

St Robert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122312
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	359221
Inspection dates	22–23 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Alison Thomson

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	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	133
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Amy Boyle
Headteacher	Mrs Vivian Cunningham
Date of previous school inspection	23 January 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors observed six teachers and 11 lessons, and held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work and analysed 50 questionnaires from parents and carers, 50 from pupils and 14 from staff. The team also looked at documents and policies, including those relating to the safeguarding of pupils, information the school had collected about the pupils' progress and the school's records of its monitoring of the quality of teaching.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Progress in Years 3 and 4, particularly the progress pupils make in mathematics and writing.
- The extent to which teachers use assessment to help pupils improve their work and involve them in assessing their own learning.
- How well the school's monitoring and evaluation are leading to improvements following considerable changes in leadership and staffing.

Information about the school

St Robert's First school is smaller than average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than average. Most pupils are of White British heritage and there are very few from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than average, but the proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs is higher than average. The school has many awards, including Healthy School status and the Activemark for the promotion of healthy lifestyles. Since the previous inspection, there have been considerable changes in staffing, including the senior leadership. At the time of the inspection, the school had an acting headteacher. Separate childcare provision shares the school site, but this is not managed by the governing body and is subject to a separate inspection.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St Robert's is a good school where care, guidance and support for its pupils are outstanding. Outcomes for pupils are good with excellence in the extent to which pupils feel safe, their understanding of a healthy lifestyle and their contribution to the community. Pupils, staff, parents and carers are very positive about all aspects of the school. These comments from parents and carers are typical of many, 'My child has blossomed – huge credit and praise to all the wonderful teachers and support staff' and 'Brilliant school, well deserves a good report'.

The school is improving strongly following a very unsettled period. The new leadership team, very ably led by the acting headteacher, is sharply focused on raising attainment following an earlier dip. The staff, many of whom are new in post, are working very well together as a team. There is rigorous monitoring of individual progress and many strategies have been put in place to address any underachievement, such as in mathematics and writing in Years 3 and 4. These strategies are being very successful and attainment is now above average overall and high in reading. This represents good progress from pupils' generally above average starting points. Gaps between groups of pupils are closing rapidly. Boys' achievement in writing was an area for development from the previous inspection and is now in line with that of the girls.

Engagement with parents and carers is good and the school seeks and acts on their concerns and suggestions well. There are now clearer lines of communication with members of the governing body. Governance is good and has been instrumental in helping the school to improve. Attendance has improved and is above average. Teaching is better and is good overall although a few inconsistencies remain. Teachers do not always engage pupils in independent learning tasks early enough, check their learning often enough or provide opportunities for pupils to say how they are getting on in lessons. Although monitoring of teaching has been effective in providing support it has not always focused sufficiently on learning. The school does not fully exploit the outstanding practice seen by sharing this across the school.

Behaviour is good. Pupils enjoy school and feel extremely safe and secure. They have an excellent understanding of a healthy lifestyle, helped by the good sports partnership. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community, through their many responsibilities. They are very proud of designing a peace garden and of having letters published supporting a case for flood defences. When asked what they would change about their school, one pupil said, 'I just like things as they are.'

The many rapid improvements that have occurred, particularly since the new leadership team has been in place, and the drive to be even better, based on very accurate self-evaluation, mean that the capacity for further improvement is good.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good in order to improve progress further and thus attainment by:
 - engaging pupils in independent learning tasks as early as possible in lessons
 - checking the learning of individual pupils throughout lessons
 - providing clear ways for pupils to contribute to their learning by ensuring they know how well they are doing
 - monitoring teaching regularly with a clear focus on the learning that is taking place
 - sharing outstanding practice more widely.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Inspection evidence confirms that the learning of pupils of all ages and abilities is good. Behaviour is good and impacts well on learning. For example, in a Year 3 science lesson on the features that alter shadows, pupils were cooperating well with each other to discuss the most important facts to report to the 'professor'. Similarly, in a Year 2 literacy lesson on descriptive writing, pupils were helping each other to check how well they had progressed with incorporating adjectives, similes and speech quotation marks in to their stories. Previous underperformance in mathematics in Years 3 and 4 has been addressed. Lesson observations confirm the school's view that progress there is now good. Likewise, observation of the work of both boys and girls in writing confirmed that the progress of the boys has risen to match that of the girls and is now good. Thus, previous differences in the progress of different groups of pupils are now minimal. The progress made by pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those very few pupils who speak English as an additional language is good, in line with their peers. Much of this is due to excellent well-focused support in lessons and in small group activities. It is not surprising that attainment is rising and is above average with many exceeding the level expected for their age. Reading is a real strength because of the strong emphasis the school places on reading for enjoyment.

