

St Josephs Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117425
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312609
Inspection dates	25 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Glynis Bradley-Peat

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 on roll	314
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Martin Curran
Headteacher	Mr P J Coldwell
Date of previous school inspection	24–27 May 2004
School address	Great Hadham Road Bishop's Stortford Hertfordshire CM23 2NL
Telephone number	01279 652576
Fax number	01279 466519

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: standards and achievement, particularly in reading in Key Stage 1; the quality of teaching and learning and its impact on achievement; the effectiveness of leadership and management on improving standards. Evidence was gathered from the analysis of school documentation, observation of lessons, conversations with learners, questionnaires returned by parents and discussions with teachers, senior staff and governors. Other aspects of the school's work were not inspected in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This larger than average sized primary school has a much lower than average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. The percentage of pupils who come from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is low. The proportion identified with learning difficulties is below average as is the proportion with a statement of educational need. The school has Healthy Schools Status and bronze and silver Eco School awards.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School is an outstanding school led by a calm, reflective, talented headteacher. His vision for the school lives and breathes amongst all his staff, governors and pupils. Parents praise the school very much for its work and are overwhelmingly supportive of the headteacher and staff. One wrote, 'The school has a great reputation and it's a privilege that my children are here. I could not ask for a better school'. Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher and his team of senior and middle leaders are all completely focused on raising standards and making sure that all pupils achieve as well as they possibly can. Work done on improving reading at Key Stage 1 has paid great dividends. Results are much better this year, especially at the higher Level 3. Writing has also greatly improved and this is making an excellent impact on standards in English. Leaders and managers work together very well and have a clear agenda to move the school forward still further. Governors are passionate about their school and praise the headteacher highly for his work. Their knowledge of school performance data and how to use it is excellent. The inspector shares their view that the headteacher has been too modest in his appraisal of the school. Self-evaluation is highly effective but does not provide a true reflection of how good the school is. Standards are high and have been significantly above average for the last five years. They are higher than at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils enter the school with just above average skills overall and leave with skills that are well above average. Learners meet highly challenging targets. Many pupils make exceptional progress as reflected in the school's tracking systems, lesson observations and pupils' exercise books. The school's track record for high standards and excellent achievement is outstanding. There is excellent capacity to improve further.

Children enjoy school very much and speak excitedly about the interesting and motivating ways teachers teach them. They were keen to talk to the inspector about what they had learned. When asked about teaching, pupils responded, 'Teachers teach us well and give us good ideas to help us improve our writing.' Enjoyment is reflected in good attendance. Behaviour is exemplary. Pupils feel safe and secure and have a clear understanding of what adopting a healthy lifestyle entails. One pupil spoke candidly, 'I have all healthy food in my packed lunch, lots of different fruits, I don't like chocolate'. However, they are also realistic and say about school meals 'It's up to you how healthy you want to be'. Pupils are clear about how to keep themselves safe and know what to do and who to go to if they feel upset. They have many opportunities to take on responsibility. They are proud of their roles as playground friends and play leaders explaining how they look after younger pupils and 'help them to play nicely together'. There is a wide variety of clubs and pupils say how much they enjoy them, particularly Irish dancing and gardening. A high number of pupils participate in local church and sporting events, festivals and fund raising activities. Economic well-being is outstanding, basic skills equip pupils well for the future. One pupil stated, 'I like learning different things so I know what I might like to do when I grow up.' Year 6 pupils praised the way the school has prepared them for the next stage of their education. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The Catholic ethos permeates all aspects of school life

and has a real impact on pupils' attitudes, contributing very well to their outstanding personal development and well-being.

Teaching overall is outstanding. Teachers' planning is detailed and ensures that it caters for the needs of all pupils in each class. There is always a variety of work presented to challenge every learner. Teaching assistants participate effectively in classrooms because teachers communicate with them well. Interactive whiteboards are used well to enhance learning. Teachers ensure that there are opportunities in lessons for pupils to use them too. Teachers ask probing questions to make pupils think and prompt them well in order to promote independent learning. Open-ended problem solving in a mathematics lesson ensured pupils thought carefully about how to organise a barbecue economically. Marking is exemplary. Pupils say, 'We get ticks if we do it right and if there's something we need to work on they write it down and give us examples to follow'. Targets are displayed in every classroom and pupils know these well. In one class pupils have butterflies to show what level they are working at and one pupil explained, 'When we achieve our target, we move our butterfly up to the next level'. Even the youngest pupils know and understood their targets.

