generous. Work is now being undertaken to ensure a greater level of accuracy. The headteacher has arranged for staff to have training in moderating assessments so that there is common agreement over pupils' levels. In addition, this downward trend has now been addressed and halted. Progress is satisfactory and pupils are on track to reach above average standards.

About two years ago, the school introduced a basic tracking system to keep a check on pupils' progress. While this is helpful for individual pupils, it is constructed in such a way that it is not possible for staff to analyse easily the progress of different year groups, or by gender or other categories, such as learning difficulties. Subject leaders for English, mathematics and science have now made a start on more detailed evaluation, which is helping them to understand the progress that is actually being made throughout the school. This is a good move but they know there is more to be done. Personalised targets in English, mathematics and science have been set for individual pupils in Year 5 and the good practice here is to be spread to other year groups.

Since a reduction both in staff and pupil numbers, there are now a number of mixed age classes. These arrangements are working satisfactorily, an issue a few parents were concerned about. Pupils enjoy lessons and the positive relationships they have with staff. Their attendance is good. Teachers generally plan work for the separate age groups, expanding the knowledge further of the oldest pupils in the class. In the best lessons, probing questioning challenges pupils to rigorously explore their ideas and deepen their understanding, such as in a Year 5 English lesson on how to develop features of a character in a play script.

However, while teaching is satisfactory in Key Stages 1 and 2 overall, and pupils' work shows that it is sometimes better than this in some year groups, there are still a few weaknesses in teaching. This results in some pupils' progress not moving on quickly enough. This is because they are not always clear about what to do or what they are learning. While teachers usually plan different activities for the different ability groups in the class, the level of challenge to stretch the most able pupils is not always sufficient. There are limited success criteria for the pupils to assess their learning against, despite the fact they are learning at different levels. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum to support teaching and pupils' learning is limited. While all classes have interactive whiteboards and the school has an adequate number of computers, little use is made of these to enhance demonstrations or explanations. Staff are building in greater opportunities for assessment, including pupil self-assessment, but the use of assessment to enhance learning is yet to be fully embedded across the school, especially in plenary sessions at the end of lessons. Teaching

assistants make a valuable contribution to the practical part of the lesson and in supporting pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, during introductions they are not always actively involved.

The care, guidance and support for pupils are satisfactory. There are good induction and transfer arrangements so pupils settle quickly in the new settings. There are sound health plans and clear risk assessment for activities and individuals. Pupils' safety is paramount and they are well supervised by staff and playground buddies. Pastoral care for the individual is paramount. The school's procedures for safeguarding pupils broadly meet requirements. A single central register of all the school's safeguarding checks is now in place. However, the child protection policy is out of date and does not have all the necessary information. This is because governors have not reviewed this annually. Staff and the designated coordinator for child protection are now booked on training. The first aid qualifications of staff have lapsed so the school does not have anyone qualified in first aid at present.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The headteacher, who was the science coordinator, has led the development of the subject well since the last inspection and pupils' now have good skills in investigative science. Recent developments have resulted in subject leadership improving rapidly this term. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, largely because of the acceleration in pace of development this term. Governors are supportive and some links have been made with staff undertaking initiatives, but there have been little monitoring or evaluation. They have had little input into the school's development, to school self-evaluation and in checking the decline in aspects of the school. They have relied too heavily on what they have been told was happening. As a consequence, governance is inadequate.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The children settle in quickly to the routines of the school and approach their learning with high levels of enthusiasm and confidence. Children of all abilities achieve well so that by the time they transfer to Year 1, many are beyond the expected level across all areas of learning. Teaching is good, and there is a good balance of free and structured play activities. However, although adults provide good levels of individual support in structured tasks they do not always intervene enough in free-choice activities. This means that opportunities to extend further the children's creativity are sometimes missed. The classroom is well ordered so that the children can easily access resources. This promotes good levels of independence. Satisfactory use is made of the outside play area, but there are not enough links between indoor and outdoor play activities. The leadership of the new EYFS co-ordinator is satisfactory, and she is quickly getting to grips with her responsibilities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the quality of teaching, learning and pupils' progress so this is consistently good across the school, and so that more able pupils are always challenged sufficiently.
- Develop more effective systems to track pupils' progress, ensure that assessment is fully embedded in the school's practice and that the levels assigned to pupils' work and achievements are accurate.
- Build on the work already started to enable subject leaders to monitor and evaluate work in their subjects and take responsibility for the progress that pupils make.

- Ensure that governors understand fully their roles and responsibilities, monitor the work of the school and its development effectively and hold the school to account for its achievements.

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.

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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?	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?	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	4
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**

27 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Primary School, Sleaford, Lincolnshire, NG34 7AT

Thank you for meeting with inspectors and making your positive views known to us. Your school has a good atmosphere and you treat others with respect and show great compassion. You learn well what it is to be a good citizen in the community and think and reflect deeply about the plight of others. Your excellent assembly about the feelings of evacuees in the Second World War was confidently portrayed through some stunning writing. Your behaviour around the school is good but, occasionally a few of you can be a bit boisterous and some of you tend to dominate discussions in lessons.

You are well prepared to live harmoniously and respect the views of others. Mrs Weldon has made a big difference to your school and things are really happening now! You are better involved in decisions made in the school and in activities. Your parents feel better informed and involved. You make satisfactory progress and gain skills which are better than most but I, and your staff, think you can do even better than this.

I have asked Mrs Weldon and the staff to improve the school further by:

- helping you make better progress by ensuring that teaching is always good and that more able pupils are given harder work
- keeping a track of your progress and using this information to assist you further
- the staff who lead subjects taking a greater role in checking how things are going generally, the progress you are making and that activities and resources get better for you
- ensuring governors understand all that they must do to help the school improve.

Yours sincerely

George Derby

Lead inspector