

St Ursula's Catholic Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102333
Local Authority	Havering
Inspection number	286343
Inspection dates	3–4 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	236
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Paul McGeary
Headteacher	Mrs Noel McNab
Date of previous school inspection	28 January 2002
School address	Straight Road Romford RM3 7JS
Telephone number	01708 345200
Fax number	01708 386627

Age group	3–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average sized school, with a part-time Nursery, serves a changing community where several families experience considerable social and economic disadvantage. The school is seeing rising levels of pupil mobility and an increase in the number at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than in most schools. Several children from Traveller backgrounds also attend the school. Attainment on entry is below expectations of three-year-olds and has fallen in recent years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Governors and staff are accurate in their view that St Ursula's Catholic Infant School provides its pupils with a good education and serves its community well. It has outstanding features, most notably the high quality care and support provided and the promotion of the pupils' personal development. All pupils, whatever their background or needs are included in all aspects of school life and so develop well both academically and socially. Parents are very pleased with the way the school puts the care and welfare of their children at the top of its agenda. Pupils of all ages feel safe and secure, and say that there is always someone to confide in if they have a problem.

Achievement is good and standards are above average by the end of Year 2, because teachers and support staff make learning interesting. The pupils' needs are carefully assessed and taken fully into account when planning lessons and deploying staff. The average numbers of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress towards their individual targets, because their specific needs are quickly identified, often before they arrive at the school. This is also the case for the increasing number of pupils who arrive at an early stage of learning English. They benefit by being immersed in language from the minute they arrive. Focused support for the Traveller children means their achievement is also good.

Strong leadership from the firmly focused headteacher, ably supported by her deputy, has created a close-knit team sharing the common aims of promoting the well-being of pupils and raising standards. Very effective links with the hugely supportive parents as well as close partnerships with a variety of other agencies and local schools significantly influence the pupils' development. The ethos of respect, care and support for pupils and their families starts with the example set by the headteacher, and permeates all areas of the school, enabling all to feel valued. Parents speak highly of the headteacher and her staff; as one said 'The school is led by a dedicated and hard working head. Her commitment to the children and the school is outstanding'. Plans for improvement are based on an accurate evaluation of what the school does well and where achievement could be raised further. Consequently, standards are rising in writing, mathematics and science. There is a good capacity to improve the school.

The school focuses sharply on promoting the pupils' personal, social and health development. As a result, pupils thoroughly enjoy school, and are enthusiastically engaged in lessons and other activities provided for them. They particularly enjoy the creative elements to lessons, although these do not permeate all subjects as much as staff would like. Pupils learn what is needed to adopt a healthy lifestyle and eagerly participate in the many opportunities for exercise and vigorous play. The school council gives them a significant voice in the school and they show initiative when raising funds for charity. Pupils of all ages share in religious ceremonies with the parish community and invite parishioners into school for special events. Their excellent behaviour and consideration of others help to generate the harmonious atmosphere throughout the school. The pupils' outstanding personal qualities and their good academic achievement give them a secure platform for success in the next stage of their education.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The wide range of ability on entry means that many children arrive with skills much lower than expected for their age, especially in language and social development. Through good teaching,

