

St Joseph's Catholic Infant School, Birtley

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108389
Local authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	377747
Inspection dates	29 February 2012–1 March 2012
Lead inspector	Linda Buller

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	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	69
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michelle Irwin
Headteacher	Valerie Gibson
Date of previous school inspection	9 September 2008
School address	Mitchell Street Birtley Chester le Street DH3 1LU
Telephone number	0191 4102324
Fax number	0191 4102324
Email address	birtleystjosephscatholiciinfantschool@gateshead.gov.uk



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Introduction

Inspection team

Linda Buller

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. There were no responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) to use in planning the inspection. The inspector observed nine lessons taught by three different teachers, including one observed jointly with the headteacher. The inspector listened to pupils read and observed sessions targeted at those pupils who are in danger of falling behind with their learning. Discussions were held with pupils, staff and members of the governing body. The inspector observed the school's work, including examples of pupils' work in books, documentation relating to the leadership and management of the school and that relating to pupils' achievement. Behaviour and safety were also scrutinised. The inspector also took into account the questionnaires completed by pupils, school staff and 28 parents and carers.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than those of its type. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. A small but increasing proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is average, as is the proportion of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs. Since the last inspection, there has been a change to the senior management with the appointment of an assistant headteacher.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- This is a good school. The school has been rigorous in following up areas identified for improvement in its last inspection report. The school is good rather than outstanding because there is not always a close enough focus on pupils' learning when carrying out lesson observations. This is one reason why the quality of teaching and its impact on pupil achievement remains good.
- Pupils' achievement is good. They make good progress to reach levels of attainment which are above average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2.
- Teaching is good. Clear explanations and regular feedback ensures that pupils have a clear understanding of the next steps they need to take in their learning. During tasks which are led directly by the teacher, skilful questioning makes pupils think carefully about how they can improve and produce their best work. Opportunities are sometimes missed to maintain this high level of challenge and good rate of progress when pupils are working independently. The curriculum has been transformed to enthuse pupils through interesting topics which maximise opportunities to develop all aspects of pupils' literacy, mathematical and communication skills.
- Pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and a safe, welcoming environment for learning, promote good behaviour. Pupils cooperate in a mature way in lessons and this has a very positive effect on their learning.
- Monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress by leaders and managers at all levels are rigorous and any potential underachievement is addressed quickly. The school is taking action to strengthen the quality of teaching, but there is still some way to go before it is outstanding. Support and training for staff has led to a better focus on providing exciting opportunities for pupils to be independent, think critically, solve problems and apply their skills.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching is consistently good or better in order to further raise achievement by:
 - making regular checks of pupils' learning when they are working independently so that a consistently high level of challenge and pace is maintained
 - making sure that the focus of all lesson observations is on the learning that is taking place.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage from a starting point that is generally typical for children of their age, but with some weaknesses in their literacy skills. Areas of learning are effectively linked together. For example, children's strong interest in building models was combined well with children solving problems and acting out the story of *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Good questioning by the teacher ensured that children made good progress in their speaking and listening skills and recognised the sounds within words which they are learning to use in their early reading and writing skills. As a result, children typically enter Year 1 having exceeded the levels of attainment expected for their age in most areas of learning, although levels of attainment can fluctuate as a result of the small numbers of children in each cohort. Pupils continue to make good progress in Key Stage 1 so that by the end of Year 2 pupils' attainment is above average.

Parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire unanimously agreed that their children are achieving well. This was exemplified well in the learning observed during the inspection. Pupils' positive attitudes to their work and their willingness to learn through discovery and investigation are key factors in their above average attainment. They gain in confidence as they move through the school and by Year 2 readily voice their opinions and share ideas. In a plenary session in Year 2, pupils demonstrated their good progress in reading and writing skills as a result of the wide and varied opportunities available to put their skills into practice. One pupil demonstrated for others how to use research skills and the ability to skim and scan text in order to find information on life in Victorian times, whilst another demonstrated a good understanding of how descriptive language makes writing interesting to the reader.

Attainment in reading by the end of Year 2 has been consistently above average. In response to a slight decline in attainment in 2010, daily sessions of guided reading and the introduction of a curriculum programme aimed at further developing pupils' ability to link sounds to letters to decode words, have been effectively introduced. Listening to pupils in Years 1 and 2 read confirmed the success of these actions in ensuring pupils' good progress.

Throughout the school, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. This is helped greatly by clear and swift identification of need which leads to good provision for individual learning. Those pupils who enter the school speaking English as an additional language make the same good progress as that of their peers. By Year 2 the majority are able to speak English with confidence and attain standards in reading, writing and mathematics at least in line with the national average.

Quality of teaching

Parents' and carers' view that their children are taught well is endorsed by this inspection. Typically, lessons are based around practical activities that encourage pupils to learn through questioning, exploration and discovery. Pupils say that lessons are interesting and fun. A good range of challenging indoor and outdoor activities prompts them to learn through finding out information for themselves and results in them becoming independent, capable learners who are well prepared for their next stage of education.

