

St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Newton Aycliffe

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114265
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	357507
Inspection dates	5–6 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Lee Owston

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	174
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Sean O'Keefe
Headteacher	Mrs Barbara Reilly-O'Donnell
Date of previous school inspection	29 April 2008
School address	Central Avenue Newton Aycliffe County Durham DL5 5NP
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 13 lessons or part-lessons taught by seven different teachers. Meetings were held with staff, members of the governing body, groups of pupils and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation including school improvement planning, a variety of school policies, including those for safeguarding, records of all pupils' progress, pupils' work and the school's self-evaluation procedures. Inspectors also took account of responses to the inspection questionnaires returned by 108 parents and carers, 85 pupils and 18 staff.

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

- The quality of learning and the current rates of progress made by pupils in English and mathematics, particularly at Key Stage 1.
- The quality of teaching and learning and how well teachers use assessment information to enable all groups of pupils to achieve their potential.
- The impact of the changes to the school's curriculum on pupils' learning, progress and enjoyment.
- The effectiveness of new leaders and managers, at all levels, in bringing about and sustaining the school's improvement.

Information about the school

This is a smaller-than-average-sized primary school. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A very small number of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and none are at an early stage of learning to speak English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average, although the percentage of those with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average. The school has been awarded Healthy School status and it also holds the Activemark for its work in physical education.

The school has experienced significant staffing turbulence and disruption since the previous inspection, particularly at senior leadership level. An associate headteacher is currently leading the school full-time and will take up the substantive post from September 2011. Over the past year, the governing body has federated with another local primary 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

This is a satisfactory school. It is improving steadily through the clear direction of the new headteacher and the strong team spirit that has been fostered amongst staff. The good-quality care, guidance and support that pupils receive mean that aspects of their personal development are a strength of the school. Parents and carers agree that the school keeps their children safe. One parental view, typical of many, was that, 'St Mary's is a friendly and caring school where the headteacher and staff know the pupils well and help them to be happy, confident individuals.'

Achievement is satisfactory. Children start school with skills that are generally in line with the expectations for their age and by the time pupils leave the school at the end of Year 6, most attain broadly-average standards. This demonstrates satisfactory progress from pupils' starting points. Appropriate support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities ensures they make satisfactory progress in relation to their starting points and capabilities. Throughout the school, pupils are confident and caring. They form good relationships with adults and each other, co-operate well and understand the difference between right and wrong. This is reflected in their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In lessons and around the school, their behaviour is good and they enjoy their learning. They have a good understanding of how to keep safe and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

The quality of teaching and the effectiveness of the curriculum are both satisfactory. The school is currently working to improve this picture. Newly-introduced initiatives are beginning to improve pupils' rates of progress and raise attainment, but these are still in the early stages of development and inconsistencies remain. On occasions in lessons, teachers talk for too long so that pupils are not actively engaged and the pace of learning slows. While some good examples of marking were seen, there is a general lack of consistency, with some pupils not being clear about how to improve their work. The newly-designed curriculum is providing more meaningful links for pupils across subjects through the use of imaginative themes with some opportunity to apply their skills in a range of contexts. These have increased pupil enjoyment and motivation, particularly in writing, but are still too new to have made a full impact on attainment and progress.

After a period of uncertainty, leadership has now stabilised. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses and there is a renewed determination to bring about improvement. The quality of provision is improving, with increasing rigour being introduced by the senior leadership team, particularly relating to the assessment of pupils' attainment and expectations regarding the quality of teaching. However, many of the new systems have yet to become fully-embedded into practice so there remain inconsistencies, for example, in the rate of pupil progress across the school. The recently-federated governing body is wholly committed to supporting the school further, as are middle

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leaders, but their effectiveness in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school is still at an early stage. The school therefore has satisfactory capacity to improve further.

