

St Gregory's Catholic Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109696
Local Authority	Bedford
Inspection number	337359
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Margaret Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	398
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christopher Donnellan
Headteacher	Robert Mundy
Date of previous school inspection	16 May 2007
School address	Biddenham Turn Bedford Bedfordshire
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Twenty lessons and nineteen teachers were seen and meetings were held with groups of pupils, governors and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at plans for raising achievement, safeguarding documentation and 76 parents' questionnaires.

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

- the standards attained in mathematics and science in KS2
- the quality of assessment and tracking
- whether the curriculum meets the needs of different groups of pupils
- the impact of the uncertainty around the future of the school and the Federation arrangements.

Information about the school

St Gregory's is part of the Federation of Catholic Schools in Bedford. It serves a wide area and pupils come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. Well over half of the pupils are Catholic. A higher proportion than average has special educational needs and/or disabilities. Nearly three quarters of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and of these a small proportion speaks English as an additional language. The school has been awarded the Healthy Schools and Sports Mark accreditation. The school is due to close in 2014 as part of the re-organisation of the middle school system in Bedford Borough.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school which is improving. It has been through a challenging time in recent years with the lack of a permanent head teacher and staffing difficulties caused by uncertainty about the re-organisation of the middle school system. Since the arrival of the new head teacher three years ago, behaviour and attendance have improved dramatically. Attendance is now good and is monitored well by the school. Although the number of exclusions has declined steeply and behaviour is mostly good in lessons, it is still over-boisterous in corridors and on the playground. A small minority of pupils feel they are not safe. Pupils make steady progress during their time in the school and by the time they leave in Year 8 they have secure literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. However, the progress of those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils with English as an additional language has lagged behind. It is now beginning to improve as the result of the successful intervention strategies the school has made. Pupils have good knowledge and understanding about how to live healthy lives. They make a good contribution to the community by acting as school council representatives and raising money for charity. Promoting spiritual development is a strong element of the school's provision and pupils actively participate in daily prayer, assemblies and other religious services and activities. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Many teachers provide a variety of interesting activities, delivered at a fast pace and with clear explanations. However, the lack of tailoring of lessons to meet the wide needs of different abilities means many lessons are aimed at the middle ground and do not meet the needs of the higher and lower attaining pupils. This is often why pupils make satisfactory rather than good progress. The curriculum is sound and includes an effective personal, social, health and economic programme and many sporting activities which the pupils enjoy. Pastoral care is good and pupils are given clear academic guidance. There are, however, some inconsistent responses to pupils' disruptive behaviour by a few staff. The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures is only satisfactory because full records are not kept about the resolution and conclusion of behaviour and bullying incidents.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. An Executive Principal for all the schools in the Federation has just been appointed and he is well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and the need to improve performance. The school's self-evaluation of its work is fairly accurate but lacks detail. The hard work of the senior management team is beginning to make an impact but the roles of senior managers in holding staff to account for the implementation of initiatives are not sufficiently clear. This hampers rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the school's work. Until these systems are embedded the school's capacity for sustained improvement remains

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satisfactory.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' achievement and the standards they reach by improving the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good, and ensuring that the work teachers set matches the needs and abilities of all pupils in the class.
- Improve safeguarding procedures so that all pupils feel safe by supervising the playground more closely to ensure good behaviour, and improving record keeping.
- Hold staff accountable by monitoring the implementation of initiatives and measuring their impact more rigorously.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

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Pupils make satisfactory progress across the school. Key Stage 2 National tests in 2009 showed standards in English which were in line with national averages, but results in mathematics and science were well below those expected. By the end of Year 8, the school's own data and inspectors' observation of lessons show that pupils have reached standards broadly in line with those expected and have acquired sound literacy, numeracy and computer skills.

Pupils make relatively better progress in reading than writing due to the introduction of the guided reading programme, although some older pupils write very creatively. Achievement in science is improving from a low base due to improved leadership and management in the subject.

Pupils enjoy their lessons, especially in practical subjects where they are engaged and active. They are keen to be involved and eager to learn.

The extent to which pupils feel safe in school is satisfactory. Pupils confirmed that they know who to turn to for help and support if the need arises.

Behaviour is satisfactory. However, inappropriate behaviour by a small minority of pupils, especially in the playground still worries some younger members of the school, and pupils present challenging attitudes too frequently. Racist incidents occur occasionally, but are few in number and are dealt with well.

Pupils respond well to the school's strategies for promoting healthy lifestyles and make a good contribution to their school community. They lead assemblies, act as prefects and contribute to the active school council. Pupils raise large sums for good causes including the local homeless charity and the international charity in El Salvador.

Pupils' attendance is above average and they usually arrive to school punctually. Preparation for their future economic well-being is satisfactory, reflecting their satisfactory literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. Pupils enjoy participating in the school bank and the project day with local businesses.

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Pupils' spiritual development is particularly strong. They use the chapel for reflective circle times which help them to reflect on feelings and values and inform their perspective on life.

Pupils' social development is good and there are opportunities for them to take on greater responsibility and develop maturity as they move through the school. Their cultural development is good as they engage in a range of activities such as the 'Faith Tour' and various project days to develop their multi-cultural awareness and celebrate the rich cultural diversity of pupils in the school.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

Most teachers create a calm and orderly working atmosphere in their classes. This is due to good relationships between pupils and adults, and ensures that pupils are keen to work and do their best. Pupils have a clear sense of purpose because teachers usually share the objectives for the lesson with them.

