

St Paul's RC Voluntary Aided First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122305
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	359218
Inspection dates	19–20 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Gordon Potter

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	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	123
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Pam Slater
Headteacher	Mrs Maria Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	4 December 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 12 lessons and saw six different teachers, and held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of school policies and documentation, pupils' work, assessment data, monitoring records, safeguarding and strategic planning. They also scrutinised the 78 questionnaires returned by parents and carers as well as questionnaires from pupils.

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

- Whether actions taken by the school's leaders are leading to sustainable improvements in attainment, especially for the most-able pupils and for girls.
- Whether actions taken by the school's leaders are leading to improvements in teaching.
- Whether pupils have a clear understanding of life in other countries and the multicultural make-up of society in the United Kingdom.

Information about the school

This school is smaller than average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language are well below average. The proportions of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and of those with a statement of special educational needs and/or disabilities are average. The school has achieved Healthy School status and the Activemark.

During the inspection, the school was preparing to leave the site to move to a new building which it will share with the local Roman Catholic middle school.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

In this satisfactory school, pupils are keen to learn, behave well and have good awareness of how to stay fit and healthy. All staff provide sensitive care and support, which ensure that pupils work and play well together, are happy and feel safe. In the best lessons, teachers make clear what pupils will learn, check their progress through skilful questioning and involve them in interesting activities. However, teaching is satisfactory overall, as teachers do not always offer pupils work that is sufficiently challenging or sufficient time to engage fully with tasks. Similarly, the curriculum offers only a few opportunities across school for pupils to write at length, to think critically and to apply their skills in a range of exciting activities.

Teachers use information about pupils' skills and abilities increasingly well to identify the learning needs of individual pupils. This means pupils know the level of their work and how to achieve the next level. However, such information is not yet used consistently well enough across the school to ensure that work is well matched to the needs of more-able pupils. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress as a result of well-managed improvements to the quality of provision. Progress in Years 1 to 4 is satisfactory and pupils' attainment in English, mathematics and science is broadly average. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress as a result of the skilful, targeted support they receive. Average attendance and attainment, allied to pupils' satisfactory skills in team work and in information and communication technology (ICT), contribute to their satisfactory development of workplace skills.

The headteacher, well supported by the deputy headteacher, has a satisfactory understanding of the school's effectiveness and knows that attainment has to rise. She has striven to drive school improvement while fulfilling her teaching commitment. This teaching role however has reduced opportunities for her to reflect and implement initiatives to improve pupils' achievement. She has identified that some roles would be better delegated to others in the school. The school's capacity to improve is satisfactory. Good care, satisfactory teaching and curriculum together with satisfactory outcomes for pupils, ensure that the school provides satisfactory value for money. Pupils have contributed strongly to developments in school and to plans for their new school. They have a strong sense of how to help others and a good understanding of life in different faiths and cultures. The school actively celebrates its Christian character and develops pupils' spiritual awareness. There are good partnerships with outside agencies to support pupils with a range of complex needs. Parents and carers are extremely supportive of the school and how it supports pupils' social and moral development.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By the end of the current school year, raise pupils' attainment, especially for the more-able pupils by:
 - providing more exciting opportunities for pupils to think critically, solve problems and apply their skills, especially in writing, across a wider range of subjects
 - ensuring that data are consistently well used so that work is well matched to the needs of individual pupils.
- Provide more opportunities for the headteacher to reflect and to innovate for improvement.
- Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The extent to which pupils achieve and enjoy their work is satisfactory. However, their enjoyment is higher when they are engaged in lively activities, such as using role play to explore the crocodile-infested river and working together to measure equipment they will need to take to their new school. They are polite, have good attitudes, form positive relationships and are eager to do well in their work.

From starting points in the Nursery, which are below the expectations for their age, pupils' attainment is average by the end of Year 4. Attainment in writing has improved slowly, as a result of strongly directed teaching which has a clear focus on basic skills, although opportunities are missed for pupils to write more often at length and creatively. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well cared for and make good progress because of the well-focused support they receive.

Pupils are very aware of the importance of a healthy diet and of taking plenty of exercise. This is reflected in their enthusiastic involvement in physical education and swimming and the high take-up of the healthy school meals provided. They care for one another well, have great respect for each other and for different cultures and beliefs, and for the adults in the school, and say they feel safe. Pupils are confident that they know exactly what to do in the event of a concern arising.

Pupils willingly make a positive contribution to the school community, by helping to write school rules and through the school council, which has helped to design the playground in the new school. Pupils support a range of charities and participate in activities with the local church and in initiatives designed to explore the locality's rich history. Average attendance and attainment and satisfactory basic skills mean that pupils are equipped satisfactorily for their future economic well-being.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
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	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

How effective is the provision?

In the best lessons, teachers use skilful questioning to ascertain what pupils already know and to encourage them to think about new ideas. They make it clear to pupils what they will learn and check regularly that they are making progress. Teachers use interactive whiteboard technology well to stimulate interest and to involve pupils. Lessons have a clear focus and pupils are able to learn together through interesting activities. In less successful lessons, though nonetheless satisfactory, teachers provide too many activities and spend too much time checking what pupils already know, missing opportunities for pupils to apply their skills. The whole-class focus on reinforcing skills in English and mathematics means that opportunities are missed for pupils to work at their own level. Marking tells pupils how to improve their work, but this is inconsistent across school.

