

St Polycarp's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125206
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	328315
Inspection date	31 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Norma Ball

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)	417
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	Mr Joe Davies
Headteacher	Mr Lawrence Henry
Date of previous school inspection	19 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Waverley Lane Farnham GU9 8BQ
Telephone number	01252 716307

Age group	4–11
Inspection date	31 March 2009
Inspection number	328315

Fax number

01252 717842

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. They evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues in particular.

- The effectiveness of strategies in place to raise attainment in writing in both key stages and to improve the attainment of boys so that it matches that of girls.
- Is pupils' progress carefully assessed and tracked effectively to guide lesson-planning so that pupils are suitably challenged and involved in their own learning?
- Is strategic planning clear, appropriately structured and regularly reviewed to ensure its effectiveness in moving the school forward?

The inspectors gathered evidence from lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and parents' questionnaires. Discussions with staff, governors and pupils also contributed to the judgements. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but 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 larger than other primary schools. It is popular and draws pupils from a wide geographical area. The proportion of pupils from different ethnic backgrounds and those for whom English is an additional language are increasing year on year, but remain below the national average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to the national picture and includes those with physical difficulties and with behavioural, emotional and social needs. A small number of these pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The school experiences above-average pupil mobility with pupils joining and leaving the school at various times of the year. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of two classes in the Reception Year. The After School Casa Club is not managed by the governing body. The school holds Artsmark, Activemark, Eco School and Healthy School awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Polycarp's is an outstanding school. All pupils achieve extremely well because they are taught by dedicated and enthusiastic teachers and are thoroughly involved in interesting learning experiences. Pupils have a great love of learning and sincerely value their school and all it provides, so they want to come to school and their attendance is outstanding. One pupil told inspectors, 'It's the friendly atmosphere and good facilities, and everyone is really helpful and kind, especially teachers.' A very large majority of parents share equally positive views of the school and one said, 'Every child is seen as an individual. There is a very strong religious and moral ethos to the school which helps the children to grow and develop their own values.'

Children enter the Reception Year with levels of skills and knowledge that are broadly in line with expectations for children of this age in their personal, social and emotional development, but below expectations in reading, writing and calculating. By the time they enter Year 1 pupils' abilities are generally above those expected because their needs are carefully identified and they receive high-quality support to help them develop and learn. Progress is accelerated as pupils move through the school and by the time they reach Year 6 all pupils, from whatever their starting point, make outstanding progress. At the end of Year 6 in 2008 pupils' attainment in mathematics was significantly high, and well above average in science and English. This very positive attainment profile has been consistently maintained in recent years. As a result of the high standards they attain and their extremely well-developed personal skills, pupils are very well placed to begin the next stage of their education.

The strong focus on improving writing skills, especially for boys, has continued since the last inspection. Inspection evidence indicates that initiatives to focus on creating more imaginative scenarios for writing tasks and providing themes and topics that capture the interest of boys are having a clear impact on improving progress in writing. For example, in a Year 6 class a task on writing in the style of a newspaper reporter was developed from an article about a giant wind farm and its impact on the environment. This subject, with a scientific interest, was greatly enjoyed, especially by boys, and pupils loved experimenting with emotive adjectives. Writing skills in terms of good letter formation and punctuation are carefully taught. The school are aware that it is through the freeing of imagination that the love of writing can be best fostered and are seeking to develop even more opportunities for free and informal writing experiences. The careful focus on improving the motivation for boys and identifying both challenging and interesting tasks for them is helping to close the gap between their attainment and that of girls. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive exceptionally good support, both in class and in small groups, so they too make outstanding progress. They are helped by well-trained teaching support assistants who are deployed very effectively in all classes.

Teachers plan lessons that are lively and very interesting. Exciting tasks are often supported by first-hand experiences in the classroom and out of school. The pace of lessons is good, so pupils remain interested and fully involved in their learning. They work well alone and in small groups. Pupils are confident in exploring for themselves what areas of their work could be improved, as well as tactfully evaluating the contributions of their classmates. They love to share views and discuss problems because good questioning by teachers opens exciting opportunities to explore ideas. Activities are well planned to meet the needs of different ability groups. Pupils are well challenged because their progress is tracked carefully and assessment information is used effectively by teachers. Interesting lessons are also facilitated by the careful integration of other subjects of the curriculum in both planned and spontaneous ways. The

use and range of resources for information and communication technology have improved since the last inspection and pupils are especially proud of their electronic microscopes. An impressive range of visits and school clubs are organised to cater for a wide range of ages and interests as well as to extend learning beyond the classroom. Parents and pupils recognise the richness of the curriculum; one parent wrote of the pupils, 'They have been encouraged not only academically but also through music, art and sports. The trips and extra-curricular activities are outstanding.'

