

St Helen's Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100623
Local Authority	Lambeth
Inspection number	335565
Inspection dates	26–27 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Jane Chesterfield

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	305
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Bernard Heaphy
Headteacher	Terry Cox
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 18 lessons or parts of lessons and observed 15 teachers. Inspectors held meetings with groups of pupils, governors and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at school policies and documentation, safeguarding records, pupils' work, assessment data, monitoring records, strategic planning and the minutes of governors' meetings. Questionnaires completed by staff, pupils and 236 parents and carers were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the impact of strategies to boost attainment in Key Stages 1 and 2
- how well teachers meet the different needs of the pupils in their groups
- how well leaders at all levels support and develop teaching across the school
- the impact of strategies to improve the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Information about the school

St Helen's Catholic School is a large school which serves a culturally diverse area of South London. Most pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds, and more than three quarters are learning English as an additional language. These figures are very high compared with the national picture. About a third of the pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is just below average. These needs relate mainly to speech and language or specific learning difficulties. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The school offers Early Years Foundation Stage provision in its Nursery and Reception classes. The headteacher and the deputy headteacher have both taken up their posts since the last inspection. The school has gained National Healthy Schools status and the Activemark award, among others.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St Helen's Catholic Primary is a good school. Its inclusive ethos creates a sense of family and belonging, and draws together and unites parents and carers from a number of different communities. They share a common satisfaction with the school and what it offers their children. One parent commented, 'My children are very happy to go to St Helen's and during the school holidays they can't wait to get back.' Another felt that, 'The school really cares for the children and always looks for the best in them.' Pupils feel the same. One said, 'It's like a big, happy family here,' while others commented, 'People welcome you and treat you equally.'

Thanks to the outstanding pastoral care, pupils feel exceptionally safe and confident at school. They have a very clear understanding of right and wrong and are very thoughtful towards others. They respect others from different backgrounds, and are genuinely interested in finding out about their beliefs and cultures. Children join the school with a level of skills which is low compared with expectations for their age. They make satisfactory progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, but a lack of continuity in planning and provision between the Nursery and Reception classes has meant that the range and balance of activities are not always effectively matched to the needs of the children. Pupils make good progress through the rest of the school, so that by the time they leave, their attainment is average in English, mathematics and science. The school has identified that pupils who are learning English as an additional language have difficulty reaching higher levels of attainment, not only in English, but also in mathematics and science. This is because they do not always understand or know enough vocabulary, and because they often lack the skills in grammar to express their ideas. Strategies to address the problem by focusing on these aspects of communication skills in every class are beginning to have an impact, particularly at the top end of Key Stage 2, but they are at an early stage.

Good leadership has led to consistently good teaching and exciting developments in the curriculum. The headteacher and deputy work very well together, and have the wholehearted support of the rest of the staff team. Subject leaders and senior staff have made sure that new teachers have settled in well and understand the whole-school approach to learning. Since the last inspection, good new systems for tracking and monitoring the progress of pupils have been introduced, so that additional support for individuals and groups can be quickly set up when needed. School self-evaluation is very incisive and accurate, which means that senior staff and governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. As a result, they have identified the right priorities for development and are working tirelessly to achieve these. The school has a good capacity for further continuous improvement.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment for pupils who are learning English as an additional language by building on current work to develop pupils' understanding of sentence structure and vocabulary.
- Improve outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage by ensuring that:
 - all interactions are planned carefully to build on the small steps in children's learning
 - every opportunity is taken during activities such as role play to develop children's language and literacy skills
 - planning and assessment are developed jointly across the Nursery and Reception classes, so that children make continuously good progress across both year groups.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

The work seen in lessons and in pupils' books confirms that attainment is average by Year 6, and that progress for all groups of pupils is good across the school. Those with speech and language or specific learning difficulties receive very good specialist support, so that they make good progress. Pupils have positive attitudes and are ready and willing to learn. They are always very keen to answer questions and to have a go at trying things out. In a Year 3 information and communication technology (ICT) lesson, for example, there was no shortage of volunteers to try out an unfamiliar computer program on the interactive whiteboard. Pupils are eager to tackle their tasks and persevere with them until they are complete. Year 2 pupils in a literacy lesson worked determinedly on stories they were writing until they were completely happy with what they had produced, despite the fact that those who had already finished were allowed to play a word game on the interactive whiteboard. Pupils do not let gaps in their language skills get in the way of their learning. In a Year 4 mathematics lesson, pupils enjoyed the challenge of devising their own problems linked to measurement, although several did not know the difference between the use of the words 'height' and 'length' and had to have this explained to them.

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school, and this is evident in their high levels of attendance. Their behaviour is good in class and often outstanding around the school and in the playground. However, occasionally, some pupils get over-excited in lessons and this has an impact on their learning. Pupils are very keen to take on responsibility in order to have an impact on the school and wider community. They say that the peer mediators and play leaders make a big difference in the playground and help everyone to play together happily. Those on the school council have been very active, contributing to plans for developing the new media centre and making a DVD about their school for a national competition. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to live a healthy lifestyle, reflected in the awards won by the school. They are able to talk about the dangers of drugs and smoking, and are good at making sensible choices of food at

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lunchtime. Pupils' social skills and attitudes in particular mean that they are well prepared for secondary school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

All teachers adopt a consistent approach in the classroom, setting out clear lesson objectives and success criteria which mean that pupils know what is expected of them. There is also a consistent approach to marking, so that pupils know what they need to do to improve their work. Relationships between staff and pupils are very good, and teachers set high standards for behaviour. Teachers keep up a good pace in lessons and explain topics in a way that is helpful to pupils who are learning English as an additional language. They use plenty of visual aids, focus on new vocabulary, and check pupils' understanding regularly. They make good use of questioning to do this. Many also give pupils good opportunities to discuss their ideas with one another, though this is not always the case. Additional adults in the classroom are usually very well deployed to lead work for different ability groups. Occasionally, however, teachers do not take advantage of the skills of other qualified teachers in their lessons.

