

St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117498
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	339020
Inspection dates	10–11 November 2009
Reporting inspector	George Logan

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	475
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Thomas Smith
Headteacher	Diann Ross
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 22 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and a representative of the local authority. They observed the school's work and looked at pupils' work, records of their progress, lesson planning, playtime activities and the school's self-evaluation documents, including records of teaching and the main improvement plan. Inspection questionnaires were received from staff, pupils and from 98 parents.

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

- How well pupils make progress across the school, particularly in Years 3 to 6, taking account of the relatively high level of pupil mobility.
- How effectively teaching and assessment support pupils' learning and achievement, especially of the more able pupils.
- How effectively the school is led and managed by senior staff and governors, and how accurately they evaluate the school's work.
- Whether the governing body and senior leaders have fulfilled their responsibilities in relation to the promotion of community cohesion.

Information about the school

This is a larger than average primary school, with fifteen classes. Some pupils travel a significant distance to the school, largely because of the Catholic ethos. While White British pupils form the largest ethnic group, the school's intake has changed over the years. As a result, this is an ethnically diverse community, with over half the pupils from minority ethnic groups. The largest groups are those of Filipino, Indian and Black African heritage. Few pupils are entitled to free school meals. A significant minority of pupils do not speak English as their first language. A below average proportion of pupils has special educational needs and/or disabilities. Almost all children join the Early Years Foundation Stage in the Nursery class. Mobility is higher than in many schools, particularly in Years 3 to 6.

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. It is an ethnically diverse, but harmonious, community which provides a secure environment for its pupils. Adults offer good pastoral care and support and this is reflected in pupils' good behaviour, good attendance and good attitudes to learning. In several respects, the school supports pupils' personal development well. As a result, pupils say that they enjoy school and feel safe there. They have a satisfactory understanding of healthy lifestyles.

Although satisfactory overall, there are some strengths in pupils' achievement. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with broadly average standards. They make good progress in Nursery and Reception classes as a result of consistently good teaching. Pupils remain enthusiastic and sustain a good pace of learning as they move through Years 1 and 2, so that standards at the end of Year 2 are above average. Progress slows for the majority of pupils in Years 3 to 6, as the teaching provides less challenge in these years. However, there is also a considerable movement of pupils into and out of the school in this phase, so that the pattern of achievement is quite complex. Despite many of them joining the school much later than others, pupils who do not speak English as their first language continue to outperform most other groups. By the end of Year 6, standards are broadly average. In 2009, there was a good improvement in standards in writing and better overall progress, following a dip in 2008. Currently, the school makes little specific provision for pupils who are gifted or talented. Otherwise, the pupils take part in a satisfactory range of activities which engage their enthusiasm satisfactorily. Effective partnerships with other schools have enhanced pupils' opportunities, particularly in games and physical education.

Up to Year 2, teachers use day-to-day assessment well to plan lessons and to provide additional support. They carefully check pupils' understanding. Beyond that, the use of assessment is less consistent. While work is marked regularly, not all teachers provide clear guidance as to what pupils must do to improve. The analysis of assessment data is not sufficiently rigorous to identify any patterns of underachievement promptly or to increase the rate of pupils' progress through the setting of challenging individual targets.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has a clear commitment to the school's Catholic ethos and to pupils' personal development. However, the monitoring of teaching by senior staff is not always sufficiently incisive. Self-evaluation, while sometimes too positive in its view of achievement, is broadly accurate and contributes satisfactorily to sustaining continued improvement. This was evident in the recent successful initiative to raise standards in writing. Governance is good. Governors have an increasingly secure understanding of pupils' progress and are prepared to hold

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the school to account. These factors suggest that the school's capacity for improvement is, at present, satisfactory.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that pupils make more rapid and consistent progress in Years 3 to 6, through:
 - more rigorous analysis of tracking data to identify underperformance in subjects, year groups or by particular ethnic groups
 - more consistent marking of pupils' work, so that they are clear about what they need to do to improve
 - setting measurable targets for the progress of each pupil
 - ensuring that lessons provide sufficient challenge for all pupils, particularly the more able.
- Improve provision for pupils identified as gifted or talented by:
 - ensuring that their individual needs are met more fully through opportunities for challenging extension activities.
- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly in Years 3 to 6, through:
 - ensuring that school leaders offer more incisive evaluation of the strengths and areas for development in lessons observed, so that the proportion of lessons graded good or better is significantly increased.
- 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

