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St Paul's Catholic Primary, Cheshunt

Inspection Report

Better
education
and care

Unique Reference Number 117492
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290853
Inspection dates 9–10 January 2007
Reporting inspector Sarah McDermott

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Park Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Cheshunt, Cheshunt
Age range of pupils	3–11		Hertfordshire EN7 6LR
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01992 635060
Number on roll (school)	201	Fax number	01992 625215
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Tony McColgan
		Headteacher	Mrs Sue Allen
Date of previous school inspection	7 October 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3–11	9–10 January 2007	290853

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average primary school. The school draws its pupils from a wide catchment area mostly made up of owner occupied housing. Fewer pupils than average are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is higher than found in most schools, but the number whose first language is not English is average. The number of children with learning difficulties and disabilities is just below average, but fluctuates from year to year. The school opened a new Nursery class in September 2003. There were a small number of Traveller children on roll at the time of the inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Paul's is a good school. It provides good value for money. Under the strong leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher standards and achievement have consistently risen year on year. Standards are now above national averages and achievement is good. This is because the school knows itself well and what it needs to do to improve. Since the last inspection the school has also worked determinedly and successfully in raising its profile in the local community. It has excellent relationships with parents, the local education authority and outside support agencies. A new Nursery class has been added and the school roll is increasing. These improvements demonstrate that the school's overall effectiveness is good and it is well placed to get better still. As one parent commented, 'We are happy with all aspects of the school which is clearly continually progressing on an annual basis.'

Teaching is good and is the major contributory factor to the pupils' above average standards. Pupils experience a good range of activities both in and out of lessons to enliven their learning. Quality and standards in the Foundation Stage are satisfactory. Here a good start to schooling in the Nursery is provided, but sometimes lessons in the Foundation Stage are too directed. However, elsewhere teachers give pupils good opportunities to try things out themselves. Consequently pupils enjoy school and are keen learners. The personal development of the pupils is good. Relationships in the school are very strong. The Catholic ethos underpins school life and leads to a very caring family feel. Attendance has been below average for several years. Although it has improved to become average last year, there are still too many parents who take their children out of school in term time for holidays and miss valuable learning.

Teachers who lead subjects are starting to understand their responsibilities, but are still often too reliant on the expertise of the strong senior management team to point the way to raising standards. Several governors are new to their role. Whilst they are fully committed to the school, they tend to accept information and data unquestioningly. Nevertheless the senior management team ensures that the school forges ahead and that the lack of experience of subject leaders and governors does not detract from the positive impact of good leadership overall.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the role of subject leaders and new governors to ensure that they have the skills to be fully effective in raising standards and achievement.
- Ensure consistency of provision and achievement for all children in Foundation Stage.
- Work with parents to reduce the number of holidays in term time and so improve attendance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The achievement of the pupils is good and standards are above average. When children start school they are at the levels you would expect for Nursery age children. They make satisfactory progress and start Year 1 also at nationally expected levels. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 in 2005 were just above national averages. In 2006 the school maintained these above average standards for pupils at this stage. Over the three years to 2005 there had been an upward trend in standards at the end of Year 6. In 2005, standards were exceptionally high in mathematics and well above average in English and science. Results have slightly dipped in 2006, with fewer higher levels achieved than the previous year. Despite this, the school has worked effectively over the past few years to challenge the able pupils and improve the proportion of higher levels achieved at the end of Year 6, which were missing at the time of the last inspection.

In the last three years pupils have made good progress. The gain in learning of pupils taking tests in 2005 was significantly higher than average, particularly in English and mathematics. Pupils taking tests in 2006 had a higher proportion than usual of pupils with learning difficulties, but still attained results better than most schools. All pupils, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who are Travellers, make good progress because the school is quick to use its accurate information to identify when a pupil is not doing as well as expected and to help them back on track. The school sets targets which are realistic but challenging and has successfully met them for the last few years.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupil's personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Pupils say that they enjoy their lessons and other activities. As a result they are attentive and well behaved and little time is lost in maintaining order in lessons. Occasionally, when the pace of a lesson slows, pupils' attention wanders and achievement is less effective.

