

St Catherine's CofE (VC) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135051
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	329016
Inspection dates	16–17 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Joyce Cox

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 controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	316
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	Fiona Haworth
Headteacher	Sarah Power
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Marlpool Lane Kidderminster DY11 5HP
Telephone number	01562 823614

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This large primary school opened in September 2007 in the building previously occupied by a first school, which closed following the local authority's reorganisation of schools in the area. Pupils are from the first school and a variety of other closed Wyre Forest schools. Staff were recruited from 15 schools; teachers come from nine different schools, and the leadership team was entirely new. Staffing changes continue in the school's second year, with four new teachers appointed in September 2008. A new building is planned with work due to start in two or three year's time. Meanwhile as the school grows, four classes are housed in temporary accommodation, which has restricted playground space. Essential refurbishment of the existing building took most of the school's first year.

The majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds and almost all speak English as their first language. An above average number of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and a high proportion have a statement of special educational needs. The main needs are moderate learning difficulties, speech, language and communication, and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

The school has an Early Years Foundation Stage Unit, which currently caters for 57 Reception-aged children. Approximately half of the Reception children join from a privately owned nursery, which is housed in the school building. Staff also provide wrap-around care and holiday clubs for the pupils. The nursery and childcare are not managed by the governing body and are inspected separately.

The school has achieved an Activemark and has won several recycling competitions, and is currently working towards a Silver Flag Eco Schools award. It is also involved in a local authority scheme to promote community cohesion.

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 is improving rapidly and has a number of good features. The most notable strengths are good leadership and management, rising standards and improved teaching and achievement, pupils' good personal development and a happy and successful start for Reception children. The experienced headteacher and leadership team are very ambitious and have skilfully and effectively brought a considerable number of new staff and pupils together as a cohesive body. Senior leaders have a very accurate view of the school's performance which is based on rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures and highly accurate tracking of pupils' achievement. However, whilst many teachers make effective use of this detailed assessment information, it is not used consistently enough in some cases to accelerate pupils' progress. The quality of marking and the use of targets also vary and pupils are not always made aware of the next steps in their learning. Nevertheless, in the light of the considerable improvements made, especially in terms of raised standards and achievement during this academic year, the school demonstrates a good capacity to improve.

Pupils' achievement varies throughout the school but is satisfactory overall. Children's attainment on entry is below national expectations, especially in their early writing skills and aspects of their personal development. They make good progress in the Reception unit as a consequence of good teaching and attain the expected standards on entry to Year 1. Pupils' progress varies in the rest of the school, with accelerated progress currently being made in Years 2, 4, 5 and 6, where the best teaching occurs. Teaching in the rest of the school is less consistent as there have been many staff changes since the school opened. In some lessons there is a slow pace, work is not matched well enough to pupils' abilities and teachers' questions do not probe learners' knowledge and understanding sufficiently. Senior leaders are not complacent and have worked relentlessly to improve the quality of the teaching which they considered to be inadequate in some classes during the school's first year. This inadequate teaching resulted in inadequate progress for some pupils. Standards were exceptionally low at the end of Year 6 in 2008 in English and mathematics, and low in science. Since the school opened the leadership team has introduced successful strategies to raise standards and achievement, which involved eradicating unsatisfactory teaching and improving the way reading and mathematics are taught throughout the school. Consequently, standards in 2009 are much higher and are broadly average overall, which represents a vast improvement on the previous year. Standards in writing are below average and this has been identified as the next area for senior leaders and staff to improve.

A key reason for the pupils' good personal development is the strong and effective pastoral care. Staff know pupils and families very well. There are good links with parents, many of whom comment on the 'warm, calm and friendly atmosphere and the way our children are treated as individuals'. Effective links with external professionals provide good additional support to pupils in greatest need. The headteacher, senior leaders and governing body form an impressive team whose various talents combine seamlessly to successfully overcome the turbulent journey they have experienced since the school began. Policies, effective routines and practices have been swiftly established. Senior leaders and governors have also successfully raised parents' and the local community's perception of the school. Consequently, it is becoming very popular and is increasingly parents' first and not last choice of schools. One parent, speaking for many, comments, 'The headteacher's inspiring leadership is the driving force behind the increasing success of the school. Together with senior leaders she has done wonders!'

