



Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, Hastings

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114575
Local Authority East Sussex
Inspection number 289977
Inspection date 1 November 2006
Reporting inspector Carole Skinner

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Old London Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Hastings
Age range of pupils	4-11		TN35 5NA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01424 429494
Number on roll (school)	245	Fax number	01424 715594
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	John Walsh
		Headteacher	Angela O'Connor
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Sacred Heart is a one-form entry primary school which is consistently oversubscribed. It is situated in an area of deprivation and is part of an Excellence Cluster and a Sure Start Zone. Its pupils are mainly from White British families, with a small percentage from minority ethnic backgrounds. A small but growing number of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is similar to that seen in most schools, but the percentage of pupils with statements of special educational need is above average. Many children start school with standards well below those expected for their age. The school has identified an increasing number of children who start school with significant speech and language problems as well as limited physical skills.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school that places equal value on high academic achievement and pupils' all-round personal development. School leaders take a more conservative view of the school's effectiveness because they are constantly striving to do even better. Pupils make exceptionally good progress to reach well above average standards in Year 6. Their achievement is outstanding, not only in English, mathematics and science but across the whole curriculum. Despite the high standards in Year 6, the school is rightly focusing on raising standards in writing, especially in Reception and Years 1 and 2, where they remain lower than those in reading and mathematics. This is largely due to weaknesses in pupils' speaking skills and their limited vocabulary.

Pupils' excellent personal development and well-being reflect teachers' high expectations and the first-rate care, guidance and support they receive from all adults. Whether in lessons, at play or moving around the school, pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Their obvious enjoyment in learning shines through when they talk about the school, and they play a full and active role in all aspects of school life. Outstanding teaching, which challenges pupils to think for themselves, is a key factor in the school's success. One pupil summed it up admirably when he said, 'Lessons are good fun, but the teachers challenge us and expect us to work hard.'

Underpinning all of this are an excellent, innovatively planned curriculum that meets the needs of pupils of all abilities and exceptionally good systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress. These two features are also evident in the excellent provision for the Foundation Stage. Children in this phase make very good progress during their first year in school, especially in their physical, personal and social development, but many do not reach the expected standards in language and communication and mathematical development due to their low starting points.

A key ingredient in the school's success is its outstanding leadership and management. The headteacher's vision, drive and determination to succeed inspire staff, governors and pupils to strive for excellence and ensure a relentless focus on improving the quality of education for the pupils. Parents are effusive in their praise for the school. One voiced the views of many in these words, 'We are very happy that our children attend such an excellent, caring school. It has a real community spirit and everyone is treated with respect.' Strong teamwork and shared commitment to its future ensure that the school has an excellent capacity for continuing improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' speaking skills and range of vocabulary in order to raise standards further in writing, especially in the Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils' achievement is outstanding because the school lays firm foundations in the Reception Year and Years 1 and 2, particularly in the way it tackles many pupils' weak literacy, numeracy and physical skills. Very good teaching helps pupils to build up their skills rapidly in these areas. As a result, by the time they move into the juniors they are achieving above average standards in reading and broadly average standards in mathematics. Throughout Years 3 to 6, progress accelerates as pupils gain in confidence and are keen to tackle new challenges. Pupils with learning difficulties make very good progress because they receive excellent support. There is ample evidence to show that the school's continuing focus on improving standards in writing is paying dividends, with most pupils reaching expected standards by Year 6 and a good number exceeding them. However, a small but significant minority fail to reach the levels expected by Year 2 due to weaknesses in their spoken language and their limited vocabulary.