Clear learning objectives and success criteria guide pupils as to what they are expected to achieve by the end of the lesson. Teaching is most successful when it is exactly tuned to the needs and capabilities of specific groups. This is most evident when small groups of pupils are working directly with their teacher. Effective questioning with frequent reference to learning targets, opportunities to reflect on the quality of their work together with effective guidance for further improvement, result in pupils' good progress. Occasionally, pupils' learning slows when direct intervention by the teacher is not readily available. Pupils enjoy the wide range of activities on offer and have a clear understanding of the learning that is intended but, do not always complete the activities to a level of which they are capable. At these times skills are consolidated but opportunities are missed for pupils to build on what they already know when learning independently. This is a key reason why pupil achievement remains good rather than outstanding.

Teaching promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development particularly well. Throughout the day pupils are required to collaborate with each other to solve problems and share resources. Time for reflection is built into many curriculum activities as well as during the acts of collective worship. The reverence and understanding displayed by Year 2 pupils when leading the liturgy belied their young age and visibly moved many of the parents and carers present. Displays around school demonstrate the teaching of a wide appreciation of art, science and the consideration of issues such as the sustainability of world resources. The increasing range of backgrounds and cultures of pupils in the school are used well to teach pupils about those whose experiences are different from their own. As a result, the school functions as an ordered community where pupils, whatever their background or ability, thrive.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Lessons are rarely interrupted because pupils are keen to learn and they respect their teachers and classmates. The rules to follow, for example, when using computers and the dangers of cyber-bullying are fully understood. Pupils say that occasionally some pupils are 'naughty', particularly in the playground, and that this can lead to others getting hurt. However, they stress that these are isolated incidents rather than systematic bullying and that this does not have a negative impact on their feeling of safety or their enjoyment of school.

Most parents and carers agree that behaviour in the school is good and that their children feel safe. A very small number of parents and carers expressed concern regarding poor behaviour and the impact of this on their children. Incident and behaviour records confirm that behaviour is usually good, but that recently a few of the younger children in particular are finding it difficult to manage their own behaviour. Clear action plans have been put in

place to address these difficulties and to provide these children with additional support, including that from other appropriate agencies.

The school's strong family atmosphere is cemented by family group learning sessions where pupils of different ages mix to consider their feelings and actions. From these, pupils learn to cooperate, develop financial awareness and the skills needed to become responsible citizens. For example, pupils are not content to raise funds for others but seek to investigate how the funds will be used to ensure maximum benefit for the greatest number.

Attendance is average and pupils arrive at the school on time.

Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management has been strengthened since the last inspection and the school is demonstrating a good capacity for sustained improvement. The governing body is now fully involved in monitoring and evaluating what is happening in lessons, and in regular analysis of pupils' attainment and progress. A clear timetable of monitoring activities, linked closely to the school's key priorities, is providing the governing body with the information they need to hold leaders rigorously to account for the impact of their work. Peer observations and increased professional development opportunities for teachers and teaching assistants are making a positive difference to the quality of teaching and its impact.

The planned curriculum gives pupils extensive opportunities to use and apply their literacy, numeracy and communication skills. It is tailor-made for the needs and interests of the pupils and is increasingly improving pupils' willingness to be open to new ideas and to independently direct their own learning. Pupils relish the opportunities to work together to investigate and to explore language and the deeper meaning in literature, mathematics, art and music all of which promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Equality of opportunity for each pupil is good and any possible discrimination is tackled rigorously.

The vast majority of parents and carers are very positive about all aspects of the school's work. A very small number of parents and carers raised some individual concerns relating to the school's care of their children. Inspection evidence indicates that the school has a wide range of procedures in place to safeguard pupils. However, these procedures have not always been followed rigorously by staff at all levels. The school has taken swift action to bring about improvement in how incidents, concerns and subsequent actions are recorded and shared with parents and carers.

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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add up exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



5 March 2012

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St. Joseph's Catholic Infant School, Birtley, Chester-le-Street
DH3 1LU**

I want to thank you all for the friendly welcome that you gave me when I visited your school to see how well you were learning. I thoroughly enjoyed my time talking to you. I agree with the school, your parents and carers that yours is a good school. It was good to see how well you get along in lessons and help each other in your plan, do and review times. I very much enjoyed attending the liturgy led by Year 2. I was very impressed with how well you read and sang and the respect you showed for this special occasion.

You told me that you enjoy school even more now that you are actively involved in your learning and have lots of opportunities to be creative and solve problems. Your teachers listen carefully to your ideas and use these to make your lessons interesting and fun. It was good to see how independent and sensible you are in selecting from your menu of activities and how well you understand what it is your teacher wants you to learn. This good teaching helps you to make good progress, so that by the time you leave to go to junior school you are doing well with your learning. Occasionally however, some of you could improve at an even faster rate if your teachers checked more often how well you are doing with your task. I have, therefore, asked them to make some improvements to this aspect of their teaching. Those who lead and manage your school will also help with this by looking more closely at how well you are learning when watching your lessons.

You can all play your part by continuing to work as hard as you can.

I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Linda Buller
Lead inspector

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