



St Philip Howard Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117469
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290848
Inspection dates 22–23 November 2006
Reporting inspector Paul Missin

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Woods Avenue
School category	Voluntary aided		Hatfield
Age range of pupils	3–11		Hertfordshire AL10 8NN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01707 263969
Number on roll (school)	288	Fax number	01707 263969
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Ms S McLellen
		Headteacher	Mrs N M Pawley
Date of previous school inspection	2 July 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3–11	22–23 November 2006	290848

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors over two days.

Description of the school

This school is bigger than most primary schools. Most pupils are of White British heritage but an increasing number are of Black African or East European origin. A small number are at an early stage of learning English. Most children begin the Nursery with skills that are below those expected for their age. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. A below average proportion is eligible for free school meals.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This good school promotes a very clear Catholic ethos, where the personal development of pupils is outstanding. One parent wrote, 'This is a very caring and nurturing school. Each child is known by name and they are made to feel special and it acts like their family'. Pupils are looked after well and they have a clear view of how to be safe. Pupils have an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles and are encouraged to take an extremely full part in the wider community. The promotion of their spiritual, moral and social development is excellent. The main reason for this strength is the vision of the headteacher and the effective way in which she ensures that pupils' personal development is central to the school's work. The effective partnership with the deputy headteacher and the work of other senior staff ensures that all staff promote the aims of the school very well. School leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and demonstrate a good capacity for further improvement.

The outstanding provision for pupils' personal development leads to their very good attitudes and behaviour and good achievement. Pupils are keen to try new things and do their best at all times. An important and continuing strength is pupils' good progress in English, particularly in Years 3 to 6. In 2006, standards in Year 2 were above average in reading. They were average in writing and relatively few pupils reached the higher than expected Level 3. Standards in Year 6 were above average and pupils made exceptional progress from Year 2. This exceptional progress is the result of confident and enthusiastic teaching, strong leadership and effective support for individual pupils. Standards in mathematics and science in Year 6 are average. More able pupils are not always challenged enough to reach the higher than expected Level 5. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) have risen steadily since the last inspection and they are now average. Pupils with learning difficulties and those with English as an additional language make equally good progress.

Provision in the Nursery and Reception classes is good. Children make good progress and most reach the expected standards by the time they begin Year 1. Their good progress occurs because the curriculum is well planned and managed and the enthusiasm and skill of the teachers and their assistants inspires children. The effective promotion of their personal skills, such as when making choices about what activities to do and working cooperatively, provides a very good platform on which children can build on in later years.

Teaching across the school is good and the curriculum is well planned. Teachers' good subject knowledge and the clever ways in which lessons are made interesting and fun engages pupils well and leads to effective learning. At times teachers do not provide enough more difficult work for able pupils. Teachers collect a wide range of information about how well pupils are doing and this is now beginning to be used to identify different ability groups in each class and to help set learning targets for pupils. This initiative is at an early stage of development. The quality of the targets and pupils' knowledge of what they should do to improve are not consistent across the school. Pupils are not well enough involved in assessing their own work.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the level of challenge for higher attaining pupils in writing in Years 1 and 2, and in mathematics and science in Years 3 to 6 in order to raise standards.
- Improve the effectiveness of pupils' learning by involving them more in assessing their own work and ensuring that their targets show them more clearly how to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes and most reach the expected standards by the beginning of Year 1. In recent years, standards have been typically average in Year 2 and above average in Year 6. Across the school, standards were above average in 2005. In 2006, standards in Year 2 were above average in reading and mathematics and average in writing. Standards in Year 6 were above average in English and average in mathematics and science.

Pupils overall make good progress as they move through the school. The proportions of pupils reaching the higher than expected Level 3 in writing in Year 2 and Level 5 in mathematics and science in Year 6, though satisfactory, are areas for development. There has been good improvement since the last inspection in the standards pupils reach in ICT. They are now average and pupils use computers well in different subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of pupils is outstanding. Their spiritual, moral and social development is excellent. All pupils pray and reflect regularly and work together very effectively. The school celebrates its Catholic ethos and other cultures and beliefs. The behaviour and attitudes of pupils in lessons and on the playground are good and are a strength of the school. Pupils are polite and confident and demonstrate mature attitudes as they take on responsibilities in the school as councillors or 'Trouble Busters'. They are proud of their school and enjoy their teachers' company and their lessons. Attendance has steadily improved and is now average.