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Reception staff work as an effective team who are all totally committed to providing high quality early years education. Attractive and inviting role-play areas such as an outdoor petrol station coupled with enthusiastic adults acting as play partners enhance children's language skills effectively. Interesting activities both indoors and outdoors, such as making a large model of a Safari Park after a recent visit, successfully capture children's imagination. Teaching is good, curriculum planning addresses all areas of learning and there is a good balance between those activities led by the staff and those that children choose for themselves. Staff are correctly looking for ways to involve children even more in planning activities and role-play areas. Children achieve well in their personal, emotional and social development. They quickly learn to become independent and confident learners. This is because the care and attention given to children's welfare are good. A strong emphasis on the development of basic skills such as phonics and chances to practise writing in all the areas of learning helps children's early reading and writing skills develop well. For instance, children are currently making an attractive booklet telling new children all about their unit. An effective, active partnership is quickly established with parents, who are extremely happy with all aspects of the unit. One expressing the views of many writes, 'We are warmly welcomed, our children are very well cared for, there are exciting activities every week and we love the weekly newsletters and comments in children's personal reading diaries.' Good leadership and management are characterised by a shared sense of purpose, effective teamwork, good quality policies and a constant drive to improve all aspects of the provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing by improving pupils' ability to write confidently in a wider range of different styles.
- Improve the quality of teaching further by ensuring that all lessons proceed at a lively pace, all groups of pupils are challenged and teachers' questions probe and check pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- Further improve pupils' progress by ensuring that pupils' targets are an intrinsic part of their learning and by making sure teachers' marking refers to these targets and shows pupils the next steps in their learning.

A small proportion of 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

The disappointing 2008 assessment data suggested that standards and progress were a cause for concern. Given the high number of pupils joining the school from other settings and the need to rely on assessments of prior attainment for which the school was not responsible, this was to be expected. The school's tracking data and pupils' current work in lessons and books indicate that standards and achievement are much higher now that the school has had time to make its own assessments, track individual pupils' progress and plan appropriate interventions if required. The school sets itself very challenging targets and standards at the end of Year 6 are now broadly average in mathematics, reading and science, and below average in writing. All groups of pupils make at least satisfactory progress throughout the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils say they like school very much because they get on well with their friends and feel the staff are kind and caring. This enjoyment is reflected in rising attendance levels, which are now average. Behaviour is good and pupils show enthusiasm and perseverance in lessons. However, there are sometimes too few opportunities for pupils to develop their independent learning skills in lessons. Pupils say they feel very safe in school and demonstrate a good knowledge and respect for fellow pupils and people, cultures and beliefs beyond their own. Their awareness of keeping healthy is good and they enjoy growing vegetables and eating vegetables from their school garden. Developing a positive school community and a sense of belonging were key foci for the school's first year. Pupils themselves say they feel part of one big family now and have made many new friends. They diligently carry out a variety of tasks and responsibilities around the school; they enjoy being school and eco councillors, monitors, peer mediators, assembly technicians and sports coaches and enjoy being consulted on many aspects of school life. Pupils confidently decide which charities to support, such as a recent initiative to support a school for pupils with physical difficulties. The school's ethos of support and care for each other is at the heart of its work. Central to this is its 'values education' whereby pupils and staff focus on a different universal value each month. During the inspection pupils were very knowledgeable about 'Truth', which is this month's value. Pupils leave school with sound academic skills and good personal qualities in preparation for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers and support staff work well together to provide interesting learning environments and classrooms contain many visual prompts and resources such as punctuation pyramids to aid learning. Teachers manage behaviour well so there is normally a purposeful working ethos. Pupils say they particularly like lessons that are practical and they are actively involved and interested. However, this does not always happen and there are times when pupils spend too long sitting and listening. In addition, some teachers are more skilled than others at matching work to pupils' abilities and encouraging pupils to explain their thinking and are not content with just single-word answers. Where teaching is good or better it is because teachers have high expectations, excellent subject knowledge and use assessment information skilfully to accelerate pupils' learning. Expectations of what the pupils will have learnt by the end of the lesson are made crystal clear. Consequently pupils are highly motivated, hard working and engaged by energetic, inspiring teaching.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has a good curriculum for personal, social and health education that promotes pupils' good personal development. Good improvements to the way the curriculum is planned for reading and mathematics have resulted in considerably improved standards. Religious education is planned to provide pupils with a good understanding of other cultures but pupils are still an early stage of exploring other cultures represented in Britain today. Pupils enjoy the very good range of extra-curricular activities on offer. These include visits to the safari park, Selly Manor and Tamworth Castle and residential visits to Llanrug in Wales. Special days

