

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Bridgwater

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123846
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	328004
Inspection dates	17–18 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Paul Sadler

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)	230
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	Helen Scott
Headteacher	Margaret Jones
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Park Avenue Bridgwater TA6 7EE
Telephone number	01278 422786
Fax number	01278 429791

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves the Roman Catholic community in the Bridgwater area, although changes to local school transport arrangements have led to pupils from Catholic families now being a minority in the school. Almost all pupils are of White British or Irish heritage. A very few speak languages other than English at home. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is about average. The school makes provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in its 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. It has a number of emerging strengths. These include good provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Strengths here lead to these children making good progress, in part due to the excellent arrangements for their care and welfare, which continue to be good throughout the school. Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength which leads to good behaviour and strong relationships between pupils and with adults. Pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in their above average attendance.

Children start school with the skills and knowledge expected of those of their age. When pupils leave at the end of Year 6 they attain standards that are average overall and are somewhat above average in English, especially writing. In 2008, the great majority of Year 6 pupils attained the national standard in English, mathematics and science, meeting the school's own targets. The proportion attaining the higher level, however, was below that expected in mathematics and science. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve satisfactorily.

Teaching is also satisfactory. The best is outstanding, as when Year 5 pupils discussed with maturity and sophistication the emotions displayed by characters in a video clip. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support from teaching assistants. However, there is too much variation in teaching across the school. In some lessons, work is insufficiently well matched to pupils' needs, so that some struggle while others find the work too easy. This is because an effective system for tracking pupils' progress has only recently been put in place. As yet, assessments contain insufficient information to accurately identify different rates of progress or underachievement. Marking, while diligent, does not always show the pupils how to improve their work. Some, especially younger pupils, have a limited understanding of how to use the targets they are set to move on to the next stage. The curriculum is satisfactory in enabling pupils to develop their skills and has some good features, such as a visit to Birmingham, which gives pupils opportunities to engage with the Islamic and Sikh communities.

Leaders and managers have a satisfactory understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and the enthusiasm and skills needed to correct the latter. The thoughtful and reflective headteacher has led some effective changes, for instance in completing major improvements to the school's learning environment and in rationalising management structures. Arrangements to improve staff performance are improving, but monitoring of teaching is as yet insufficiently precise to enable rapid improvement in teaching quality. These recent improvements, together with those in provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, demonstrate that the school has a satisfactory capacity to carry out further improvements. Governors meet their statutory responsibilities but do not offer adequate support and challenge to the school. Parents of younger pupils are generally happy with what the school offers, but those with older children are less satisfied with the information they receive about their children's progress and what they are learning. While the inspection found no evidence to support their specific concerns, their comments reflect some weaknesses in communication with this group of parents.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children's admission to the Early Years Foundation Stage is very sensitively managed and this ensures children make a happy start to their education. Children make good progress and by the end of Reception, attainment is above average, including in literacy and numeracy, which were areas of weakness in the recent past. Literacy standards are rising as a result of the new systems for teaching letters and sounds. Teaching and the curriculum are good, and children thrive in a caring environment. Staff work closely together and ensure routines are well established and children are exceptionally well cared for and kept very safe. Children make good progress in their personal development because the warm relationships help them grow in confidence. They behave well and learn how to get on with other children.

A good balance is struck between children learning for themselves and the direct teaching of basic skills by adults. Topics such as 'Food' awaken children's interest in how to eat healthily, for instance through eating fruit and vegetables. Indoor role play areas such as the Café support children's creative, literacy and mathematical development well. The recently created outdoor play space is still developing, but is already enriching children's investigative learning across the whole curriculum. The Early Years Foundation Stage is well managed and there are rigorous assessment procedures. Children's progress is now checked very systematically, although this degree of rigour has yet to have an impact throughout the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the monitoring of teaching and learning to promote greater consistency, and wider adoption of the best practice seen in the school, particularly to provide greater challenge for more able pupils in mathematics and science.
- Use the emerging information from the assessment of pupils' progress and the marking of work to ensure that planned work fully meets their individual needs and that they are aware of how to improve their work.
- Ensure that all governors meet their responsibilities to offer both support and challenge to assist the school in raising pupils' achievement.
- Improve communication with parents, especially those of older pupils, to ensure that they are fully aware of their children's progress, and of the quality of the education they receive.

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

Overall, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Children make good progress in the Reception class, previous weaknesses in developing their communication, language and literacy skills having been rectified. In Years 1 to 6, they make satisfactory progress overall, although this is faster in some years, such as in Years 1 and 5, than in others. Standards attained in national assessments and tests at the end of Years 2 and 6 are average. However, higher standards are being attained in English at the end of Year 6, especially in writing, where pupils are able to write at length and with accuracy in a range of styles. In science and mathematics, most pupils attain the expected standards, but the proportion attaining the higher level is relatively low as the planned work does not always extend the more able pupils. Most pupils with learning

difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress with the support of teaching assistants, but a few who get less help sometimes struggle when the work is too difficult for them. Standards are above those expected in some other subjects, such as in art among younger pupils and in some aspects of physical education, including table tennis and gymnastics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. A loving ethos fills the school, promoting harmony and high levels of pastoral care. Pupils' understanding of different cultures is enhanced by visitors from different backgrounds and visits to other places of worship. Pupils behave well, showing care and consideration for each other. They feel safe at school and say that while bullying can occur, they feel confident in telling an adult and that it is dealt with effectively. No evidence was found to justify the concerns of some parents on this matter. Pupils are particularly enthusiastic about lessons which have practical starting points, such as science and art and design. They confidently cite examples of how to keep healthy by eating the right foods and taking part in plenty of sport. Pupils' good contributions to the community are shown by the way in which they conduct charity events, for example when raising money to help children in Uganda. Year 6 pupils have been trained as 'peer mediators' and show sensitivity and maturity in their approach to helping other pupils to enjoy friendships during playtimes. Pupils develop a good work ethic and know the importance of hard work, punctuality and neat appearance. Pupils' independent learning, teamwork and decision making skills do not develop so systematically. Nevertheless, their satisfactory progress in acquiring literacy and numeracy skills prepares them soundly for their life ahead.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The best teaching allows pupils autonomy to apply their skills, and to enjoy practical activities and working together in pairs and groups. It challenges them to think hard and to express their thoughts clearly in speech and in writing. While this is seen in some lessons, in others the work is too heavily directed by the teacher and is insufficiently well-matched to pupils' current skill levels. On occasions, pupils struggle or become bored. Some teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) well to support pupils, but again this use is inconsistent. Teachers mark most of the pupils' work, but do not always show them how to improve, and the marking of aspects of the work, such as spelling and punctuation, is inconsistent. Good relationships between staff and pupils, and effective use of teaching assistants to support those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are strengths in the teaching.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Recent improvements in assessment procedures are beginning to enable teachers to plan work that meets pupils' individual needs, but this aspect of the curriculum remains a weakness in some classes. There are some good opportunities for pupils to apply their developing basic skills in a range of subjects, as seen in examples of historical writing on evacuation in the Second World War in Year 4. Opportunities for pupils to apply their ICT skills are limited. Good use is made of links with the local secondary school to develop skills in modern foreign languages

and aspects of physical education, such as gymnastics, which pupils say they especially enjoy. For older pupils, there are a good range of enrichment opportunities, including music, sport and educational visits, although the range of such activities for younger pupils is more limited. Recent improvements in the school's environment have greatly enhanced the climate for learning, especially for the youngest pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Parents value the warm, friendly and caring environment of the school. The school puts much emphasis on safety and there are robust procedures and checks to ensure that pupils are well cared for and kept safe. The school works closely with outside agencies to support their work with pupils who have extra needs, including those with educational and medical difficulties. The school's 'Nurture' provision successfully helps those with social and emotional problems to co-operate with others and adjust to school. Academic guidance is satisfactory. The new and thorough assessment procedures are still becoming established and have yet to enable school leaders and staff to evaluate the full impact of provision on pupils' progress. Pupils' individual target setting is improving, although it is more established in Years 5 and 6 where pupils are aware of their English and mathematics targets and what they need to do to improve. Parents of older pupils do not always feel they have sufficient information about what the school provides or about how their children are getting on.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school's talented headteacher and middle leaders recognise what needs to be done to improve the school. They have made a good start by putting new systems in place to track pupils' progress and monitor the quality of education. These are beginning to have an impact, most notably in the quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Monitoring of teaching and learning is developing, but is not yet sufficiently precise to ensure consistency and the spread of best practice across the school. The calm nurturing of the headteacher is strengthening staff confidence and teamwork. Unfortunately, some parents and governors do not yet recognise that these improvements are taking place. While most governors, including the chair and others with specific briefs such as for community cohesion, understand their roles and responsibilities well, divisions in the governing body are diverting the focus of the headteacher. The governing body as a whole does not offer the levels of support and challenge necessary to promote rapid improvement.

The school makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion. It has reviewed its provision and is developing an action plan. Pupils develop a good understanding of the national and world communities and there are good links with the Catholic Church, but links with parents and throughout the local community are not as strong as they might be.

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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?	3
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?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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	2
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?	3
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**

01 April 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Bridgwater TA6 7EE

We very much enjoyed meeting you and talking to you when we visited your school recently. It was good to see you working and playing happily together in beautiful weather. This letter is to tell you what we thought of your school.

St Joseph's is a satisfactory school. It is improving, and some important things about it are now good. Children in Reception get a good start to their education. You behave well and know how to keep yourselves healthy and safe. You enjoy school and your attendance is good. You do a lot to help others, such as older children helping younger ones in the playground and by collecting for charities such as Cafod. The adults in school care for you well, and you trust them if you have any problems.

When you leave at the end of Year 6, almost everyone has the literacy and numeracy skills needed in secondary school. The best of the teaching helps you to think and to express yourselves well. Those of you who need it get good help from the teaching assistants. We enjoyed hearing Year 5 talk about 'The Piano' and looking at Year 4's work on 'evacuation'. Overall, your progress is satisfactory. You enjoy activities like art, science, gardening and gymnastics and going out of school. We know Year 5 are looking forward to going to Birmingham.

The headteacher and staff are working hard to improve the school and you can all see it is now a better place to learn, with bright, clean areas and a nice outdoor area for Reception and Year 1 to learn in.

We have asked the school to do a few things to make it even better. We have asked the governors to give all the support they can to the school to help you and the staff. We have asked that all lessons become more like the best ones. Teachers are now tracking your progress more effectively and we have asked them to use this to make sure the work is not too easy or difficult for you, and to make sure you know how to improve your work. Some of your parents say they do not know enough about what is happening at school, or how well you are getting on, and we have also asked that this be improved.

I would like to wish you every success in the future. If you have suggestions about how things at school could improve, politely talk to an adult about this.

Yours faithfully

Paul Sadler

Lead Inspector