the children make good progress in the Foundation Stage. The strong focus on literacy and numeracy and the emphasis on developing speaking skills mean that by the time children leave Reception many reach and some exceed their expected goals. The early identification of their abilities and the full involvement of parents help the children to settle quickly and form constructive relationships. The staff team carefully monitors how well children are doing so that activities can be matched closely to their needs. Teachers and support staff praise the children's efforts, so raising their self-esteem. As a result, they make good progress in their personal development. Children readily get involved in the range of activities on offer and learn to share with others. The school is trying to deal with one shortcoming. The outside areas are neither stimulating enough nor well resourced. This limits the ability to extend the children's learning through structured outdoor activities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make the outdoor areas in the Foundation Stage more stimulating places for children's learning.
- Deepen the creative dimension to the curriculum in all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The children's good start in the Foundation Stage is built on well in Years 1 and 2. Pupils make good progress here, although differences in the characteristics of each year group lead to wide variations in standards from year to year. Assessments of Year 2 pupils have risen over the last two years and were above average in 2007 in all areas. Improving writing has been a successful focus for the school with increased progress and rising standards. The action taken to raise achievement of more able pupils in mathematics and science through a greater emphasis on investigation and problem solving has led to more pupils reaching higher levels. Groups of children with skills below that expected for their age are identified early. Targeted support helps them to catch up and make good progress. Those pupils entering the school in later years make similarly good progress because of good induction procedures.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The pupils' very positive attitudes help to make the school what it is, a very happy place in which to learn, develop and thrive. The school's drive to reduce absence means that they attend regularly and arrive punctually. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is an outstanding feature of the school. The pupils show great respect for each other and all adults in the school. They work and play happily together and undertake the duties they are given responsibly and with maturity. They understand about the customs of other peoples, and learn to value and respect cultural difference. Pupils learn how to evaluate their own performance and that of others in a constructive and sensitive manner, and they very much enjoy discussing ideas with their 'talk partners'. They show concern for others such as when they prayed for those less fortunate in their practice for Harvest Festival.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils fully understand what teachers expect of them. They respond enthusiastically to interesting activities, work that is well matched to their needs and their teachers' lively approach to lessons. The skilled teaching assistants play a valuable role aiding pupils in class or when working with specific groups with particular learning needs. All pupils are consequently involved in the learning. Teachers also make sure that the more able pupils and those with particular talents are challenged by activities that extend their thinking. Learning is more effective in the lessons where teachers draw out ideas and responses from the pupils through skilled questioning. On occasions, not enough is asked of pupils, and opportunities to deepen their understanding are missed. Resources such as interactive whiteboards are used creatively to make lessons interesting and to engage the pupils fully.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is designed well so pupils have programmes that meet their particular needs whether they have learning difficulties, are at an early stage of learning English or have particular talents. The wide range of additional activities enriches the pupils' experiences and brings much enjoyment to their school life. Visits and visitors from the community along with a variety of clubs foster their personal development and understanding of others. Careful attention is given to promoting basic skills, and pupils have opportunities to develop their writing in several subjects. Pupils develop and apply their information and communication technology skills well in many subjects, although the school is seeking to strengthen this even further. Pupils enjoy creative aspects such as when they engage in interesting artwork, express themselves through dance and take part in music lessons. The inspection agrees with the school that this aspect has scope for further development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Parents are rightly confident that their children are safe and well cared for in school. Rigorously implemented procedures are in place for safeguarding children and for ensuring their health, safety and welfare. The circumstances and individual needs of pupils are well known to staff, and well tracked, so that academic and personal support is directed to maximum effect. Where necessary, the help of a very wide range of agencies is enlisted with much success to give support for pupils with specific needs and to extend staff expertise. Close links with the local authority service help support the academic and personal development of the Traveller children. Thoughtfully planned arrangements help children settle quickly when they enter the Nursery, and prepare them for a smooth transfer to the junior school. The recently revised marking policy is taking effect so that pupils generally know what steps are needed to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Teamwork and the drive to do the best for all of the children and their families are the keys to the school's success and its capacity to meet with confidence the challenges it faces. Recent changes in roles at senior and middle levels are starting to take effect, and the headteacher has already planned for a greater contribution from other staff to more aspects of school leadership, including self-evaluation. The drive to develop staff expertise especially those with leadership roles is seen through the commitment to 'lifelong learning'. Assessment data is analysed thoroughly so that targets for improvement are realistic yet challenging. Central to the school's ethos is the commitment to the inclusion of all pupils, which it does effectively and sensitively, enabling all to feel valued. Governors are strongly committed to raising standards. They hone their skills through their participation in regular training, and are well aware of the challenges the school faces and what to do to improve. Funding is used well to meet the objectives of maintaining high quality teaching and support staff as well as enhanced accommodation. Both have led to improvements in achievement.

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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?	2
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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

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	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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.

Annex A

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 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	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

16 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Ursula's Catholic Infant School, Romford, RM3 7JS

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we came to see how well you are learning. It was a pleasure to spend two days at your school. You were very helpful and showed how proud you are of your school. You and your parents told us that you enjoy school and we are pleased that you all come to school regularly, work hard and behave sensibly. We think that the school is good because the adults care about you very much, teach you well and look for ways to improve.

The youngest of you have a good start in the Nursery and Reception. You make good progress during your time at school. Most of you reach the standards expected by the time you move on to the junior school. Many of you do better than this. You have a good understanding of the importance of diet and exercise. You take your responsibilities seriously and make a huge contribution to the life of the school.

Your teachers and governors are trying hard to make the school better. We think that there are things that can be even better so we have asked your teachers to:

- improve the equipment and opportunities to learn different skills in the outside areas in Nursery and Reception
- give you more opportunities to be more creative in all subjects.

We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale

Lead Inspector