3

Although pupils mostly enjoy school, are willing, co-operative and settle quickly in lessons, their achievement does not consistently reflect their good attendance and positive attitudes. Too often, the teaching overvalues passivity and does not build effectively upon pupils' capacity as active learners, working productively in groups. Overall, pupils build satisfactorily on their previous learning as they move through the school, although some groups, notably those who do not speak English as their first language, make more rapid progress. Staff are attentive to individual needs, deploying additional support effectively.

Standards in Year 6 have been broadly average for several years. A dip in standards in 2008 prompted a focus on writing skills, leading to significantly improved standards in 2009. Average standards in mathematics and science in 2009 represent broadly satisfactory progress for pupils who are in the school for the full four years. While standards in Year 2 are generally above average, this is not an entirely reliable baseline for subsequent progress, given the high mobility in the upper part of the school. Across the school, some minority groups do well. White British pupils, however, the largest and

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most stable ethnic group, tend to make progress which is seldom better than satisfactory. This is compounded by less inspirational teaching from Year 3 to Year 6. For example, in spite of the limited challenge in a higher set Year 5 numeracy lesson, pupils sustained their attention and work rate reasonably well and, as a result, made some progress.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The Catholic ethos underpins the strong sense of community and tolerance. Pupils feel generally safe and have confidence in most adults. They show great consideration for those around them. The Eco initiatives ensure that pupils have a clear sense of their responsibility towards the environment. They feel that behaviour is mostly good although they have a sense that bullying does occasionally occur. Their well-developed social skills, and leadership opportunities as play leaders, together with satisfactory academic skills, suggest that pupils are adequately prepared for their future education. The school council provides a satisfactory forum for their views. The school's promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory overall, although it is still developing opportunities for pupils to engage with other communities with different characteristics.

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	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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

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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How effective is the provision?

Teaching is better in Years 1 and 2 than in Years 3 to 6. Most lessons in Years 1 and 2 have a brisk pace and challenge pupils well to think and respond. In a successful Year 2 lesson, pupils' knowledge and understanding of doubling and halving in mathematics was tested and extended. The final minutes of the lesson were used well to enable the teacher to judge how well pupils understood the concept. While there are occasional good lessons in Years 3 to 6, too many lack pace and challenge. They support satisfactory achievement as a result of pupils' positive attitudes, but do not take learning forward quickly enough. Able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged. Assessments are used well to check pupils' progress in Years 1 and 2, but less so in the higher years. Some use is made of individual learning targets in writing, but these are inconsistently implemented, so that their impact on progress is limited. There is some quality marking, mainly in English, but this is, again, inconsistent between classes. Pupils are beginning to evaluate the quality of their own work, as seen in Years 2 and 6. A key strength in the provision is the quality of the teaching assistants who successfully support pupils who need additional help.

The curriculum promotes satisfactory standards in reading and in writing, with some planned cross-curricular use of writing skills. There is good provision for developing information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Partnerships with specialist secondary schools have successfully supported curriculum development in games and physical education. The school has a gifted and talented pupil register. However, although there are incidental opportunities for these pupils in music and sport, there is no coherent programme to provide for the range of their needs. There is good provision for personal, social, health and citizenship education, underpinning pupils' good personal development. The range of enrichment activities, visits and visitors is reasonably extensive, although there are relatively few extra-curricular clubs.

Staff care for pupils well and there are good links with parents. Pupils speak of their school with pride and feel that they receive good support from adults. The school works effectively with outside agencies to support vulnerable pupils who have identified learning or welfare needs.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

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The strength of the leadership team is in its support for pupils' personal and pastoral development and for the distinctive ethos of the school. In these respects it has been very successful. There has also been effective action to develop provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and to tackle weak outcomes in writing in 2008. This led to a significant improvement in English in 2009. However, in other areas progress has been less rapid. The monitoring of teaching and learning by some members of the leadership team is not rigorous enough, providing insufficient guidance for improvement. Not enough time is given to detailed analysis of assessment data, and this can distort the accuracy of self-evaluation. The school recognises this as an area for improvement. Where subject leadership is stronger, as in English, there has been a positive impact on learning.

