

St George's Cathedral Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100828
Local Authority	Southwark
Inspection number	307499
Inspection dates	24–25 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Wendy Simmons

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	326
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Pauline McAlpine
Headteacher	Mrs Ann Higgs
Date of previous school inspection	13 September 2005
School address	33 Westminster Bridge Road Southwark London SE1 7JB
Telephone number	020 7525 9250
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St George's is a large inner city primary school, which serves a socially and economically deprived area. The majority of pupils are from the Catholic faith, although the school serves a very culturally diverse community. The largest group of pupils come from a Black African heritage, but in the last few years an increasing number of pupils have joined from South American Spanish backgrounds. Half of all pupils speak English as an additional language and many are at a very early stage of learning to speak English when they join the school. A higher than average proportion of pupils has learning difficulties and disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St George's Cathedral Catholic Primary School is a caring and satisfactory school. There is a distinct Catholic ethos and relationships are good. The school successfully includes pupils from many backgrounds and this has resulted in a happy working community. Links with parents show a notable improvement since the last inspection.

Leaders are focused on improving standards. Due to previous difficulties in staffing, standards are currently below average. Inspectors agree with the governors when they commented, 'There were real problems with recruiting and retaining staff but we now have an enthusiastic team who are committed to the children'. The quality of teaching is improving with a greater proportion of good lessons and better planning and development of the curriculum. Teachers are introducing changes to English and mathematics curriculum well and these are having a positive impact on standards.

Pupils achieve satisfactorily. This is a direct result of having a more secure staff, improved teaching and better checking of pupils' progress. Pupils gain basic academic skills steadily and benefit from a satisfactory curriculum. As a result, pupils work steadily, enjoy school and develop healthy and safe lifestyles. They behave satisfactorily and there is good support to help those who have behaviour difficulties. Pupils learn respect and show good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Pupils do best in reading and science and they enjoy music, sport and art. Pupils who speak English as an additional language gain satisfactory skills in spoken English and pupils with learning difficulties are suitably supported, although some lessons are not challenging enough for higher attaining pupils. Overall, pupils make satisfactory progress because teachers provide lessons that help pupils to develop their skills steadily. Leaders recognise that more teaching and learning needs to be good or outstanding if they are to raise standards more rapidly. Governors are ambitious and say, 'Satisfactory is not good enough for us'. Consequently, leaders have organised for their most skilled teachers to work in many classes to help other staff to improve their skills. The school is working with The Institute of Education, to find out how pupils learn to best effect and this is helping teachers to provide more suitable and inspiring activities, although this remains an area for development.

The headteacher works well with the staff and leads them effectively. As one teacher said, 'She has helped staff to shift their thinking to drive things forward'. The whole school is rightly focusing on improving standards in writing and mathematics for all pupils because standards are below average. Leaders have started work to help higher ability pupils to do better and as a result, more pupils are working on complex skills in writing, although this continues to be an area for improvement. Leaders and teachers have been successful in helping pupils to improve their number and calculation work in mathematics, but they are not using these skills to solve a wide variety of problems. Pupils' handwriting and presentation has become neater and more accurate in the last year. Pupils are checking, editing and extending their writing more successfully than they did.

Leaders have developed a wide range of good assessments to help them to check the work of school. As a result, they have useful data about pupils' overall progress. However, they are not yet rigorous enough in evaluating the progress made by higher attaining pupils and those learning to speak English as an additional language. This is hampering them from quickly raising standards to very best effect.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

When children start in the Nursery, their skills are much lower than expected and many are at the beginning stages of learning English. Most find it hard to communicate in English. Their social skills are often limited and overall, they do not have a strong understanding of the world around them. As they move through the Nursery and Reception classes, they steadily gain basic skills and do best in developing their social and communication skills. Nonetheless, when they leave the Foundation Stage standards are lower than expected because many are still at an early stage of speaking English.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Planning and record keeping have improved well since the last inspection. Leaders recognise that the accommodation is in great need of redecoration, and plans are in place to make much needed improvements. Resources are adequate, but often tatty and there are missed opportunities to develop creativity through role-play and dressing up. There is no easily accessible adjoining outside play area for Reception children. This prevents children from having the best possible range of learning activities throughout the day. Good relationships help children to settle quickly and enjoy learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards, especially in writing and mathematics.
- Help higher attaining pupils to reach higher standards in their work by ensuring that activities and support meet their needs consistently well.
- Provide more good teaching and inspiring learning opportunities.
- Rigorously evaluate the progress of different groups of learners to raise standards.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards improved significantly between 2005 and 2006. During this time, pupils' progress, especially from Years 2 to 6 rose from inadequate to good. However, standards then dipped due to the many changes in staffing and inconsistent learning. Standards are currently below average for the pupils in Year 6, but they are making satisfactory progress and in the last year, there has been some good catch-up in their writing, although standards are still too low.

