

St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134318
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	294124
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Mike Thompson

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	3–10
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	179
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Brandon
Headteacher	Mrs Patricia O'Byrne
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Tewkesbury Lane Milton Keynes MK10 9PH
Telephone number	01908 692438
Fax number	01908 691739

Age group	3–10
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Bernadette's is a new school within the Monkston Park housing development on the eastern outskirts of Milton Keynes. It primarily serves three Catholic parishes. In addition about a fifth of the pupils come from other districts. The school opened in September 2005 with 50 pupils, and the number on roll is growing rapidly. From September 2007 there will be pupils in Year 6 for the first time. With the exception of children in the Foundation Stage, all pupils have joined from other schools. A few have come directly from overseas. About 40% of pupils are of White British heritage. There is a wide range of ethnic minority groups represented in the school, the largest of which is Black African. The proportion of pupils with English as a second language is about three times the national average. The proportion with learning difficulties or disabilities is below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Bernadette's is a good school with some outstanding features. It is effective because it has good leadership and management, good teaching, a well-planned curriculum, and provides excellent quality of care for its pupils. Particularly noteworthy are the school's outstanding provision for promoting the personal development of its pupils and its strong Catholic ethos.

The school is successfully managing a period of extremely rapid growth, in which the number on roll has increased by 350% within the space of 20 months. It has been able to do this because of the excellent leadership and management provided by experienced headteacher and her deputy. They have established good procedures for the induction of new pupils. They have also ensured that detailed assessments of pupils are regularly carried out, and use excellent systems for checking on the progress made by pupils

Pupils achieve well and make good progress as they move through the school. However, standards are below average overall. Attainment on entry to the school, as pupils join between Years 1 to 5, is well below average. In the Foundation Stage, it is very low because of the extremely limited communication skills of the high proportion of young children with English as an additional language. Children are given a good start to their education in the Foundation Stage classes, and make good progress in developing their basic skills as a result of good teaching and management. However, most fall well short of the expected goals for children's learning by the time they transfer to Year 1. By the end of Year 2, standards are still well below average. Currently, the oldest pupils are those in Year 5, and here standards are below average. There is clear evidence of the very good gains in learning made by pupils who have been at the school for some time, but in each class, many of the new pupils have much catching up to do, and this impacts on the standards attained overall. Although pupils make good progress overall, rates of progress vary significantly between year groups. This occurs because teachers in some classes are more skilled than those in others at pitching work at levels that provide achievable challenges for all.

Despite the excellent provision for developing pupils' personal and social skills, the personal development and well-being of pupils is good rather than outstanding. This is because some of the newcomers take longer than others to adopt the school's strong Catholic ethos.

The headteacher and her deputy are highly effective in monitoring the school's performance. They are well aware of the need to provide pupils with even more teaching that is good or better. To achieve this, they are working hard to improve teachers' skills in assessing their pupils and using assessment data more effectively when planning their lessons. At present, too much of the responsibility for monitoring the day-to-day work of the school rests with the two senior managers. They realise that there is now an increasingly urgent need to develop a clear structure of middle management and to develop the leadership skills of the teachers who fill these posts.

Parents hold their school in high esteem. Their views, expressed through the inspection questionnaires, are extremely positive, although a few commented on inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. One summarised the views of many others when writing, 'My child settled very quickly, and within weeks it seemed as though he had been here for years. His progression has been amazing both academically and in terms of his growth in confidence.'

The school has made rapid progress since it opened and, given the good staff development programme underway, is well placed to make further improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teachers in all classes consistently provide achievable and challenging work for their pupils.
- Implement a clear structure of middle management and develop the leadership and management skills of teachers.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage because they are well taught, their learning is well managed, and accurate ongoing assessments provide the basis for future planning. By the time children transfer to Year 1, they attain standards close to the national average in their personal and social development, knowledge and understanding of the world, and physical development. However, their attainment in mathematics and creative development is below average and their levels of skills in communication, language and literacy are low.

In Years 1 to 5, pupils continue to make good progress overall because they are quickly assessed soon after they start, and good quality help is given to help meet the individual needs identified. There are clear variations in the rates of progress between year groups that are directly linked to the quality of teaching. However, there are no significant differences in the rates of progress of pupils within year groups when comparisons are made by gender, ethnicity or attainment.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Within this, pupils' moral and social development is excellent. Pupils' good spiritual awareness is evident in the respect they show for one another and their ability to reflect on how well they are doing at school. However, their appreciation of the arts is less well developed. Pupils' cultural development is satisfactory.

