

St Mary's Catholic Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101799
Local Authority	Croydon
Inspection number	307815
Inspection date	11 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Lynn Bappa

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	262
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Stuart White
Headteacher	Mrs Madeleine Whale
Date of previous school inspection	10 March 2003
School address	Bedford Park Croydon CR0 2AQ
Telephone number	020 8688 2891
Fax number	020 8688 5955

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- standards and achievement, particularly in reading
- teaching and learning
- personal development and well-being
- aspects of the curriculum
- child protection procedures
- leadership and management.

Evidence was gathered from performance data, observations of teaching and the work produced by pupils. Parents' questionnaires and discussions with children, the chair of governors and staff also contributed to the judgements. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector 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 larger than average two-form entry school is situated in the heart of Croydon town centre. It serves 13 parishes and its pupils come from a wide geographical area. Almost all the pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and two-thirds speak English as an additional language. This proportion is increasing. Many pupils speak little or no English when they join the school. The school has a higher than average percentage of vulnerable pupils such as refugees and asylum seekers. Over ninety per cent of the children are from practising Catholic families.

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 provides an excellent standard of education and care for its pupils. At its heart lies a clear commitment to Catholic values. Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. Pupils feel safe, welcomed and cared for. They behave extremely well and say that bullying is rare. They quickly develop in confidence and are eager to learn. As one pupil commented, 'This is a loving school because people care for each other.' Members of the school council talk confidently about the plans for improving the main school playground so that it is of the same outstanding quality as the outdoor area in the Foundation Stage. Lunchtime is an enjoyable social occasion where pupils chat to their friends over their meal. Particularly good manners are rewarded by sitting at the weekly 'Golden Table' to have lunch with the headteacher. Pupils speak with enthusiasm about the golden plates and waiter service provided at this special table. Most pupils come to school regularly and thoroughly enjoy lessons and other activities. A small number of families take their children on extended holidays during term time and this has an impact on the school's attendance figures which, despite recent significant improvements, remain just below average. Parents are overwhelmingly pleased with the school. As one parent commented, 'I think all parents want the best for their children and I believe by sending my children to St Mary's I have achieved that. I cannot praise the school enough.'

The pupils are proud of their school and thoroughly enjoy learning. Consistently strong teaching and high quality support mean that pupils, irrespective of gender, ethnicity or ability, make excellent progress throughout the school, both academically and in their personal development. Standards are above average overall. Pupils do particularly well in mathematics with a significantly above average proportion achieving the higher levels. Standards in reading, however, lagged behind that of other subjects in the 2007 test results. The school acted quickly to tackle this by introducing a range of initiatives to improve the pupils' performance, with a particular focus on helping pupils to become more confident and fluent by making reading more enjoyable. These strategies included imaginative story sacks, volunteer community readers and parents' workshops to show how to help with reading. The evidence confirms that these are already bearing fruit and that standards in this area are rising. The school is well on its way to meeting its challenging targets for next year and prepares its pupils very well for the next stage of their education.

Strong features in the teaching include a wide range of interesting activities, the fast pace of lessons, excellent relationships and very good use of resources such as story sacks and interactive white boards. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning, supporting individuals and small groups. Pupils are developing so well as individuals because the school has established a very strong ethos of respect and care for others. Vulnerable pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities and those learning English as an additional language, are very well supported so that they play a full part in lessons and other activities. There are very good procedures for child protection. Academic guidance is very good. Pupils' progress is tracked closely and they are set challenging learning targets.

The curriculum offers a good range of experiences to make learning interesting and relevant. Pupils learn to swim, for example, in the neighbouring junior school's swimming pool. A recent focus on improving reading is leading to rising standards. Links between subjects are improving and the school is keen to take this work forward by planning a richer and more imaginative curriculum with an increased focus on subjects other than English, mathematics and science.

The headteacher provides excellent leadership. She knows the school's strengths and weaknesses very well and this is evident in the high quality of the school's self-evaluation. The school has very good systems for checking how well it is doing and uses them effectively. Together, senior leaders, governors and all staff form a very effective team who go the extra mile to make sure all pupils, whatever their starting points, are given the best possible start to their education. The school has an excellent capacity to improve. This is because there is a common sense of purpose and a lack of complacency. The impact of the highly effective leadership is seen in the excellent progress made since the last inspection.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Parents rightly recognise that provision in the Foundation Stage is excellent. A typical comment was, 'Some mornings my son wakes up at 5.30 ready to dress and go to school.' Children arrive with skills that are well below expectations, with particular weaknesses in communication, language and literacy. Many speak little or no English or have restricted experiences and skills that represent significant disadvantages. Despite this, they grow rapidly in confidence and make very good progress, particularly in their personal and social development. Progress in reading and writing is a little slower than in the other areas of learning because many children need extra help with their early English language development. However, they gain a firm basis in the early skills of literacy that prepares them well for more formal learning when they enter Year 1. The Foundation Stage curriculum is lively and interesting and provides children with an interesting range of activities to support the different areas of learning, both indoors and out. Outdoor areas have improved significantly and now provide an outstanding level of challenge and stimulation. Teaching in the Foundation Stage is lively and interesting and provides children with very good opportunities to acquire essential skills.

What the school should do to improve further

Although there are no substantial weaknesses, the inspector agrees with the school that in order to build on its success it should concentrate on:

- implementing current plans to further improve standards in reading
- planning a richer curriculum with an increased focus on the identification of creative opportunities across the range of subjects.

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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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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 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	3
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 the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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.

Annex A

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 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

19 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Infant School, Croydon, CR0 2AQ

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your excellent school. I especially enjoyed talking to the school council and having lunch at the Golden Table. You helped me to see how much you enjoy your work and try your best. I agree with you that you go to a loving school where people care for each other. I was pleased that you know how to keep safe and healthy and that you behave extremely well. You work hard in all your lessons and this means that you do well in the tests that you take in Year 2. Well done! I think that your headteacher and all the other adults in the school know how to look after you and do an excellent job in helping the school to get better and better.

I think your school is outstanding. There are still things you can all do to help it stay that way however. I have asked your headteacher to make sure that you get even better in your reading. I have also asked your teachers to make sure that you do even more interesting work in all your lessons.

I know you will help by keeping up your excellent behaviour and super work in lessons.

Best wishes for the future.

Lynn Bappa

Additional Inspector