

St George's Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123851
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	328005
Inspection date	20 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Martin Kerly

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	209
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vince Kearney
Headteacher	Peter Hanratty
Date of previous school inspection	22 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	The Mount Taunton TA1 3NR
Telephone number	01823 284130
Fax number	01823 325946

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- reasons for a dip in standards in 2008 and evidence of progress achieved by pupils this year, particularly those in Years 2 and 6
- the proportion of good and outstanding features within pupils' personal development and the quality of provision
- how effectively the school checks its performance in order to identify priorities for improvement.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is a little smaller than average although numbers are rising steadily and the school is over-subscribed in some year groups. There are seven classes. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a class on their own. Older pupils are taught in six classes, each comprised of one year group. As the only Roman Catholic primary school in the town, the school draws its pupils from an exceptionally wide geographical area. The very large majority of pupils are White British. The largest other group comprises pupils from Polish families. The proportion of pupils who are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language is increasing and is greater than found nationally. Relatively few pupils have learning difficulties.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. It has several excellent features, including the pupils' outstanding personal development and well-being. Pupils make good progress and attain above average standards. The headteacher provides an exceptionally clear lead in maintaining a caring family atmosphere and in pursuit of the school's aims for pupils to grow in mind, body and spirit. He is supported well by all members of the staff team who provide outstanding care, guidance and support for the pupils. These many qualities are appreciated by almost all the parents who replied to the inspectors' questionnaire. Comments such as: 'The thing that really stands out is the happy, caring, welcoming atmosphere', 'caring and committed staff led by an inspirational headteacher' and 'my child loves school and is learning many new skills' were common themes amongst the responses received. The school has effectively addressed almost all the areas previously identified for improvement and implements clear plans to introduce new initiatives. It is well placed to improve further.

The attainment of children on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage has fluctuated from year to year. It is always at least in line with expectations and occasionally, including this year, is above that expected for this age. Children make good progress in their first year. This good progress is maintained by pupils as they move up through the school and, in most years, standards are significantly above the national average by the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science. Standards fell in 2008 in Years 2 and 6, mainly related to individual pupils' specific circumstances. Pupils in these year groups this year are once again set to attain higher standards, with Year 6 pupils on track to achieve their challenging targets. The school recognises it has been slow to set and use targets for younger pupils in order to help raise standards. It has very detailed knowledge about the progress of individual pupils but has not made the best use of technology to collate and track overall progress by larger groups and whole classes. Well-planned and well-led additional programmes of support enable a good proportion of the pupils who are learning English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties to make very rapid progress. Whilst most of the more able pupils make good progress, a few do not attain the high standards of which they are capable in assessments and national tests at the end of Years 2 and 6.

The behaviour and attitudes of pupils are excellent throughout the school day. All aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are excellent and pupils are particularly thoughtful and caring towards one another. The modern sports hall and indoor heated swimming pool are outstanding facilities and contribute strongly to the pupils' strong commitment to adopting healthy lifestyles. Activemark and Healthy School awards reflect the school's very strong work in this aspect. Parents who completed the questionnaire were unanimous that pupils enjoy school and feel safe. The school rigorously implements procedures designed to safeguard all. Pupils very confidently talk about how to take care of themselves and whom to approach if they have a problem. The breakfast and after-school clubs are well run and provide a caring and safe environment for the small group of pupils who attend.

Numerous special events and imaginative experiences, from visiting a local farm, involvement in the Darwin 200 project, growing vegetables, singing in the Royal Albert Hall or spending a few nights away in the middle of Exmoor inspire the pupils and lead to their exceptional level of enjoyment of school life. The outstanding range and quality of enriching experiences is a major factor in the excellent curriculum. Attendance continues to rise, and is above average and above the target agreed with the local authority. Although there is no school council, pupils

contribute very significantly to their school and wider community. Many are involved in helping around school, with older ones caring for younger ones, organising play activities, helping out at mass or attending the 'Lunch-Bunch' meetings to discuss school issues with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. They are acutely aware of the wider community, organising Fairtrade events for the school and parents, participating in the 'Taunton in Bloom' project and contributing to local and international charities. By the end of Year 6, pupils gain a good level of skill needed for the next stage of education and adult life.