The governing body encompasses a good range of expertise. It has been active in ensuring that it is representative of the main ethnic communities in the school. Governors have a good knowledge of pupils' learning. They ensure that statutory requirements are met, including the school's satisfactory procedures for safeguarding pupils. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and are concerned to shape its future direction, driving through improvement. They show determination to hold school leaders to account and to accelerate the pace of progress.

The school engages well with community interests and with parental expectations. Although potential discrimination is tackled resolutely, equality of opportunity is only satisfactory since gifted or talented pupils are not supported as effectively as those with special educational needs. The school understands community cohesion issues well.

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	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
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
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

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Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter Nursery with a wide range of skills and knowledge. Overall, these are similar to the levels expected for their age. A small proportion of pupils have limited experience of spoken English when they first join the school. Most children settle rapidly because of the good induction arrangements and the high level of adult support. Children are well cared for and have good relationships with staff. They feel safe and secure, are enthusiastic about learning and behave well. Effective teaching helps children, including those with additional learning needs, to make good progress, both in Nursery and in Reception. The school has worked hard to develop the potential of the spacious outdoor area and this is used well. During sessions where children choose their own activities, staff do not always closely monitor which activities children have attempted. Sometimes they do not intervene promptly enough in activities in order to move learning forward. Outcomes by the end of Reception are consistently above those expected nationally. They are particularly good in aspects of children's personal development, in their mathematical development, their knowledge of sounds and letters and in their physical development. Leadership and management are good. The monitoring and recording of progress is rigorous and information collected is used well to guide planning.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

A high proportion of parents and carers hold positive views of the school. There were several written comments, mostly positive. A typical response said, 'St Vincent's has an extremely caring staff...a happy and safe family atmosphere'. The small number of less favourable comments related to issues around pupils' behaviour, the time given to physical activities and opportunities for parents to discuss pupils' progress. While there was no particular pattern to these one-off responses, the team did consider them carefully. Although there was no evidence of significance to support either of the other points, pupils certainly felt that the amount of time given to physical activities did not match what their class timetables suggested. Overall, the consensus suggests that this is a happy, caring school where pupils are well supported in their personal development and the inspection findings mostly endorse parents' and carers' positive views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Vincent de Paul Primary 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 98 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 475 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	68	69	29	30	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	64	65	31	32	2	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	55	56	38	39	0	0	3	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	58	59	33	34	0	0	5	5
The teaching is good at this school	64	65	30	31	0	0	4	4
The school helps me to support my child's learning	49	50	42	43	0	0	4	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	58	59	37	38	1	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)	48	49	41	42	0	0	6	6
The school meets my child's particular needs	49	50	40	41	1	1	5	5
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	41	42	49	50	2	2	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	37	38	48	49	1	1	8	8
The school is led and managed effectively	57	58	35	36	1	1	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	69	71	27	28	1	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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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.



12 November 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School, Stevenage SG1 1NJ

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you and spending time in your lessons. We found that your school is satisfactory overall. While it has areas which could be improved, it also has several strengths.

Our main findings are these:

You attend as often as you can, behave well and work hard

The links with the local Parish are well-developed

Standards are average in Years 3 to 6, but higher than that in Years 1 and 2

Children in Nursery and Reception make good progress, especially in their knowledge of sounds and letters and in their personal development

The school makes sure that you are cared for well

You conduct yourselves safely and have some understanding of how important it is to eat healthily.

The curriculum is satisfactory and, although there could be more clubs, you do get to go on a good range of visits

Those of you who need extra support are well provided for.

We are asking the school to make the following changes so that you do even better:

Monitor and develop teaching and pupils' learning more rigorously, particularly in Years 3 to 6, to ensure that that lessons are more stimulating, so encouraging you to learn more quickly

Provide well-planned activities for pupils who are talented in particular areas, so that they can develop their skills and extend their knowledge more rapidly

Ensure that school leaders have the skills to judge the quality of teaching accurately and to provide the support which will help teachers improve.

You can help by continuing to work hard and do your best. We hope that you will have every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

George Logan

Lead inspector

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