The curriculum contributes to satisfactory attainment by offering a strong focus on developing pupils' basic skills in English and mathematics. There is a developing range of activities which help them to see the links between subjects and offer them opportunities to write about a range of topics. This is helping to improve their writing. There are good procedures to encourage reading, although there are too few opportunities for pupils to use ICT to enhance their learning. Occasionally, activities lack excitement for pupils of varying abilities and there are too few lessons where pupils are encouraged to solve problems, apply their skills and to develop their own thinking. Well-planned enrichment activities and visits, include opportunities to learn about the environment and the wider

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world. There are many popular extra-curricular clubs, which help pupils develop their skills in sporting and environmental activities, including the development of the school garden.

All staff have detailed knowledge about individual pupils so that they are well cared for and develop self-esteem, respect and a sense of responsibility. A key feature is the sensitive care for the few pupils from Eastern Europe, who speak English as an additional language, and for those with complex learning needs. Well-established practices involve parents and carers when their children enter school, move from class to class and on transfer to middle school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has established a clear view of the school's effectiveness and, working closely with the deputy headteacher, has introduced initiatives that have led to improvements in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They have refined systems for tracking pupils' progress and are offering more opportunities for pupils to write at length, although these have not as yet had a significant impact on pupils' attainment. In this small school, all staff have clear roles and responsibilities and are accountable for key areas of the curriculum. They relish the opportunities to contribute to decision-making and the school improvement plan and to advance their own professional development. However, the headteacher has a large teaching commitment and does some tasks which would be better delegated. This reduces the time she has to reflect on the school's effectiveness and to pursue initiatives which would raise attainment. The governing body has been instrumental in supporting the school, ensuring that the move to the new school is being well-managed. It has established procedures for evaluating subject areas, although these have not as yet had an effect on raising attainment. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are satisfactory, meet government requirements and secure pupils' safety. It has close links with outside agencies to support the wide range of individual needs of pupils. While there is a clear commitment to promoting equal opportunities and to ensuring that discrimination against any group is avoided, a focus on meeting the needs of those who may be falling behind occasionally means that work for the more-able is not always sufficiently challenging. The school is proud of its inclusive nature and makes a good contribution to community cohesion. The sense of community in the school is strong and there are good links with the local community. There is a good awareness of life in other countries and a clear understanding of Britain as a diverse, multicultural society. The school has good relationships with parents and carers, who are provided with frequent information about their children.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
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	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

There is a wide range of ability, but children's skills on entry to Nursery are below those expected for their age overall, particularly so in personal and social development and in communication, language and literacy. Effective teaching, which particularly focuses on developing writing, speaking and listening and skills in linking sounds and letters, helps children to make good progress so that their attainment is average as they enter Year 1. Adults offer high levels of care so that children feel safe, are confident and happy. They encourage children to share, to take turns and to behave well so that children settle quickly and thrive. Children particularly enjoy using a range of construction materials to investigate how their new school is being built, including mixing 'cement', and recording what they have bought in their 'office'. A range of healthy snacks and drinking water, opportunities for exercise and clear guidelines for hand washing, help children to develop a good understanding of how to stay healthy. Staff ensure that requirements regarding children's safety are met. Adults plan carefully together and they are enthused by the opportunities afforded by the new setting into which they are to move. There is much useful information gathered about children and their progress. Observations and assessments are specifically targeted to provide appropriate activities for children's individual needs. There are highly effective partnerships with parents and carers that enable children to settle quickly into the Nursery and Reception classes, and there are good arrangements for transition into Year 1.

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

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

The response to the questionnaire for parents and carers was higher than the average response rate in other first schools. The respondents support the school extremely strongly. The overwhelming majority is happy with their child's experience at school and how it meets their child's needs, helping children to feel safe and stay healthy. Likewise, almost all parents and carers are strongly supportive of the way the school informs them about their child's progress and helps them support their child at home. The overwhelming majority believes that unacceptable behaviour is dealt with effectively. The inspection reflects the view that these are positive features of the school. Almost all parents and carers believe that management and teaching are good and that pupils make good progress and are well-prepared for their future. While the inspection acknowledges that the school strives hard to achieve these things, inspectors believe that opportunities are missed to make lessons more exciting and this slows pupils' progress. A few parents and carers expressed concern about the timing of the inspection. The inspection confirmed the school's judgement of its overall effectiveness.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Paul's RC Voluntary Aided First 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 78 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 123 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	61	78	16	21	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	69	88	9	12	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	57	73	20	26	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	53	68	21	27	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	61	78	16	21	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	58	74	19	24	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	59	76	18	23	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)	55	71	21	27	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	54	69	23	29	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	56	72	20	26	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	53	68	25	32	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	60	77	18	23	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	66	85	12	15	0	0	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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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 October 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Paul's RC Voluntary Aided First School, Alnwick, NE66 1UR

On behalf of the inspection team, thank you so much for making us welcome when we inspected your school.

You go to a satisfactory school, where teachers take great care of you. The team was impressed by the pride you take in your work and how hard you work in lessons. You behave very well, show great respect for one another and look after one another admirably. You are very polite and helpful and we enjoyed talking to you about your school and how excited you are about moving to your new school. You told us that you look forward to coming to school because you like your teachers and appreciate the activities the school provides for you, such as visits and clubs. Teachers help you learn and tell you how to improve your work. They also know what to do to make the school better. Your parents and carers like the school very much.

We have asked your school to improve even more, by:

- helping you to reach higher standards at the end of Year 4, by providing more exciting opportunities for you so that you have more chances to investigate together, solve problems and apply your skills in exciting activities
- making sure that all the information that teachers have about how well you are doing is used to plan work that is at the right level of challenge for all of you
- allowing the headteacher more time to think about how to make the school better.

You can help by continuing to do your best and attending regularly. We wish you every success in the future in your new school.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Gordon Potter

Lead inspector

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