

St Catherine's Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101333
Local Authority	Barnet
Inspection number	323451
Inspection dates	30 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Kath Beck

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 (total)	362
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Lisa Sturley
Headteacher	Mrs Eileen Quigley
Date of previous school inspection	27 June 2006
School address	Vale Drive Barnet EN5 2ED
Telephone number	020 8440 4946
Fax number	020 8441 3436

Age group	3-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school. The inspectors carried out an in-depth evaluation of the following aspects: the Early Years Foundation Stage; achievement and standards; teaching and learning; and leadership and management. To come to their judgements, inspectors collected a range of evidence including:

- the school's self-evaluation form
- a selection of its documentation, including safeguarding procedures
- a scrutiny of samples of pupils' work, especially writing
- meetings with staff, governors and pupils
- observation of parts of lessons
- analysis of parental questionnaires
- records for monitoring pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and learning
- the school's provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language.

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

This primary school is larger than average. It draws pupils from a wide area of Barnet and serves two Roman Catholic parishes. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of a Nursery for 52 part-time children and two Reception classes. Over half of the pupils are from White British backgrounds. An increasing number of pupils come from minority ethnic groups. Few speak English as an additional language, although the number is rising. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. These include specific, moderate and severe learning difficulties as well as behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school is oversubscribed. Work is due to commence in the autumn of 2009 to extend the buildings. This is to enable the number that can be admitted in a year group to rise from 45 to 60. The school operates a breakfast club and there is a privately run after school club on the site.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Catherine's is an outstanding school. A high number of parents responded to the questionnaire and many wrote to express their appreciation of all that the school offers. Parents' comments include, 'I am very impressed with my child's learning'; '...the school looks towards developing all pupils' talents and potential' and 'St Catherine's is a truly wonderful school, concentrating on the child as well as the learning'. Inspection evidence confirms these views.

Since the last inspection, governors and senior leaders have brought about the following significant changes that illustrate an outstanding capacity to improve. They work closely together, determined that the school should provide the best possible learning experience for each child. The Catholic ethos underpins their aims to meet challenging targets and the Every Child Matters Agenda. The priorities for development are shared so that all staff are clear about their role, the expectations of them, what is to be achieved, how and when. Staff who have taken on new roles, especially in literacy, the Early Years and English as an additional language, say they enjoy the responsibility for leading developments according to their skills, and acknowledge that they are accountable for the outcomes for the pupils. These characteristics, together with rigorous self-evaluation and staffing changes, have been particularly successful in raising the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and when pupils transfer into Year 1. In addition, achievement and standards in literacy, especially in Years 1 and 2, have risen and the progress of gifted and talented pupils and those in the first stages of learning English as an additional language has been enhanced. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics in Year 2 have risen to above average this year and are exceptionally high in English, mathematics and science in Year 6.

Excellent teaching, supported by a vibrant curriculum, means pupils make rapid progress in their learning and personal development, giving them a firm foundation for their future economic well-being. Pupils have many opportunities to develop their talents, especially in music, sport, drama, art and information and communication technology (ICT), both during lessons and in out-of-school activities. Their behaviour is excellent and they become mature, independent, thoughtful young people who care for each other. These factors, together with good attendance, allow pupils to really enjoy their learning, including when working together in groups or with a partner. Pupils show their enjoyment through the tremendous pride they take in presenting their work to a high standard as they know that their efforts are appreciated fully. Pupils make a strong contribution to their community. They put forward their views about school improvement confidently. They are always ready and willing to help and to raise money for good causes.

Staff track pupils' progress meticulously and plan lessons together. This means subjects are linked, making learning relevant and consistent across age groups. Each teacher adapts the lesson plans to meet individual pupils' needs, identifying carefully the tasks and provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff use a very wide range of strategies, including ICT, to capture and sustain pupils' attention. Consequently, pupils apply new skills, knowledge and understanding quickly, take decisions and express their own ideas. Teachers' skilled questioning deepens and challenges pupils' thinking so they are confident to reflect on and improve their own work as well as that of their friends. Marking is constructive and involves pupils in a dialogue with their teacher about what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. Staff have high expectations of their pupils and ensure they know what they are learning and the criteria they need to meet to help them reach the next stage in their learning.

Pupils and families within the local community are cared for and supported very effectively by an excellent range of external agencies. The school is totally committed to reducing the barriers that some children face in their learning, and the significant contribution of the learning mentor is already having an impact in this respect. The breakfast club provides a happy and healthy start to the school day for a high number of pupils. The school also sees itself as an important part of the wider world. Senior leaders have made it a priority to develop this aspect of the school's work and have appointed a coordinator to lead its initiatives with regard to global education. The school has developed an international link with a school in Zambia. Staff have travelled to Russia to look at other provision for gifted and talented pupils and all pupils learn to speak French. The cultures of the pupils whose first language is not English are welcomed and celebrated.

The school faces a number of challenges in the near future as a building programme will allow it to increase the number of pupils who can attend. Governors and senior leaders are aware of the disruption this might cause and have planned to minimise it. They are determined to maintain the momentum of improvement through a time of change.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Parents are rightly full of praise for the outstanding start to education provided in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Most children join the Nursery and Reception classes with levels of maturity and skill close to those found nationally, although an increasing number arrive speaking little or no English. All groups make excellent progress. By the time they move into Year 1, the majority of children have reached the Early Learning Goals, especially in personal, social and emotional development and are fully ready for the next stage of their education.

Outstanding teamwork, high professional expectations, and driving enthusiasm underpin the performance of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The very close relationship between staff and parents has resulted in mutual confidence, and shared, high aspirations for the children. Staff are highly skilled in promoting the personal development of the children, encouraging them to become independent and make decisions for themselves. Staff plan learning activities together, pooling their excellent knowledge of each child's needs and capabilities to ensure tasks inspire and challenge them. Lessons are imaginative in their linking of the different areas of learning, and bringing learning to life for the children. For example, work based on 'Peter and the Wolf' took the children into the recognition of instrumental sounds, the identification of characters from a display of puppets, extensive discussion, and the naming of characters in French. The levels of insight children achieved were well above those usually found at this age. Recent initiatives in the teaching of reading and writing are also bearing fruit, as shown in children's lively and accurate writing.

What the school should do to improve further

- Sustain high-quality provision as the school enters a period of growth and change.

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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?	1
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	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

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

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/or 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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well 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	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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interest 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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B

Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

14 May 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of St Catherine's Catholic School, Barnet, EN5 2ED

Thank you for making us very welcome and for helping us with the inspection of your school. You are lucky to go to an outstanding school where the governors, senior leaders, staff and helpers share a determination to make the school as good as it can possibly be. You told us you are very happy here and enjoy all the activities that you take part in because your imaginative teachers take care to interest and challenge you. From the time you start, you learn quickly and you know a great deal by the time you leave. Your excellent behaviour and kindness to each other does you great credit.

We expect you are aware that there is going to be a lot of change soon with new buildings and more children due to come to the school. We are asking the governors and senior leaders and staff to make sure that you are not unsettled and that the school remains an outstanding one. You can help by continuing to take pride in your work, attend regularly and give useful ideas to make the school the best.

Yours faithfully

Kath Beck
Lead Inspector