Throughout the school, more of the higher ability pupils are on track to reach the level expected for their capabilities although there is room for this to be increased further. For example, by ensuring that they have work that is consistently challenging. Improved practical activities and enhanced links with Notre Dame Secondary School have helped pupils to enjoy science and gain better investigation skills. As a result, pupils understand science more clearly and this has resulted in closer to average standards in their work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils mostly enjoy school. A few show challenging behaviour, which is well managed by the school. Relationships are good. Pupils respect each other and like taking responsibility especially

helping as 'buddies' and say that this has helped everyone to enjoy playtime more. Pupils regularly say prayers and many of these demonstrate their respect and care for others. Pupils enjoy fund-raising and make a satisfactory contribution to the community; links with the church aid this. Recently, pupils supported the Handicapped Children's Pilgrimage Trust and donated to a Catholic primary school in Hull, where pupils had been affected by the floods. Pupils develop healthy lifestyles satisfactorily. For example, they enjoyed rigorous exercise when taking part in 'Jump Rope'. Physical activities are improving steadily and these help pupils to improve their fitness, teamwork and social skills. Pupils know about how to be safe and understand about how to cope with bullying. Pupils' enjoyment of learning is increasing, but some lessons are dull. This results in some pupils occasionally losing focus and this prevents them from working at a fast pace.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Lesson planning has improved with greater use of assessment to help teachers to match work to pupils' needs. Nonetheless, the planning and the match of work are inconsistent for higher-attaining pupils. Some lessons are great fun but there are not enough of these to thoroughly enliven learners and lift the pace of learning from satisfactory to good. Some teachers are very skilled at asking thought-provoking questions and providing plenty of interesting resources to make learning meaningful, and challenging, but this is inconsistent. Learning in reading has improved because teachers have been helped to develop new skills and support each other well to raise standards. For example, teachers plan lessons carefully so that more work is done on letter sounds. Teachers are working well to make sure that writing activities are meaningful and linked to different subjects. As a result, pupils write more frequently and mostly enjoy the activities. They are beginning to develop a range of editing and checking skills, although there is a need for more to raise standards.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is developing well and places a clear emphasis on improving English and mathematics, although there is still more to do. Plans are well underway to develop skills in grammar in the drive to lift standards in writing. There is a satisfactory focus on promoting speaking skills and the school is shortly to work with local authority advisory staff to help to enrich English, especially through drama. An interesting, and gradually increasing, range of extra activities and visits enriches the pupils' personal development. Pupils value these greatly. One said, 'It's easier to recognise things when you see them, not just hear about them. When I saw the construction of the bridges, then I really understood'. The school is working well towards gaining the 'Healthy School' and 'Arts Mark' awards, which is positively aiding pupils' enjoyment of learning and adoption of healthy lifestyles. Special focus weeks allow pupils to explore subjects in depth and these contribute much to pupils' personal development, as evident in the 'International Week', which helped pupils to celebrate the cultural diversity of the community. One parent commented, 'A great way for everyone to come together'.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Daily pastoral care is good and the many links with outside agencies help to ensure that pupils with complex needs are given appropriate support. Initiatives have contributed well to pupils' improved behaviour and increased rates of attendance. Clergy visit frequently and contribute much to the wider pastoral and spiritual care. There has been a good focus on helping to promote anti bullying measures and this is valued by the pupils. Pupils raise any concerns quickly and the school responds well. The school has a good healthy eating focus. Child protection procedures are in line with government guidelines. The school checks how well pupils are developing and now makes sure that those who have made slower progress are put into target groups for extra support; this has a positive impact on the achievement of many. There is room for better support for higher attaining pupils. Most pupils know their targets and parents are fully involved in the target-setting progress. One noted, 'It gives parents and teachers some goals to aim for'. Marking often gives pupils clear guidance about how to improve, although pupils do not always act on the comments made by teachers.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Morale in the school is strong. One parent said, 'The headteacher and other staff are well coordinated and dedicated to their job'. Leaders work well together and the appointment of several skilled staff has strengthened the management of the school. Senior and middle managers are taking greater responsibility for monitoring lessons, evaluating test results and planning improvement initiatives. There is still more to do by evaluating more rigorously the achievement of those learning English as an additional language and the higher ability pupils. The checking of the quality of lessons is satisfactory, although more precise monitoring is needed to help lift the quality of learning from satisfactory to good. Leaders have set suitable targets to raise standards, but the targets for English are over ambitious considering the current position of pupils in Year 6. Governors hold the school to account by asking pertinent questions and by helping with the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning. The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve due to the strengthened management team and the impact of the developments since the staffing difficulties. As a result, standards, within the school as a whole, are on track to rise.

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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?	3
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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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

4 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St George's Cathedral Catholic Primary School, London, SE1 7JB

You may remember that three inspectors visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting and talking to you and I am writing to tell you what we have found out.

You are welcoming, respectful and polite and you have good relationships with your teachers. You have plenty of opportunities to understand your own faith and learn about different cultures, which is good. Your school is satisfactory, which means that you learn new things steadily, but there is still more to do to make the school good. More of you need to get to a suitable level in your work by the time that you leave Year 6. Teachers usually provide suitable activities for you in lessons and we are pleased that they are trying to make more lessons fun. They have listened to your ideas about having more visits and practical work and you value the increasing number of extra activities, clubs and visits.

We know that you have been worried about the changes in teachers last year. You are pleased that your headteacher and governors have worked hard to find permanent teachers that you like. Staff care for you well and this helps you to gain confidence and feel happy at school. Congratulations for coming to school regularly. Many of you behave well, although a few of you find this hard and need to improve your behaviour. Your headteacher, other teachers and governors are keen to make the school even better and have decided on some good things for you to do this term to help you with your writing and mathematics. You all have targets to work on, which are helpful and teachers give you good ideas about how to improve your work, so follow these carefully and keep practising your tables!

We want the school to work on the following important things.

- Help more of you to get to a suitable level in your work by the time that you leave Year 6, so that you have the best possible chances to do well in the future.
- Help those of you who find learning easier to have plenty of activities and support that allow you to reach high levels in your work.
- Provide more lessons that are really fun, inspiring and challenging, so that you learn new things as quickly as possible.
- Carefully check how well all of you make progress.

Yours faithfully

Wendy Simmons

Lead inspector