and events such as Global Trade Day enrich pupils' learning effectively. Year 6 pupils spoke with considerable enthusiasm about a recent project whereby they had to submit plans for a garden design for Ragley Hall. Peer mediators recently enjoyed a reward day at Blackwell outdoor centre.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides good levels of pastoral care and works very effectively to remove barriers to learning. For instance, a recent successful project to encourage some pupils who would not ordinarily volunteer to take community responsibility to become peer mediators and sports coaches has improved these pupils' attitudes and also raised their confidence and self-esteem considerably. Much has also been accomplished since September 2007 in terms of improving pupils' behaviour and reducing absence. The school has established good links with parents to extend pupils' well-being and enhance community cohesion on a local basis. At the time of the inspection, safeguarding arrangements fully met requirements. Effective links with outside agencies ensure pupils receive support when it is needed. Pupils' academic achievements are effectively and accurately tracked by senior leaders. All pupils have learning targets in literacy and numeracy but not all teachers use these effectively enough in lessons to accelerate pupils' progress. Teachers' marking also varies and does not always inform pupils how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, working in close collaboration with her senior leaders, has a very clear vision and relentlessly drives forward school improvement with steely determination and vigour. Together with the effective governing body they have succeeded in overcoming considerable obstacles since the school was formed. They have developed an ethos of high expectations for all staff and pupils. This is manifest in the way they have successfully eradicated inadequate teaching, raised standards and improved pupils' behaviour. They realise, however, that a mix of satisfactory and good teaching is not good enough and carry on with their rigorous monitoring programme with zealous fortitude. They have taken effective actions to improve the teaching of mathematics and reading and know standards in writing are still not high enough. Pupils' progress is checked frequently so that senior leaders and governors know the actions they have taken are proving successful. The school is now a very cohesive community and senior leaders work hard to successfully promote community cohesion in the local and national communities. Effective links have been established globally with communities in Ghana and Florida.

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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	NA
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?	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?	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	3
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?	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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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	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**

18 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Catherine's CE VE Primary School, Kidderminster, DY11 5HP

You will probably remember that we visited your school not too long ago and I am writing to let you know what we found out. Before I do, I would like to thank you for the warm welcome you gave us. You are all polite and friendly and are great ambassadors for your school. We particularly enjoyed talking with many of you and discovering how much you like your school, other pupils and all the staff.

We agree with your headteacher that you go to a satisfactory school, which has many good features. Children in the Reception unit do well and have a happy start to their school life. Teaching in the rest of the school is satisfactory and is improving, and you rightly say that staff make learning enjoyable so that you reach broadly average standards in your work. You have a good understanding of how to keep fit and healthy and it was good to hear all about your football team. You are well cared for at school and you receive satisfactory support in your learning and good support with your personal development. Another strength is the impressive way in which the headteacher, senior leaders and the governing body lead the school and make sure it is a welcoming and happy community. You yourselves are another huge strength with your good behaviour, your hard work and your contribution to school life, and in the kind way in which you respect and care for each other.

The headteacher and senior leaders have many excellent ideas to make the school even better. We agree with all their plans and also feel it would be helpful if teachers made sure you all do as well as you can in writing. It would also be helpful if all your lessons were good or outstanding so you make even more progress. Also it would help you if all teachers made sure they told you exactly how you can improve your work. The headteacher and all the staff want the school to continue to improve. Having met you I am sure you will play your part as well by continuing to work hard and by keeping up your good standards of behaviour.

On behalf of the other inspectors, I wish you every success in the future. Yours faithfully

Joyce Cox

Lead inspector