

St Margaret Clitherow Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118773
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291250
Inspection date	21 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	290
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	G A Horne
Headteacher	Annemarie Whittle
Date of previous school inspection	8 May 2001
School address	Trench Road Tonbridge TN11 9NG
Telephone number	01732 358000
Fax number	01732 369691

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school is slightly larger than most primary schools. The majority of pupils come from the immediate surroundings, although because of the school's faith status, a small proportion of pupils come from a wider area. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, with about a quarter of other European heritage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is in line with most schools, although the proportion with a statement of special educational need is higher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstandingly effective school and even better than the school indicated in its self-evaluation. The very positive comments and high rate of return of the questionnaires before the inspection reflect parents' satisfaction and confidence in the quality of education provided by the school. The success with which the school emphasises its' Catholic and family atmosphere is confirmed in many parental comments. This was summarised by one parent, 'Our school is a real community and I am thrilled that my family is part of it.' The school takes account of parents' and pupils' views in an exemplary way, for example, through its school improvement evening for parents. This well attended event provides parents with an excellent opportunity to contribute their ideas and directly inform the school's development planning. Pupils' review of the roles of adults and pupils very effectively reinforces the school's values and aims.

Outstanding provision in the Reception classes helps the youngest children to settle very quickly into the school's expectations that only their best will do, so that even in the youngest classes there is a quiet and purposeful atmosphere, where all are clear about what they are learning. Teaching is also outstanding throughout the rest of the school. Teachers plan rigorously so that tasks for pupils build systematically on what pupils already know and can do and this means that not a moment is lost. Pupils enjoy an outstanding curriculum which is rich and varied. They say that 'learning is fun and active'. As a consequence, their achievement is outstanding and they make significantly higher rates of progress than most pupils nationally. Standards overall are well above average representing outstanding achievement for pupils. At the end of Year 6 standards are consistently higher than the national average and in some years are exceptionally high. In spite of this, sometimes pupils' enthusiasm for what they are doing leads them to forget about the presentation of their work. The school has already identified this as requiring some improvement and also plans to improve the curriculum further by planning more opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills in other subjects.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding as a result of the very high quality pastoral care. Staff and pupils share the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of school life. Pupils have high levels of trust in adults and the school is rightly proud of its caring ethos, where all pupils are safe and feel valued. Pupils enjoy the wide range of facilities in the school grounds, from areas for active physical games to shady spots where older pupils in particular choose quieter activities, enjoying one another's company and conversation.

Leadership and management are also outstanding. The headteacher's very strong leadership and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses are key factors in the school making real gains in the effectiveness of its work since the last inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the presentation of pupils' work.
- Give pupils more opportunities to practise their writing in subjects other than English.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Children enter the Reception classes with levels of skills and knowledge typical of children of their age. The exceptionally good start they make in their personal development means that they develop the early skills of reading, writing and numeracy very well and become confident

learners, ready for more formal learning in Year 1. As pupils move through the school they build well on these foundations and gain a momentum in their learning, consistently widening the gap between their performance and national performance levels. This results in consistently high standards by Year 6, with results in the Year 6 national tests usually well above national averages, although the differing capabilities of groups of pupils result in some variation from year to year. Although meeting its own performance targets and achieving standards just above average, the school is not complacent and responded quickly to a slight fall in standards in English in the Year 2 tests in 2006. Revised approaches and targeting reading and writing in smaller groups have brought about significant improvement this year. Pupils' outstanding achievements in literacy, numeracy, science and information and communication technology provide them with a strong basis for their future economic well-being. Regardless of their starting points and capabilities, all pupils are challenged well. For example, a parent of a pupil joining the school at a non-standard time of entry commented on how well her child had been integrated into the school and 'stretched to achieve high standards'.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' behaviour in lessons and in the playground is exemplary because they have very positive attitudes to learning and thoroughly enjoy the time they spend with their friends. Attendance is above average, in part due to the school's robust approach to discouraging holidays in term-time. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Expectations of behaviour are high and consistently applied so that pupils learn within a very calm and purposeful environment. The school has developed an expertise in dealing with some very challenging behaviour. Pupils and adults alike treat one another with care and respect. Bullying is extremely rare. Pupils value 'bubble time' when they can talk in confidence to an adult so are confident that any unacceptable behaviour is taken seriously and dealt with quickly. Pupils have a mature understanding of social responsibility and contribute to their own and the wider community very well, such as organising events for local senior citizens or raising funds for charity. The school council serves fellow pupils well and members are particularly proud of their contribution towards suggesting ways in which traffic could be managed to make the entrance to the school safer. Recent work in preparing for 'Healthy School' status, including pupils speaking at a county conference, has very effectively developed pupils' understanding of how to live healthy lives. They have an exceptional awareness of health related issues and how to stay safe. A high proportion of pupils successfully represent their school in a range of sporting activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. The school shares the best practice in teaching and learning very effectively so that teaching is consistently strong across the school and improved since the last inspection when it was already good. Teachers' strengths are used exceptionally well, for example to provide specialist teaching in science, music and art in some year groups. Pupils find teachers' enthusiasm infectious and appreciate that teachers make learning fun. They also value that teachers are patient and explain things well. A strong emphasis is placed on giving pupils opportunities to think things through for themselves. This is seen in the use of 'talking partners' and in pupils' detailed oral responses to questions. Pupils particularly enjoy