The curriculum is outstanding and it provides pupils with many opportunities to shine. Information and communication technology is used well to make learning interesting and to help pupils make connections between subjects. Pupils have researched on the internet to support a geography topic and have written letters about evacuation during the war prompted by reading the novel 'Goodnight Mr Tom'. There are a number of creative approaches to the curriculum through themed weeks and through planning which ensures that pupils' preferred learning styles are taken into account. Pupils particularly enjoyed the 'American Arts Week' where they made totem poles, teepees and masks. This ensured a valuable mix of art and culture. During Eco week pupils researched pollution on the internet and then made a media presentation of their findings. French is offered within curriculum time to pupils in Key Stage 2. Pupils have the opportunity to participate in sports competitions against other schools and in music festivals. They are offered a range of extra-curricular clubs in sports, dance, art, gardening and science. Excellent school trips are organised and visitors to school are valued.

The provision for care, guidance and support is outstanding with assessment and academic guidance being a strength. The progress tracking system is very clear and consistently identifies any pupil requiring extra support or challenge. Safeguarding is thorough, child protection procedures are fully in place and all staff have received training. Pupils know who to come to if they have any problems and are confident that things will be dealt with effectively. Literacy and mathematics targets are displayed and pupils know these well and understand what they need to do to reach the next level.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage is outstanding because of excellent leadership and management. The Foundation Stage leader ensures that information gathered prior to entry to the Nursery is detailed. This is done through a systematic induction process which includes, home-school visits, pre-school liaison, preliminary

visits, meetings with parents and an assessment on entry to the school. This ensures teachers gain a very good knowledge and understanding of children's needs so that children settle easily into life in the Nursery class. Parents are extremely happy with the Nursery and in the words of one, 'Our daughter thoroughly enjoys the school, she skips on her way to school and when she finishes she comes out smiling, skipping and singing'. Children enter the school with just above average skills. Many make outstanding progress and reach or exceed the early learning goals by the time they enter Year 1. In Reception, children are provided with stimulating activities to develop their skills. They practise their phonics and write new words independently because of the wide range of activities offered to them. Teaching is of high quality and clear communication and teamwork with teaching assistants ensure that they stimulate children well. For example, work on the mathematics table outside was facilitated very well by a teaching assistant and focused clearly on developing speaking and listening. The accommodation in the Foundation Stage is cramped which limits the extent to which children can participate in independent practical activities. However, the school has made the best of what space there is.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the accommodation in the Foundation Stage is improved and that children have sufficient space to work unimpeded.

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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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards reached by learners ¹	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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



26 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Bishops Stortford, CM23 2NL

What a lovely day I spent in your school recently, I really enjoyed it. Thank you to those of you who took time out of your lunch hour to speak with me. Your comments were very useful. I was very impressed by your behaviour and thought you were very courteous and well mannered. I was very interested to hear that you adopt healthy lifestyles and make good choices about what to eat and how much exercise to take. You told me all about the clubs you are able to attend and that you were particularly keen on gardening and Irish dancing. I was also pleased about how much you enjoy your theme weeks. Making the totem poles must have been great fun.

I should like to tell you what I found out during my visit. I think your school is outstanding. That means it is really super! Your headteacher does a brilliant job and is really keen for all of you to do as well as possible. He is very pleased about how well you do in tests. Those of you in Year 2 have done excellently this year, well done! Your teachers also do a fantastic job and give you lots of interesting things to do in your lessons. Even in such an excellent school, there are always things to be done. I have asked that your headteacher and the school governors ensure that the building where the youngest children are taught is improved. It is too small and cramped to allow the children to play and learn properly without interrupting each other.

Once again, thank you for making my visit a memorable one. Good luck and best wishes for your future at St Joseph's.

Yours sincerely

Glynis Bradley-Peat
Lead inspector