Pupils' personal development and well-being and the care, guidance and support they receive are outstanding and bound together by the caring Catholic ethos of the school. Older pupils provide thoughtful and dignified role models for younger pupils through the efficiency with which they carry out duties such as house captains or the informal way in which they show concern for younger children. There is an expectation of care, both within the school community and beyond, which is exemplified in their support of charities. The quality of the Lenten promises that pupils had completed also show their loving and giving qualities. The school council is a respected body and has promoted improvements such as the buddy stop in the playground and provision of water fountains. The Eco council, too, reflects the deep concern of pupils for the quality of their own local and the global environment. Pupils are very proud of their work in the school grounds and were delighted with the display of spring flowers from bulbs they had planted. All aspects of safeguarding, health and safety are rigorously managed and pupils have highly developed awareness of both healthy living and being safe and sensible in their conduct. Pupils' personal development is as carefully promoted as their academic development. They have a clear understanding of right and wrong and show sincere respect for adults and other pupils. All pupils have a very clear understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work and make even better progress. They help identify their own targets for improvement, in literacy and numeracy as well as personal targets. They discuss and agree additional personal targets with their teachers. Pupils respect this process and value targets as important steps along their learning path.

The headteacher is greatly respected by pupils, staff and parents. He has provided inspirational leadership that has empowered staff and united them in a shared ambition to provide the highest quality provision for all pupils. Leaders and managers at all levels are reflective and have a very clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the school. All new initiatives are carefully integrated into the curriculum and closely monitored to ensure they remain fresh and effective. Subject leaders have developed and extended their role since the last inspection and under the leadership of the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher, provide an efficient and highly committed team. Community cohesion is promoted well and pupils have an active interest in their local and global community as well as a developing understanding of Britain through residential trips and their school studies. Governors are very knowledgeable and supportive of the school. They are searching and very analytical in their monitoring role and hold the school to good account. Areas for improvement identified in the last report have been fully addressed or are still work in progress. Leaders and managers ensure that resources are used to maximum efficiency and the school provides good value for money. The school has an excellent capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Provision in the Reception Year is outstanding. Children make an excellent start to their learning because they are extremely well cared for and their development is carefully nurtured. Children's

needs are identified quickly and their development and progress is promoted systematically through well-planned and effective support. The good social skills that most children have when they join the school are extended and so they settle quickly, make friends and learn to share. Children are gently encouraged to become independent, although even more opportunities could be provided for them to initiate and select activities for themselves. Speaking and listening skills are encouraged well and linked to well-designed learning activities to promote the development of their reading and writing skills. A similar meticulous and progressive approach to extending children's skills in using numbers ensures that their mathematical skills are developed well. By the time they enter Year 1 the good progress made by all children ensures that they are securely in line with expectations of children of a similar age. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make equally good progress because of good teaching and carefully structured support. Learning experiences are varied, full of fun and challenge and this helps children develop a love of learning that continues as they move through the school. Staff work together very closely as a dedicated team and leadership and management are excellent.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the range of child-initiated activities in the Reception Year to promote further independent learning.
- Provide further opportunities for pupils to extend their confidence in writing in informal rather than structured contexts.

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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 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?	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

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	1
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

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 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?	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**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

23 April 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Polycarp's Catholic Primary School, Farnham, GU9 8BQ

You may remember that two inspectors visited your school recently. We thoroughly enjoyed our time with you and thank you for being so welcoming and helpful to us. You are rightly proud of your school and you show great enjoyment in learning. You and your parents told us what a wonderful place your school is and we agree with you.

We saw that you get on very well together and are polite and very kind to each other. Your teachers make sure that you work hard and do as well as you can. They also make sure your lessons are interesting and they plan tasks for you that really stretch you to do the best you can. You are given lots of guidance with targets and advice from your teachers that help you to improve your work. Your reading, writing, mathematics and science skills are much better than most children of your age.

Everyone makes sure that you are safe and well cared for in school. You also know a lot about keeping safe and being healthy. You play an important part in making your school such a happy place in the jobs which some of you do, how well you care for the environment and through the important work of the school council. We were also very impressed with the many opportunities you have to join school clubs and go on interesting visits outside school. This helps to make your learning even more fun. Your headteacher, teachers and governors are doing a wonderful job in making sure that your school keeps improving.

There are just two things we have asked the headteacher and staff to do to make things even better. First we have asked if writing tasks can be made even more exciting. Second, in the Reception Year we have asked if more opportunities could be found for children to create their own games and learning activities.

Thank you again for making our visit to your school so enjoyable.

Yours faithfully

Norma Ball

Lead Inspector