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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and improve rates of pupil progress across the school by:
 - – ensuring all teachers use their knowledge of where pupils are at in their learning to plan and deliver activities that are more closely-matched to their individual needs
 - – providing more opportunities for pupils to apply their basic skills in a range of different contexts across the curriculum
 - – applying the school marking policy more consistently so that all pupils understand how well they are doing and what they need to do next to improve.
- Ensure all teaching is consistently good or better by:
 - – making sure that all parts of each lesson proceed with good pace
 - – increasing the opportunities for pupils to learn actively and independently
 - – demonstrating to pupils how their skills, knowledge and understanding can be combined into a successful piece of work.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - – developing the skills of middle leaders and the governing body in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school
 - – ensuring school tracking systems allow a more focussed and thorough analysis of pupil progress, across the year and from term-to-term
 - – refining school improvement planning so that it includes clearly measurable steps towards improved outcomes for pupils.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Throughout the school, good relationships and keen attitudes aid learning. Pupils say they enjoy their lessons, especially when they get to work together and carry out engaging practical activities. For example, in a Year 4 lesson, pupils rose to the challenge and made appropriate interpretations of an unfamiliar text by taking on the role of different characters and debating the reasons for and against immigrating to a new country. Pupils talked animatedly and worked well together as a group to support their developing comprehension of more complex texts.

Across Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils make satisfactory progress. In Year 6, it is often good and pupils make accelerated progress to reach average levels of attainment in English and mathematics by the time they leave the school. Assessment data and pupils' work indicate that this has been maintained in the current Year 6 although the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels has dropped slightly in English. The new headteacher has rigorously implemented a number of actions to ensure more accurate assessment and raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve. This has halted the declining

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attainment at Key Stage 1 and pupils now make satisfactory and improving progress to reach levels of attainment which are closer to national expectations by the end of Year 2. Pupils appreciate the improvements that have been made to the school over recent months and they are proud to receive special awards for their learning in assembly.

Pupils feel safe and secure in school and have a good understanding of safety issues, including careful use of the Internet. They know that adults are there to help and support them and feel confident that any adult would resolve their problems quickly. Behaviour in lessons is generally good but when the pace slows pupils can become restless. Pupils talk confidently about the benefits of healthy food and exercise and older pupils offer informed opinions about the dangers of smoking, alcohol and drug misuse. As one older pupil commented, 'We are well-armed to make the right decisions in later life.' Pupils make satisfactory progress in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy but do not yet have enough opportunities to use them to best effect across a range of subjects. These skills, average attendance and good personal development ensure they are prepared satisfactorily for the future.

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	3
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?

Secure relationships and effective classroom routines characterise all lessons so that a purposeful learning environment is created. In better lessons, teachers have high expectations for all pupils and learning moves along briskly. Pupils are encouraged to be

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active and they are supported to make maximum progress when working independently. This was evident in a literacy lesson, where a high-quality text was used by the teacher to demonstrate what pupils were to accomplish independently later in the lesson. Careful unpicking of the text by the teacher supported pupils in generating their own checklist for success and this led to faster progress when working independently. This effective practice of demonstrating to pupils how their skills, knowledge and understanding can be combined into a successful piece of work is not used consistently.

In less successful lessons, assessment information is not used sufficiently to tailor activities to the specific needs of individual pupils. Pupils do not always understand what is expected of them and teachers spend too long explaining so that pupils listen passively rather than being actively involved in their learning. Consequently, the lesson moves at a slower pace.

The developing curriculum is adding interest and enjoyment to pupils' learning with, for example, the use of visual images and artefacts providing a memorable start to topics. Pupils say they enjoy the links that are being made in their learning through such imaginative themes such as 'Exploring Antarctica'. This has led to increased motivation, particularly in writing. However, this approach is not fully-embedded across all classes and pupils have too few opportunities to apply their basic skills across all other subjects they study.

Good care, guidance and support ensure that every pupil is known and valued as an individual. This is particularly so for pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Every effort is made to ensure that those pupils with specialised additional needs are included in the life of the school. There is close partnership-working with a range of external agencies. These effective relationships are having a positive impact on the personal development and well-being of pupils and the support and advice provided for their families. The provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is satisfactory and improving, with systems in place for reviewing individuals' progress more regularly so that interventions can be planned and implemented more swiftly.

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?

After a period of uncertainty and frequent changes of leadership, school leaders at all levels now share a common vision and are working together well under the strong direction of a permanent headteacher. A tracking system is in place which shows the percentage of pupils each term that are working at the relevant attainment levels for their age. As yet, it does not provide a clear enough picture of the progress made by groups

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and individuals, overall and term to term, especially for those that may be at risk of underachievement. Recently-introduced pupil progress meetings are therefore not always sufficiently focused on what teachers could do to tailor provision to meet the specific needs of individuals. The headteacher, together with senior leaders, analyses the data on a termly basis, although middle leaders have only recently been involved in wider monitoring and evaluation. A good awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses has led to the correct areas for improvement being identified. However, the school's development plan is not focused sharply enough on how the impact of actions will be measured making it difficult to gauge precisely how far outcomes and provision have improved.