Sometimes, though, teachers do not facilitate group work well by giving clear

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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expectations for how this will happen and what is expected by the end of the task.

The tasks set by teachers do not always meet the needs of all the pupils in the class. Consequently, more able pupils are sometimes not sufficiently challenged and the less able do not understand the work. This limits these pupils' learning and progress.

There have been improvements in the usefulness of individual educational plans for promoting the achievement of pupils with particular needs, and staff now have a clearer idea of each individual's learning needs. Teaching assistants are starting to take more responsibility for monitoring pupils' progress, but this practice is relatively new and not yet fully embedded.

A new assessment system has been successfully established. Data are being used much more incisively to identify pupils in danger of falling behind and to provide them with extra support. Their progress is starting to improve as a result. Although the range of data available is now much improved, its use for planning lessons and setting suitable challenging targets is at an early stage of development.

Sports and other related after-school activities are a strength of the curriculum. The sports mark award has had a positive impact and many pupils act as sports leaders. A whole-school focus on guided reading is beginning to improve standards. However, the curriculum for pupils with special educational needs, those with English as an additional language and those who are gifted and talented, whilst improving, is still not finely tuned enough to fully meet their needs.

The school's personal social and health education programme responds promptly to current circumstances. A renewed drive on preventing bullying is in place, with several initiatives such as focused assemblies and school council debates. Currently, its impact has still to be felt, which is reflected in some pupils' negative views about how bullying is handled.

Pastoral care is effective in supporting the needs of pupils. Vulnerable pupils, in particular, receive good quality support for their learning and development. Very effective support for those with especially complex needs derives from a multi-agency approach, including an outreach service from a local specialist school.

Behaviour management and support are satisfactory overall and the rate of exclusion, bullying and serious behavioural incidents has declined markedly over the last three years.

The steps taken by the school to encourage attendance are effective. The induction arrangements when pupils start school are good and pupils are well prepared for the next phase of their education.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<p>The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning</p>	<p>3</p>
	<p>3</p>
<p>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</p>	<p>3</p>

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The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3
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How effective are leadership and management?

Senior managers are determined to bring about improvement and have worked well together on plans to raise achievement, but lines of accountability have not been clearly enough established to follow through actions taken. Self-evaluation is largely accurate, especially in the evaluation of teaching. However, it is insufficiently detailed to hold staff fully to account for the implementation of initiatives to raise achievement and this leads to inconsistent practice.

Middle managers are beginning to take on more responsibility for performance in their subjects and as a result standards are beginning to improve.

Governors have played a significant role in steering the work of the school through the support group which has brought about improvements. However, they are not yet fully and systematically involved in evaluating the work of the school.

Safeguarding regulations and duties are met but the school could do more to ensure that all pupils feel safe in school and to improve its record keeping.

The school has satisfactory procedures to promote equal opportunities and the action taken to improve the achievement of different groups of pupils is beginning to have a positive impact on their performance. Occasional instances of racial disharmony outside the classroom have not been entirely eliminated.

The school has taken action to promote community cohesion and it makes a very worthwhile contribution to the wider community through its charitable work. However, it does not fully evaluate the impact of its work.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3

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The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money

3

Views of parents and carers

Most parents are positive about the school. For instance, as one wrote; 'St Gregory's is a lovely school and the support and communication that happens between teachers, parents and pupils is outstanding.' However, a small minority have concerns about behaviour and whether their children's needs are met. Inspection findings agree that these aspects should be improved.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Gregory's Catholic Middle 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 76 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 398 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	32	42	39	51	5	7	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	34	45	38	50	3	4	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	29	38	44	58	2	3	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	28	37	39	51	7	9	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	23	30	49	64	4	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	24	32	44	58	5	7	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	21	28	45	59	6	8	2	3
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)	22	29	43	57	6	8	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	19	25	47	62	8	11	2	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	21	28	44	58	5	7	6	8
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	18	54	71	5	7	2	3
The school is led and managed effectively	27	36	41	54	4	5	2	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	31	41	38	50	4	5	2	3

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.



21 May 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Gregory's Catholic Middle School, Bedford, MK40 4AT

Thank you for all the help you gave us when we visited your school on 19-20 May. We enjoyed talking with you. St Gregory's is a satisfactory school and is improving all the time. Shown below are our findings about what is good about your school and what it needs to do to get even better.

Strengths:

Behaviour and attendance have improved a lot, and attendance is now good.

Your teachers help you to make steady progress during your time in school. By the time you leave in Year 8 you have secure literacy, numeracy and computer skills.

Those of you who find learning difficult are beginning to make much faster progress than previously, due recent changes in the school's practice.

You know how to keep healthy by eating the right food and taking exercise.

You enjoy the work you do in practical subjects, and the range of sports activities and visits arranged for you.

You understand what is meant by active citizenship and participate well in activities both in and outside your school.

Areas for improvement include:

Most of you behave well in lessons, but a few of you are too boisterous in corridors and on the playground which means that some of you do not feel safe.

You would make faster progress, especially in mathematics and science, if your teachers always set tasks that matched your skills and abilities.

Senior managers should keep a closer check on what is happening in the school so that they can celebrate the good things and plan to improve the weaker ones.

We wish all of you success in your studies and thank you once again for your help with this inspection.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

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