Overall, pupils' behaviour is outstanding. It is impeccable in closely supervised situations, such as when they move around the school or gather for acts of collective worship. It is never less than good in lessons, and is often excellent. The pupils show real consideration for one another, and work and play well together. Older pupils take their responsibilities seriously when carrying out their roles as playground leaders. Pupils have a good sense of community, and their care for others is clearly demonstrated by their keenness to participate in charity fundraising and supporting the work of organisations such as the St Francis Children's Society and Children in Need.

Pupils enjoy being at school. They show a good awareness of safe practices, both at school and at home. They have a satisfactory understanding of the importance of diet and exercise in leading healthy lifestyles. Pupils are satisfactorily prepared for the next phase of their education and to become life-long learners.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching ranges from satisfactory to outstanding. In all classes, teachers have very good relationships with pupils and high expectations of their behaviour. This results in

calm, well-ordered classrooms. Teachers and pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) well in their lessons.

Pupils learn best where teachers set out clear success criteria for what is to be learned and then challenge pupils to explain their answers. In these lessons, teaching generally proceeds at a lively pace and pupils have frequent opportunities to use their knowledge and practise their skills at an appropriate level. However, in some lessons, the pace of teaching and learning is too slow, pupils are not given enough time to work independently, and the tasks set do not match the pupils' needs as closely as they should.

In all classes, skilled teaching assistants work very effectively with individuals or groups of pupils with specific needs.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and places a strong emphasis on developing pupils' personal and social skills. It is enriched through educational visits and opportunities for pupils to learn musical instruments. A weekly 'Extended Curriculum Afternoon' enables pupils to learn in small groups with friends from other classes. Pupils have regular opportunities to take part in a range of after-school activities, including dance, drama and ICT. A particularly good feature is the school's involvement in the local 'Building Learning Power' initiative. This focuses pupils on the skills essential to ensure good learning, such as perseverance or the ability to use questions well. Pupils' successes in this work are celebrated in weekly assemblies when the 'Stars of the Week' for each class are nominated by staff and pupils. There is a good emphasis placed on physical activity. For example, during lunchtime all pupils take part in 15 minutes physical exercise organised by adults, with the support of Year 5 playground leaders.

The school has rightly identified the need to embed the revised Foundation Stage curriculum and the new literacy and numeracy strategies into its practice. The curriculum responds satisfactorily to the wide range of minority ethnic groups, but this remains an area for development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Parents appreciate the care their children receive and its impact on their personal development. One parent said, 'The school encourages good behaviour and promotes a calming ethos which I want my children to grow up with.' Excellent relationships between adults and pupils foster confidence and trust.

Pupils learn in a safe and attractive environment, which is constantly being developed to meet their needs. Health and safety procedures and risk assessments are robust. Child protection procedures are fully in place.

Assessment systems are highly effective in enabling senior managers to check the progress of each pupil, and in providing information on which pupils' individual targets are based. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities find the child-friendly targets in their individual education plans extremely useful in focusing their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The driving force behind the school's success is the partnership between the headteacher and her deputy. Together they have created an orderly and calm environment for learning, and are working hard to raise standards within the climate of rapid change caused by the continuing influx of new pupils. The systems implemented to help new pupils to settle in quickly, together with rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the gains in learning made by all pupils, ensure that pupils achieve well. At present almost all monitoring is carried out by the headteacher and deputy. This is because most staff are inexperienced in having responsibility for leading aspects of the school's work.

Governance is good. Governors know the school well and carefully monitor its effectiveness. A good feature of governors' monitoring is the form used to record the outcomes of their visits to the school, because it sets out very clear areas of focus.

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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
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	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	1
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	3
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	3

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 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

22 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School, Milton Keynes, MK10 9PH

I would like to thank you very much for being so helpful when the inspectors came to visit your school. We really enjoyed meeting you, talking to you and looking at all your work.

We agree with your parents that you go to a good school that has some excellent features. This is a list of some of the things we liked best.

- It is a happy place to be in. You all follow the values your school teaches you. Everyone in your school is friendly and welcoming, and your behaviour is excellent.
- You make good progress.
- You learn well in lessons because you are taught well.
- Your teachers plan really interesting things for you to do.
- All of the adults in your school make sure that you are really well looked after.
- Your headteacher and the other people who help run your school are doing a good job.

Even a good school like yours has something that needs to be improved. Here are two things that I think need to be done now.

- I would like your teachers to try to make sure that they plan their lessons so that you always have to think really hard. I'm sure that you are ready for this challenge!
- I would also like your teachers to learn about how to be in charge of different subjects. This is because the school is getting bigger and bigger, and your headteacher and deputy head now need your teachers to help them manage the school.

With best wishes for your future success,

Mike Thompson

(Lead inspector)