initiating and challenging their own learning by investigating and researching things for themselves in 'plan, do and review' sessions throughout the school. They have the skills to undertake such activities successfully because they are developed progressively from the early years. A review of pupils' written work supports the school's view that the presentation of work could be improved.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is excellent and matched very well to the needs, interests and capabilities of the school's pupils. It is enriched well by links with other schools to provide specialist inputs for a range of activities, including sport and modern foreign language workshops. Parents comment favourably on the high adult to pupil ratio, which maximises specialist teachers' and teaching assistants' expertise to focus learning in small groups. The planning to develop skills and knowledge at various stages of learning is rigorous. This, together with the emphasis placed on transition work in each phase, means that no time is lost because pupils are prepared well for the next stage and work is matched very closely to pupils' earlier learning. The school's 'creative curriculum' makes learning relevant and interesting for pupils. The school recognises that the curriculum at present has further potential to provide more opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy skills in the real contexts of other subjects. These opportunities are being introduced to increase the range of opportunities for writing and to improve standards further. The school grounds and neighbouring areas are used regularly to enhance learning, and visits to places of interest are carefully planned to enrich specific topics. Learning is enlivened further by a wide range of visitors including grandparents who provide an oral history of the locality, often reinforcing pupils' understanding of various roles within society. Extra-curricular activities meet pupils' interests very well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

When asked to talk about their school, the first comment pupils made was, 'People always listen to you.' This sense of being valued enables pupils to develop into confident and independent learners. The school's care, guidance and support for pupils are outstanding. Procedures for ensuring the safety of pupils are robust. The school uses an appropriate range of external agencies to support pupils who may be experiencing difficulties.

Teachers know pupils very well and make exceptionally good use of assessment to identify the next steps for learning, usually for groups of pupils but also for individual programmes when these are needed. Pupils know the level of their work and exactly what they have to do to improve further, and they reflected that 'work is usually just about right, not too hard or too easy'. A few parents expressed the view that reports are not as informative as they might be. Reports are very detailed and give useful information and targets, although some subject targets are rather too general. The school is already addressing parents' concerns by writing the current set of reports to make them more helpful for parents.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Teamwork is central to the school's ethos and approach to leadership and management. The headteacher is a highly effective leader with a clear sense of direction for the school, fully shared by other staff. She has very high expectations and uses individuals' strengths to the full, giving the school a very strong capacity for continuing improvement. This is a school where adults and pupils enjoy working together so that learning is fun and adults are enabled to grow professionally. Teachers and support staff are reflective about their practice so that whole school evaluation is accurate and leads to developments that are clearly focused on bringing about the greatest improvements. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities in an exemplary manner. It challenges and supports the school in equal measure and has effectively ensured that the school has sustained high levels of achievement for many years.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	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 behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the 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.

Annex A

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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

22 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Margaret Clitherow Catholic Primary School, Tonbridge, TN11 9NG

Thank you for welcoming me to your school recently. I would have liked more time to speak to even more children but the group who spoke to me really helped me to understand just how highly you think of your school.

I am pleased that you know that the school gives you an excellent education.

- When you start school, you settle very well into school life in the Reception classes.
- Your behaviour is outstanding.
- You care well for one another and make sure that everyone is happy and included at playtimes.
- You work very hard in lessons and it is good that you find work interesting and know that you are very well taught.
- You make excellent progress so that you reach standards above those and sometimes well above those of other pupils of your age.
- Teachers explain things well and give you really interesting things to do in lessons.
- They mark your work well and give you lots of opportunities to think about what you have done so that you know exactly how to improve your work.
- Adults take excellent care of you so that you are safe and secure in school.
- You stay fit and healthy by taking part in a lot of sport.

- I hope that you continue to do as well as you do now. I agree with the plans your teachers have to help you make your work even better. They plan to:
 - make sure that you take more care to keep your work neat and tidy
 - set you more tasks to practise your writing in other subjects.

Very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Helen Hutchings Lead Inspector