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Support for pupils with personal difficulties, or who may be vulnerable, is outstanding. The school monitors pupils' circumstances carefully in order to tackle any barriers to learning they may have, including making sure that they come to school regularly and on time. Staff are able to call on the services of the learning mentors or specialist outside agencies in order to help pupils and their families.

All pupils benefit from a well-planned curriculum which rightly focuses on literacy and numeracy. The school is currently developing links between the different subjects and provides some outstanding specialist provision, for example in music, the arts and ICT. During the inspection, a visiting performing arts company provided excellent opportunities for Year 3 pupils to express themselves imaginatively and creatively as they set a poem to music. Pupils also enjoy a wealth of new experiences and the chance to develop new skills and interests through the outstanding range of enrichment activities provided by visits, visitors and clubs.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The new senior leadership team has quickly become established and combines a determination to drive up standards with a commitment to develop every pupil as a well-rounded individual. Other staff with leadership responsibilities have varying degrees of experience in the roles, but all have a clear understanding of how to improve their areas and an enthusiasm to make a difference. The governors come from many different cultural backgrounds, and all share the aims and values of the school and give it a good balance of support and challenge in its work. Good attention is given to safeguarding pupils. All the required checks on adults who come into contact with pupils are carried out, and risk assessments are thorough. Procedures for child protection are rigorous, and staff training is up-to-date.

The school works well to promote equal opportunities and tackle discrimination. The achievement of all pupils is carefully tracked, and the school is aware that the attainment of all pupils can be improved. Links with parents and carers are outstanding, and this is borne out by the very high number of very positive responses to the parents' questionnaire. The school keeps parents and carers well informed about their children's education and events at the school, and gives them good opportunities to develop their own skills through workshops and language classes. Partnerships are used exceptionally well to give pupils opportunities they may not otherwise experience. The school is proud

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of the fact that no families ever have to pay for any extra activities, trips or tuition such as instrument lessons. The school's contribution to community cohesion is excellent. It draws together the many different faiths and cultures which make up the school and local community and ensures that families get to know and understand one another. Pupils are given every opportunity to get involved in life beyond the school. One group has been involved in planting the gardens of a nearby old people's home, for example, while others are developing exciting new links with a school in the Sussex countryside. All are involved in fundraising for charities and projects in developing countries.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make satisfactory progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Staff work hard to promote their personal, social and emotional development, and relationships between adults and children are very supportive. Lunch in the Nursery, for example, is an excellent social occasion, helping children learn how to look after themselves and take into consideration the needs of others. Staff have identified communication, language and literacy skills as a priority for development, and make sure that they offer children opportunities for speaking and listening as often as possible. However, their interactions are not always planned carefully enough to enable children to reach the next stage in their learning. Activities such as role play are not always structured well enough to develop children's language and literacy skills. Classrooms are set up to provide a suitable range of activities to cover all the areas of learning, but the outdoor provision does not offer a full and stimulating range of opportunities.

Senior staff are providing satisfactory interim leadership of the Early Years Foundation

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Stage until a new postholder takes up the role next term. There has been a lack of continuity in planning and assessment between the Nursery and Reception classes, so that children have not been able to build effectively on the good start they make in Nursery. However, support from the local authority is helping to establish effective management systems for the new postholder to develop further from September.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

A very high proportion of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire, and the overwhelming majority were very happy with every aspect of the school and with what it offers their children. A few felt that the school did not take enough account of their suggestions, or that it did not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors investigated these concerns but did not uphold them. Teachers and senior staff are available every day to talk to parents and carers, and the school has recently installed an electronic screen outside the main entrance to keep them up-to-date with news on a daily basis. School records indicate that unacceptable behaviour is handled in a firm and fair way. Inspection observations showed that pupils who have difficulty behaving well were very well supported in lessons so that they did not disrupt the learning of others.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Helen's Catholic School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 236 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 305 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	165	70	67	28	1	1	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	165	70	66	28	2	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	150	64	80	34	3	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	119	50	108	46	4	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	132	56	95	40	2	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	127	54	103	44	1	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	119	50	109	46	3	1	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	104	44	113	48	6	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	106	45	117	50	7	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	126	53	94	40	9	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	101	43	109	46	15	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	133	56	91	39	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	158	67	73	31	2	1	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



29 May 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Helen's Catholic School, London SW9 0TQ

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently, and for helping us with the inspection. We really enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and sharing your lessons.

We found that your school is giving you a good education, and that it is a very important part of the local community. You are exceptionally well cared for in school. These are just some of the other things that we liked about your school:

- You enjoy coming to school and your attendance is excellent.
- You are making good progress as you move through the school.
- You behave well, you are very happy to take on responsibility, and you are very respectful of one another's different backgrounds.
- You have very good relationships with your teachers and you are keen to learn.
- You feel very safe and secure at school, thanks to the efforts of your teachers.
- You get very good extra support if you need it.
- You enjoy an excellent range of extra activities and opportunities.
- The senior leaders are doing a good job, and know how to make the school even better.

To help the school improve further, this is what we have asked the staff to do:

- Help you all to learn new words and write your sentences correctly so that you do better in all your lessons.
- Improve activities and organisation in the Nursery and Reception classes so that the children make faster progress.

You can help by checking your writing carefully and always doing the corrections your teachers ask you to do. Good luck for your future and believe in yourselves ☐ you know you can be successful!

Yours sincerely

Jane Chesterfield

Lead inspector

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