Teaching and learning are good throughout the school, with several excellent features. Teachers are always striving to make learning interesting by embracing imaginative projects and finding good ways of making connections between subjects, for example when working in pairs in a class project combining music and the use of computers to produce an electronic recording. Pupils invariably respond very positively indeed. Teachers are particularly good at providing clear guidance about how to improve, and involving pupils in thinking about their next steps to improve. Work set is usually carefully planned to meet the needs of different ability groups, and the curriculum is frequently adapted well to meet the needs of those with learning difficulties. There are also good examples of catering for the more able pupils, but in a few lessons, pupils of average and above average ability are engaged on identical tasks, with the most able not being fully challenged. The use of specialist sports coaches and of teaching assistants with expertise in music and the use of computers strengthens the overall quality of teaching. The school carries out a number of procedures to monitor the quality of teaching. A few of the judgements are over-generous and some of the written feedback to teachers does not sufficiently explain how they could improve further.

The very experienced headteacher is highly respected by the whole school community. He is constantly seeking to enrich pupils' lives and improve the school. The staff team is motivated by this and individuals are keen to embrace new initiatives and practices. The leadership is exceptionally effective in promoting pupils' personal development. The headteacher undertakes most of the checks on the school's performance. Although all staff are involved in discussions about practice and what needs to improve, the findings from these discussions are not always systematically recorded, making it more difficult to follow them up. Governors fulfil their roles and responsibilities well and are fully involved in key decision making, for example the proposed extension to the leadership team in order to share responsibilities more widely. The school has reviewed its role in promoting cohesion in the wider community and works very effectively with others to reach out to those in the community who, from time to time, experience difficulties.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Children benefit from the very close partnership established from the beginning between school and the children's parents. The promotion of children's welfare is given the highest priority throughout. Standards are continuing to rise and children make good progress in nearly all the areas of learning. A few make slower progress in early writing skills than in other aspects. By the end of last term, many children were already attaining standards normally attained by the end of the school year. They are on track to complete, and some to exceed, the learning goals set nationally. Those at an early stage of learning English are supported very effectively by the bilingual teaching assistant. The leader manages the team well, resulting in good teaching and learning. A wide range of experiences and activities are offered and adults carefully observe and assess the children's learning. Children respond very positively to the activities set up by adults, for example going

on a bug hunt around the school grounds. The children's personal development is outstanding and their relationships with other children and the adults are excellent. They join happily with whole-school assemblies and confidently use the swimming pool. Recent improvements to the outdoor area are providing the potential for children to move safely yet independently indoors and out. The school is aware that the creation of opportunities for independent free-flow, whilst satisfactory, is an aspect for further development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure there are consistently high expectations of the more able pupils so that more of them significantly exceed standards usually found for their age
- Establish and use more effective ways for the leadership to track pupils' progress and set challenging targets for all year groups
- Involve more leaders in robust checks on the school's performance and ensure findings are clearly recorded for future reference.

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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
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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 learners' needs?	2
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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

22 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St George's Catholic School, Taunton TA1 3NR

Thank you for the way you made us feel very welcome when we visited you in your school. We thoroughly enjoyed talking with some of you and visiting all of your classrooms. St George's is a good school and your parents are pleased you are able to go there. Here are some of the highlights we found during our visit.

- It is very clear that you like your school very much.
- You are very lucky to have a headteacher and teachers who plan so many interesting and exciting things for you to do, such as the Darwin 200 project, visiting a local farm, growing vegetables or using the brilliant sports hall and swimming pool.
- You behave very well around school and take good care of one another. You all do your best to meet the school's aims of growing in mind, body and spirit.
- Everyone who works in the school takes exceptionally good care of you and makes sure you are safe.
- You work hard in lessons and make good progress with your work. Some of you who are learning English as an additional language make excellent progress.
- Your teachers carefully plan interesting things for you to learn about. The teaching assistants and sports coaches add to the expertise that is used to help you learn.
- Your very experienced headteacher never stops thinking of ways to improve your time in school.

We have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to work together on three things to make the school even better.

- Help those of you who find learning easy to reach even higher standards in your work.
- Use more efficient ways of recording the progress made by each class and when thinking about targets for the following year.
- Involve more leaders in checking the school's work and make sure what they find out is written down and shared.
- We know you will have your own ideas for improving the school. Maybe a 'Lunch-Bunch' gathering can talk about these

Yours faithfully

Martin Kerly Lead Inspector