Pupils are knowledgeable about how to keep themselves safe and demonstrate an outstanding knowledge of health issues. The school has recently gained the 'Healthy School Award'. Pupils' good progress in basic literacy skills ensures that they are well prepared for their next schools. They also make an outstanding contribution to the wider community through raising money for local and national charities, integrating with the local parish and winning a national recycling competition.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers manage pupils very effectively and offer high levels of care and support for them. Hence, pupils make good progress. Teachers present interesting and enjoyable activities for pupils to complete in lessons, but at times lessons do not provide enough extension work for more able pupils, which slows their progress. Teachers in the Nursery and Reception classes provide a good range of practical activities for children and make good use of the indoor and outdoor environments. Teachers and their assistants support pupils with learning difficulties and those with English as an additional language well and they also make good progress.

Information from the Nursery and Foundation Stage profile assessments and from statutory and optional tests for older pupils give the school a clear view of the progress that pupils are making. Pupils' targets for improvement are not always sufficiently precise to bring about the improvement the school is seeking.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school offers a well planned and well balanced curriculum, which meets pupils' needs and ensures learning is often fun. Pupils report that, 'We do lots of interesting things and there is loads of equipment for art.' Pupils made attractive homemade paper books in art club, just one of the many clubs that the school offers from the Nursery to Year 6. Pupils in Year 6 are going to France for their residential visit and this year pupils learn French from Year 3 to Year 6. Every pupil has two years professional music tuition and learns how to play a stringed instrument, including the double bass for some. Provision for the development of personal, social and health education is good.

The Foundation Stage curriculum is very well planned and is packed with exciting activities both in classrooms and in using outdoor facilities, so that children enjoy school from the start. The curriculum is cleverly constructed to ensure that pupils develop key literacy skills across other subjects. The new ICT suite and interactive white boards also enhance lessons. There are too few opportunities for pupils to design their own investigations and decide how to resolve problems in some subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care of pupils is very good. Adults place a very strong emphasis on pupils understanding their rights and responsibilities and this contributes to their excellent personal development. The school provides a safe and secure environment. Child protection arrangements are effective with all staff and governors having received recent training. Assessments of physical risk are in place.

The school works well with parents and other agencies to help pupils make good progress. Teachers identify pupils with learning difficulties at an early stage and good measures are in place to support their progress. Proper procedures are in place to support the growing number of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. All pupils receive strong encouragement to do their best, whatever the circumstances and appreciate the significance of house points and the award of a weekly trophy for the class with the best attendance. Assessment information is used to set pupils' group and individual learning targets but these approaches are still relatively new, and not all teachers use this information effectively.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The caring Catholic ethos of the school and good leadership and management lead to the excellent development of pupils' personal skills. Parents value this feature highly, 'I love the way the headteacher seems to know each child, not just by name, but by personality.' The school's development of confident, effective teaching, particularly in English, plays a major part in pupils' good achievement.

School leaders work effectively to embed improvements. Analysis of pupils' progress has helped the school identify ways to improve the performances of more able pupils, especially in mathematics, and a good plan of action has been drawn up to raise standards further. The school's evaluation of its performance is good. The school has good capacity to improve further.

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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

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 behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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?	2

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?	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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
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

24 November 2006

Dear Pupils

St Philip Howard Catholic Primary School, Woods Avenue, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, AL10 8NN

Thank you for making my colleagues and I so welcome when we came to your school recently. You were very polite and helpful and we think that all your teachers work hard to make your school a welcoming, attractive and exciting place to come to.

We think that your school is good. There were several things that we thought were working really well.

- You told us how much you enjoy coming to school and how you always try to do your best. You are proud to be part of this Catholic school community, where you 'Follow the way of Jesus by loving, learning and doing your best'.
- Your headteacher and other senior teachers are good at organising the school.
- We think your teachers are very clever in the way they make lessons fun and find interesting things for you to do.
- You do very well in most aspects of your English work.

There were two areas where you could do even better.

- We found that the more able of you are not doing quite as well as you could in writing in Year 2 and in mathematics and science in Year 6, because the work is sometimes not difficult enough.
- You need to work with your teachers to make your learning targets clearer and to do more assessment of your own work.

We think that your school is well placed to continue to get better.

We wish you well for the future.

Paul Missin (Lead inspector)