The results of the national tests in Year 6 in English, mathematics and science are consistently well above average and often exceptionally high. But it is not just in these subjects that pupils excel. Stunning displays of excellent artwork and portfolios of work in every subject illustrate the high standards being achieved across the curriculum.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are at the very heart of the school's nurturing Christian ethos. Their exemplary behaviour and eagerness to learn underpin their achievements in all aspects of school life. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils are thoughtful, respectful and mindful of others' feelings. Through the long-standing 'best buddies' system older pupils develop a strong sense of responsibility while younger children are helped to feel secure and well looked after. The school council gives pupils a valuable experience of democracy in action and the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the school community. Pupils have an excellent awareness of the need to make healthy eating choices and take plenty of exercise in lessons, sports clubs and in the adventure playground. They feel safe and say bullying is a rare occurrence. Their awareness of world issues is enhanced by fund-raising to fight poverty in the third world. Attendance is similar to the national average. Many absences are due to medical reasons, though families taking holidays in term-time are also a significant factor.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding in their impact on pupils' achievement. There are a number of excellent qualities. Very high expectations of behaviour, coupled with

warm and supportive relationships, help to create a productive atmosphere in classrooms where pupils are keen to learn and work hard. Imaginative and often innovative approaches help to make learning interesting, and this engages pupils and motivates them. Interactive whiteboards are used effectively to enhance learning and there is a strong focus on developing more advanced thinking skills. At the heart of this high quality provision are the school's excellent systems for assessing pupils' progress, which teachers apply consistently and rigorously. They set challenging targets for pupils and check the progress of all individuals regularly. Teachers' marking is informative and helpful. It rewards good work while showing how pupils could make their work even better.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. Teachers use many imaginative and innovative projects to bring the curriculum to life for the pupils. Productive links with the local Excellence Cluster of schools bring many enrichments to pupils' learning, such as additional experiences for gifted and talented pupils. The provision of additional programmes for pupils with learning difficulties is first-rate. Pupils' horizons are expanded by learning Spanish, attending theatre productions, visiting museums and enjoying performances by Indian dancers and African drummers. A residential week for older pupils in Carroty Wood provides excellent opportunities for team building and pupils participate with enthusiasm in the wide and varied range of clubs and many inter-school sports, music and drama competitions.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support for pupils are outstanding because they are based on personal knowledge of every child's needs. Thorough assessments ensure that needs are identified quickly and support given promptly. Excellent support for pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties and for those learning to speak English enables them to make very good progress. Skilled teaching assistants play an important role in leading small group activities and visiting specialists support pupils with behavioural difficulties to help them make appropriate choices. Rigorous tracking of pupils' progress towards their challenging academic targets is a key factor in their excellent achievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher successfully encourages and builds leadership capacity in all staff and so has created a strong and unified team who share her vision for the school. An unrelenting focus on raising standards and improving the quality of pupils' learning lies at the heart of every decision. One of the school's most notable strengths is its openness, both to new ideas and strategies and to the views of parents and pupils which are valued and acted upon. Staff and governors evaluate the school's

performance with rigour and know exactly where improvements are needed. For example, careful analysis of the reasons for the lower standards in writing has revealed that the problem lies largely with pupils' poor speaking skills and limited vocabulary, which also have a knock-on effect in mathematics for some pupils. Armed with this knowledge, teachers are focusing on developing these skills as well as greater fluency in reading as an aid to writing. The impact of new strategies can already be seen in the standards achieved in Year 6.

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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and 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 behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
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

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.

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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school. I really enjoyed talking to you and learning about all the things you do. You are right to be proud of your school because it is giving you an excellent education. You said that you enjoy learning because the teachers make lessons fun and I could see what you mean. I was very impressed by your excellent behaviour and the way you take part in lessons with enthusiasm. This helps you to make excellent progress and to reach high standards by the time you leave the school. Another reason why you do so well is the excellent range of activities that teachers plan for you, including lots of clubs and visits. I think you have produced some excellent artwork and lots of good work in other subjects. You are pretty good at eating healthy meals and taking lots of exercise. I particularly like the 'best buddies' system and the way you look out for each other.

The adults who run the school do an excellent job because they are always trying to make it better for you. All of the adults look after you very well indeed. The teachers keep checking regularly to see how much progress you are making and if they find that some of you are struggling, especially in English and maths, they give you lots of extra help and support. As a result you are all doing really well in reading and maths, but some of you are still struggling with writing, especially the younger children. We have asked the teachers to help you to do even better in writing. You can help them by really trying hard to do your very best.

I would like to wish you all success both at Sacred Heart and in the future.