Pupils enjoy the many opportunities for responsibilities, such as buddies, helping to support younger children at breaks and lunchtimes, including promoting healthy lifestyles by leading their play. The school council has a very influential voice. They have been instrumental in securing more playground equipment and have been involved in drawing up the new behaviour policy. Pupils raise money for a wide variety of charities and are extremely well thought of in the local community. They told the inspectors how important it was that they raised money for a boy's education in South America. Pupils' basic skills, including strong information and communication technology skills (ICT) and involvement in many enterprise activities, such as making and selling crafts, prepare them well for their future. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their spiritual development is particularly strong, with pupils regularly leading the worship. Their cultural development is improving aided by events such as an Indian workshop.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
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?

The school is rightly proud of its outstanding care, guidance and support and its reputation as an inclusive school. Pupils are known well as individuals and any at risk of underachievement are identified early. Highly effective support helps pupils to catch up and to access their work. There are rigorous procedures to ensure attendance is above average, such as careful monitoring and following individual absence. There are many enrichment activities and a wide range of clubs on offer. Pupils told us how much they enjoyed visits to the theatre and the opportunity to sing and dance at the City Hall in Newcastle. One parent commented how much their son looked forward to the 'Maths Detective' club after school and how it had increased his love of the subject. The curriculum is tailored well to the needs of different groups of pupils, with tasks adapted well for the more able and for the less able and the very few pupils who speak English as an additional language. Literacy, numeracy and ICT are being embedded within other subjects increasingly well and there is a move to integrate many subjects into topics. Pupils in Year 4 were seen studying an Anglo Saxon burial site; researching information on the internet and drawing some of the artefacts found.

Relationships are good and most lessons move forward at a brisk pace, with a range of interesting activities and the effective use of interactive whiteboards. In some lessons, however, pupils do not get involved in independent activities early enough and teachers do not check learning through the lesson. Teachers use good questioning techniques to

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challenge pupils and usually there are high expectations of pupils in lessons. Learning support assistants work well with teachers and provide good proactive support so that all pupils have full access to the good curriculum. Teachers usually discuss with pupils what it is they should be learning, but sometimes this is not specific enough. As a result, it is sometimes difficult for the pupils to be able to say how well they are learning. Teachers' marking is usually thorough and helpful in making clear the next steps pupils need to take in their learning. This was particularly evident in writing where a sharp rise in progress has been apparent.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Good leadership and management of the school have played a large part in its improving success. The new leadership team has achieved much in a short period of time. The acting headteacher has successfully integrated a number of new teachers into the school and has brought the staff together such that they are all focused on taking the school forward. Staff questionnaires show that most staff know and are involved in what the school is trying to achieve. The school's self-evaluation is searching and accurate. Analysis of pupils' progress is rigorous and underachievement is being tackled well. Partnership with the local authority has given good support to the new leadership well and also helped to redress the dip in attainment in mathematics and writing. The leadership and management of teaching and learning are good and consequently, the quality of teaching is improving, although there is not enough focus on learning when lessons are being observed and not enough sharing of outstanding practice at present.

Currently, all groups of pupils make equally good and improving progress, reflecting good equality of opportunity for all pupils and effective tackling of discrimination. Racism is not tolerated at all and there have been no racist incidents in school. Safeguarding procedures are good, with up-to-date policies and thorough risk assessments carried out.

