

St Catherine of Siena Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117571
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	339036
Inspection dates	19-20 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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 of pupils on the school roll	226
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Quinn
Headteacher	Pauline Curran
Date of previous school inspection	8-9 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 13 lessons, observing each of the seven class teachers at least once, and held meetings with staff, groups of pupils and representatives of the governing body. Informal discussions were also held with parents as they arrived with their children at the start of the day. They observed the school's work, and scrutinised assessment information, pupils' books, records of pupils' progress and improvement plans. The team analysed 82 parental questionnaires, 133 responses to the pupil survey and 18 responses to the staff questionnaire.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the extent to which teachers make lessons interesting for the pupils and develop their key skills
- the impact of improvements this year in Reception
- the way leaders contribute to improving teaching and outcomes in their areas of responsibility.

Information about the school

Few pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals in this average sized school. A quarter of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. This represents an increase over the last three years, although few pupils are from homes where English is not the first language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. Their needs are mostly associated with learning difficulties related to literacy and specific learning difficulties. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a Reception class.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St Catherine of Siena Primary is a good school. It has improved in key areas since the last inspection and developed some outstanding features. The very positive ethos based on strong Christian values permeates the school and underpins all that staff and governors are seeking to achieve. One parent seemed to speak for many when writing, 'The school has a great ethos. Teachers and parents work together to ensure that the children get what they need and work towards developing a strong bond as well as a great education'.

Children enter the school with skills as expected for their age. They make good progress in Reception because determined leadership has led to improvements in provision and consistency to teaching. Pupils continue to make good progress across the rest of the school, although their more rapid progress at Key Stage 2 compared to Key Stage 1 is directly attributable to more effective teaching in these classes. Attainment is above average by the end of Year 6 and the pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

The school's key strengths are:

- lively, interesting and engaging teaching which fires the pupils' imaginations and generates an enthusiasm for learning
- a thoughtfully planned set of experiences that are increasingly developing the pupils' key skills by creatively linking learning between subjects
- pertinent feedback to pupils so that they have a clear picture of how to meet their goals and take responsibility for their learning
- sharply focused support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, particularly those with more acute needs
- a clear understanding of the needs and circumstances of the more vulnerable pupils and their families so that tailored and targeted support can be provided.

The vigorous attention paid to safeguarding the welfare of the pupils, means that they show a very keen appreciation of how to keep themselves safe and deal with any risks they might face, including those related to the use of new technology. The pupils' behaviour is often exemplary. The pupils understand and accept the school's expectations for their behaviour, which is continually reinforced by the praise they are given when they do something well. The pupils' contribution to the life of the school is considerable, such as through being representatives on the school council, when Year 6 pupils act as buddies for new Reception children and their input into planning changes for the outside areas.

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The well-led and reflective staff team shares a common purpose and pulls together in the drive to improve performance. The headteacher is supported well by other key members of staff who have clearly defined management responsibilities, and an increasingly effective governing body. Everything is done to ensure that no pupil is left behind, and the school is successful in removing any barriers learners might encounter to impede their development. Staff and governors understand the school's context and participate in activities to support pupils and their families. However, the impact of this work is felt less strongly beyond the local Catholic community. Action to overcome any areas of concern is based on an accurate evaluation of the school's qualities and clear priorities for improvement. On this basis and given the consolidation of previously good performance, the school has good capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Bring the less effective teaching up to the quality of the best by developing the skills of teachers in:
 - questioning techniques to draw out ideas from the pupils, extend their thinking and engage them more in their learning
 - adjusting teaching in the light of observations of the pupils' progress during lessons.
- Use the school's understanding of the context in which it works to plan for community cohesion and evaluate the effectiveness of its implementation.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils show much enjoyment, are keen and apply themselves well in lessons. Most reach and many exceed national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they leave the school. They work hard and strive to produce their best work. They develop their basic skills at a good pace and apply them across a wide range of subjects. Their personal qualities such as teamwork and the ability to work independently and take the initiative support their good progress. These skills were particularly evident when a small group of more able Year 5 pupils undertook a problem set by their teacher to carpet the stairs and stairwell outside their room. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress as a result of the careful balance between support in lessons and withdrawal for specific focused activities.

The pupils take great pride in their achievements and in their school. They say they feel very safe in school and that they have the confidence to confide in each other and adults if they have a problem. This is a view echoed unanimously by parents. Pupils understand how to adopt a healthy approach to diet and exercise, and participate in large numbers in the range of physical activities and sport provided for them. Their concern for others is demonstrated when they organise charity

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fundraising events. Pupils show great respect for others and for cultural differences, although pupils have a more limited appreciation of the wider world and their role in it. They show great care for others and are very polite and courteous towards visitors. Pupils of all backgrounds work and play happily together taking care to ensure that no individual is left out and unhappy. They listen to the views of others when making decisions and think carefully about how they can live to Christian values.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The most effective teachers use engaging methods and probing questions to keep pupils on their toes and involved in all aspects of the lesson. However, at times discussion is not used to draw out ideas from the pupils and extend their thinking. Resources and new technology are used imaginatively in the most effective lessons to reinforce key points and add enjoyment to learning. The team of skilled support staff make a significant contribution to the progress of individuals and groups they are deployed to work with.