Pupils know what constitutes a healthy diet, but they do not always make the healthiest choices in practice as they tend to avoid fruit, salad and vegetables. They understand how to keep themselves safe. Pupils enjoy the opportunities they have to take responsibility and show initiative as school councillors, house captains and helpers around the school. The resulting experience, combined with good basic literacy and numeracy skills, prepares them well for adult life. The school helps children to become increasingly aware of their place in the community, and how they can contribute to it, through close links with the parish, charity fund raising and carol singing in the local town centre. Although attendance has slightly improved, it has been lower than most schools for several years. The school attributes this largely to holidays taken in school time, which it tries to discourage.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good because pupils make good progress in most lessons. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good so pupils are keen to learn and do their best. Pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work because teachers mark work thoroughly and give useful comments. Lessons are well planned to take account of individual needs. Teachers brief their teaching assistants carefully to help pupils who need extra support. Staff are quick to notice if any pupil is falling behind and to find effective ways to bring them back on track.

Teachers make good use of technology to enliven the curriculum. They are adept in training pupils to use a wide range of different ways to learn. Many teachers are confident enough to give the pupils free rein to have a go at exciting activities so they can learn very effectively from first hand experience. However there are still a few lessons which lack pace and do not provide sufficient stimulation to the pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good range of activities to stimulate pupils' learning. French lessons, visits to places of interest like Cuffley camp and theme days, when a given subject is studied in depth, add interest to the normal range of subjects. Increasingly work is planned to link different subjects and to make the most of information and communication technology to promote learning. For example, Year 2 pupils looked at scientific vocabulary in a literacy lesson, and pupils in Year 6 used computers to perfect their writing skills. However, such opportunities are sometimes missed. The pupils enjoy a good range of after school clubs that include the opportunity to participate in sport or care for the environment. Children in the Foundation Stage enjoy interesting activities but at times they lose interest because lessons are too directed by the teacher. Very good links with other agencies like the police and the fire service help pupils to appreciate how to keep themselves safe.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care, guidance and support to its pupils. This is undeniably appreciated by parents. One parent adds, 'As a parent I can honestly say that I feel lucky that my children attend St Paul's'. The required checks to ensure pupils' safety, protection and well being are effective. The school's catholic ethos of mutual respect permeates all the school's work and results in pupils showing high levels of care for each other.

The school has good systems for checking how well pupils are doing and identifying those who need extra help with their learning. This means any pupil slipping behind

is helped to catch up and achieve as well as other pupils. Teachers set pupils clear individual targets in English and mathematics, with a particular emphasis given to writing. Very good links with other schools and agencies ensure that pupils are well supported as they transfer to secondary school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are a very strong team and provide excellent leadership. Although several subject leaders are new to their posts, the senior management team supports them very well to accomplish good outcomes for the pupils. However new leaders are not yet sufficiently accountable for pupils' standards and the quality of teaching in their subjects. They currently rely too much on the expertise of their seniors.

The school's evaluation of how it is doing is accurate. It is proactive in identifying the difference between pupils year on year and adapting the curriculum and teaching styles accordingly. Consequently the school has reaped rewards in improved standards and achievement. Equality of opportunity is good so pupils make good progress, whatever their background or ability. The school manages its finances carefully and ensures spending is closely tied to the needs of the pupils. Governors are committed to the continued success of the school. However they are not yet adept at asking probing questions to help the school progress 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?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
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	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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	3
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

11 January 2007

Dear Pupils

St Paul's RC Primary School, Park Lane, Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, EN7 6LR

Thank you for making us very welcome in your school. We enjoyed meeting you and were pleased that you were happy to share your ideas and views about the school with us. This letter is to tell you what we think of your school and how it can be even better.

You told us that you enjoy school and get on really well with your teachers. Your parents are particularly pleased that you go to St Paul's School because you are taught well and are doing well in your tests. We agree. However, we have noticed that too many of you have days off school to go on holiday. You readily take part in the exciting activities provided. In lessons we think your teachers are good at making learning fun by giving you the chance to have a go at things and sorting out problems yourselves. We were impressed with the grown up way you take on jobs such as councillors, buddies and play leaders. You behave very well. We know that you understand how to keep healthy and safe, but we were disappointed to see that many of you do not choose enough vegetables, salad or fruit at lunch times. You put a lot of thought into your assemblies and times for prayers. Teachers look after you well and we think the way you care for each other is especially good.

To make the school even better we have asked your teachers and governors to do three things. Firstly, to make sure that teachers who lead subjects and your governors are clear that they know how you are doing and what you need to do to do even better. Secondly, to check that all the children in the Nursery and Reception classes are given exciting ways to learn. Thirdly, to persuade your parents not take you out of school for holidays in term time because it interrupts your learning.

We thoroughly enjoyed our visit to your school. I am sure all your teachers will continue to work to make your school a special place for you. You can do your bit by continuing to be positive, helpful and make the most of your time at St Paul's.

Mrs McDermott

Additional Inspector