The school's promotion of community cohesion is good. It is particularly strong in school and in the local community. The school is able to demonstrate that the pupils have a good understanding of faith, ethnicity and culture, particularly internationally, through its work with schools abroad. Pupils have helped to produce a book with recipes from different countries. The school has a link with a school of a different socio-economic make up in the United Kingdom and is the early stages of developing a link with a school with differing ethnicity. The school engages well with parents and carers, acting well on their views and concerns. The school held a very successful 'Fathers into School' day recently which helped to improve the pupils understanding of the world of work. The governing body is

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effective because it is very knowledgeable about the school's strengths and areas for improvement. It supports and challenges the school very well and helps to shape its direction, but at present recognise that it does not fully evaluate its own role.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children very much enjoy school and their learning and gain much in confidence during their time in reception. Good welfare arrangements and relationships with parents and carers ensure children feel safe and secure and settle quickly. Children enter with varying skills, attitudes and knowledge. Overall those are above those expected at this age, but lower in writing and in boys' dispositions and attitudes. They make good progress and, by the time they leave at the end of reception, their development in the different areas of learning has risen, particularly so in writing. This has been helped by a focus on linking letters to sounds.

The environment is very stimulating and ensures that children have a variety of engaging and creative activities which sustain their interest. For example, children were eagerly seen writing labels to attach to animals explaining why they wanted to keep them and not send them back to Edinburgh Zoo. Adults keep a good overview during the activities that children choose for themselves, appropriately intervening and moving learning on well. Effective learning also occurs outdoors, an area for development from the previous inspection, with activities often extending those begun indoors. Children behave very well and follow well-practised routines, such as sitting down quietly when eating their fruit. Staff are led well by the new leader and adults work effectively together as a team. They regularly assess what the children know and can do. Whilst these assessments generally indicate good progress, there are missed opportunities for assessment in some activities.

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

This means that sometimes the next steps in learning are not identified as early as they might be.

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

Nearly 40% of parents and carers returned the questionnaire. They were very positive about all aspects of the school's work, particularly the extent to which the school keeps their children safe, the good quality of the teaching and the extent to which the school meets the needs of their children. The inspectors judged that the extent to which pupils felt safe is outstanding. A few parents and carers felt that the school did not help prepare their children for their next class or stage in their learning. Inspectors followed up this concern and felt that this was something that the school is doing increasingly well.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Robert's Roman Catholic 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 50 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 133 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	29	58	16	32	4	8	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	30	60	19	38	1	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	21	42	24	48	5	10	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	22	44	23	46	3	6	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	26	52	20	40	1	2	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	24	48	20	40	5	10	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	25	50	21	42	4	8	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)	20	40	22	44	6	12	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	22	44	23	46	2	4	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	20	40	26	52	3	6	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	19	38	24	48	5	10	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	25	50	18	36	2	4	2	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	27	54	19	38	2	4	1	2

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



24 March 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Robert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School,
Morpeth, NE61 1QF**

Thank you for welcoming the inspectors to your school recently. We enjoyed talking with you and seeing you learn in class. We worked closely with your headteacher and also spent time talking to your teachers and governors and looking at your work.

Yours is a good school that is improving. You have an excellent understanding of what it means to be healthy and you make an outstanding contribution to your school and the local community. We enjoyed seeing the beautiful peace garden that you helped to design. Your behaviour is good and you work well together in lessons. You told us that you feel very safe in school and that adults look after you very well.

We have asked your headteacher to make the school even better by:

- enabling you to work individually or in small groups sooner in lessons
- checking more often during lessons on how well you are doing
- making it clear to you what it is you should be able to do so that you can always tell if you are doing well
- asking your teachers to share their good ideas more
- making sure that when other adults are observing your lessons they look more closely at what you are learning.

You can help by telling your teacher if it is unclear to you if you are doing a good job with each of your activities.

We would like to wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Alison Thomson

Lead Inspector

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