Pupils receive valuable feedback through marking that helps them to see how to improve their work in order to meet their individual targets. The learning of older pupils benefits from regular self- and peer-assessment. Most teachers use assessment information well to tailor their teaching to meet individual needs. They adjust lessons in the light of their observations of the pupils' progress, although this is not a feature of all lessons.

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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The curriculum is used well to promote key skills while broadening the pupils’ experiences and making their learning more interesting and enjoyable by linking learning in subjects more closely. Pupils’ involvement in redesigning the playground is a particularly good example of this. Many activities are provided to broaden the pupils’ experiences both during and beyond the school day, including visits linked to areas of study and themed events. Partnerships with other schools strengthen opportunities for sport and provide additional activities for gifted and talented pupils. As one parent rightly said, ‘The children have opportunities for many after-school activities, which otherwise would not have been accessible to them’.

The school has a clear understanding of the circumstances of pupils and their families. This enables leaders to identify the precise difficulties faced by pupils with special educational needs and to target support programmes effectively. External agencies provide valuable expertise where needed. Induction arrangements when pupils join and the careful preparation when they move on to secondary school help to give a seamless transfer from one stage to the next.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

There is a shared ambition for success where teachers and others constantly reflect on how to improve further. The school’s targets are challenging and progress towards them carefully checked. Procedures to check on the school’s performance are thorough and any concerns that emerge are tackled rigorously. Teachers have the opportunity to work alongside others as part of their development, but this is only slowly having an impact in some areas.

The governing body is led with drive and determination. Governors are fully involved in identifying priorities for improvement and are increasingly challenging of the headteacher and her staff as their expertise and understanding develops. They are also vigorous in ensuring that all arrangements for safeguarding the welfare of the pupils are fully met so that anyone working with children in the school is properly vetted. Procedures are constantly reviewed and updated to reflect changes in new technology, and the views of parents and pupils used to inform the evaluation of the impact of policies.

Promoting equality of opportunity is at the heart of the school’s work. As a

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consequence, this is a very cohesive school, where everyone feels valued and where pupils from minority ethnic groups achieve equally well. Senior leaders and governors have a clear understanding of the context within which the school operates and undertake activities to help promote community cohesion but have not evaluated their impact. Close links with home are used not just to help parents to support their children’s learning but also to point them towards additional services in the area. The school would not be able to support pupils or enrich their experiences effectively were it not for the expertise brought in through links with a variety of outside organisations.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of the children’s experiences has improved greatly this year, particularly as teaching is now at least good, with some outstanding aspects to the work of the staff team. Developing a close relationship with their buddy in Year 6 from before they arrive, smoothes the children’s entry into Reception. The comments from this parent encapsulated the views of many when writing, ‘I have been pleased with the teaching staff’s time and efforts in ensuring a smooth transition from pre-school.’ Almost all children are on track to reach, and the majority to exceed, levels expected for their age by the time they leave Reception. The children greatly enjoy learning and their independence increases as they begin to take responsibility for organising activities for themselves. They behave in a safe and responsible manner because all adults reinforce what is expected in a positive and encouraging way.

Their good progress is achieved by:

- a stimulating environment in which adults creatively link learning inside and outdoors

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- a skilled team of adults who know when to stand back and when to intervene to move the children’s learning forward
- adapting planning carefully to provide activities that meet child’s needs and interests
- the use of assessment to adapt activities immediately and on a daily basis
- close and productive links with home
- the sharp focus on securing all aspects of the children’s welfare and safety.

The team is well led and has adapted provision over the course of the year in response to evidence gathered from rigorous evaluation of all aspects of the team’s work. The drive and determination to bring greater consistency to the setting and to the children’s achievement gives a very firm platform for further improvement, although some of the changes introduced have not fully bedded in yet.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Responses to the questionnaire show that parents and carers are generally happy with the school’s work, particularly the way it helps their children to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Parents are almost unanimous in saying that their children enjoy school and are well prepared for the next stage of their education. The inspection team concurs with their views. Furthermore, no evidence was found to support the view of a few parents that their children’s needs are not being met or that they are not making sufficient progress.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Catherine of Siena Catholic Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 82 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 226 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	48	59	31	38	1	1	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	55	67	27	33	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	37	45	39	48	6	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	37	45	36	44	8	10	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	41	50	35	43	6	7	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	39	48	35	43	6	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	40	49	39	48	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	33	40	41	50	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	35	43	37	45	8	10	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	32	39	38	46	7	9	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	29	35	45	55	6	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	36	44	35	43	3	4	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	43	52	30	37	5	6	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



21 May 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Catherine of Siena Catholic Primary School, Watford, WD 25 7HP

Thank you all very much for your friendliness and help when we visited your school recently. We agree with you that St Catherine of Siena is a good school. You clearly enjoy school and we agree that your teachers take good care of you. Your behaviour is excellent, and those of you who have special jobs, like members of the school council, carry out your duties responsibly. We were also struck by the way older pupils form a close bond with their 'buddy' in Reception.

You make good progress during your time in school, learning the skills you need for the future. This is because you are taught well and have interesting things to learn. Those of you who find learning more difficult also make good progress because of the support you receive, particularly from classroom assistants.

Everyone is trying hard to make the school even better. The two things we have asked the teachers and other adults to do are to:

- bring all teaching up to the quality of the best
- carry out a plan showing how the school is to help the community to work more together.

You can play your part in helping the school to get even better by continuing to work hard and show pride in your school.

I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale
Lead inspector

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