As a result of the federation the governing body includes a good mix of skills and experience. It understands the challenges the school faces and is committed to supporting the school and increasing their level of challenge as their partnership-working embeds. The school gives high priority to the safety and welfare of pupils. Consequently, procedures to safeguard pupils are good, characterised by effective systems which are checked regularly.

The partnerships the school forges are good and impact positively on pupils' personal development and well-being in particular. All groups of pupils have equal opportunities to develop skills and talents. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated. However, across the school, pupils do not yet make consistent progress.

The school promotes community cohesion satisfactorily. It reaches out to the community to establish links and extend pupils' knowledge of issues in the locality and wider world but these actions are in their early stages of development. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

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Early Years Foundation Stage

Children settle quickly and happily into the Early Years Foundation Stage because there is a safe, calm and caring atmosphere. The good role models staff provide mean that children behave well and show concern and co-operation for each other. As a result of the good care they receive, children become confident, independent learners.

From starting points that are broadly in line with expectation, with some weaknesses in writing and calculation, children make satisfactory progress across the Early Years Foundation Stage. Opportunities for learning are satisfactory and improving. Staff have benefitted from the substantial training they have received from the local authority and their expertise is developing well. Sometimes learning opportunities are missed when activities are too directed and there is more focus on the activity rather than the learning. Outdoors, children have free access to a range of activities which promotes their physical development well. However, other activities are not as imaginative or interesting and simply transfer the indoor equipment into the outdoor environment without adaptation.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The team works well together, integrating the needs of all children, especially those with specific medical needs so that the environment is fully inclusive. On-going assessments of learning are becoming more focused and staff are making more effective use of these to tailor provision to specific needs, especially in terms of children's knowledge of letters and sounds. Good relationships have been fostered with parents and carers, who say that they feel welcome in the setting. However, not all opportunities are taken to involve them in their children's learning journeys. The on-going improvements in provision reflect the ambition, drive and increasing confidence of leaders and managers.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

The return rate for the parents' and carers' questionnaire was above average for primary schools. The very large majority of those who replied were very positive in their views about the school, as were those who spoke to inspectors. Most parents commented on the improved leadership of the school and the improving outcomes for their children. All agreed that the school keeps their child safe. Inspection evidence supports the positive responses that parents submitted about all aspects of the school's work. However, a small minority of parents expressed concerns about the regularity of information they receive about their child's progress. These were followed up during the inspection and inspectors

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found that the systems and procedures for informing parents of their children's progress were appropriate.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Newton Aycliffe 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 108 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 174 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	50	46	44	41	10	9	2	2
The school keeps my child safe	67	62	40	37	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	31	29	55	51	14	13	5	5
My child is making enough progress at this school	32	30	61	56	6	6	5	5
The teaching is good at this school	35	32	58	54	8	7	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	34	31	51	47	15	14	3	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	34	31	68	63	3	3	1	1
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)	40	37	57	53	2	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	40	37	56	52	7	6	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	34	31	52	48	16	15	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	30	28	56	52	11	10	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	49	45	47	44	6	6	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	45	42	50	46	11	10	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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



07 July 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School,
Newton Aycliffe, County Durham, DL5 5NP**

Thank you all for the very warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We really enjoyed meeting you and particularly appreciate the helpfulness of those pupils who spoke with us, shared their work or explained what they were learning during lessons. Your school is currently providing you with a satisfactory education. This means that there are some things that your school does well and others that need some improvement.

We found that your school has some important strengths. You are very polite, friendly and obviously enjoy coming to school. It is good to know that you are very happy with the way all adults look after you, help you to keep healthy and make you feel so safe in school. You work very hard in lessons and reach standards that are similar to those reached by other pupils nationally by the time you leave school. All the adults who work with your headteacher are determined to make sure your school keeps getting better and better.

To help your school to improve even further, we have asked Mrs Reilly-O'Donnell, your teachers and the governors to do the following things:

- ensure that teachers give you exactly the right kind of work and let you know exactly how well you are doing so that you can all make better progress
- give you plenty of opportunities to join in during lessons and practise your reading, writing and mathematics skills in all of your other subjects
- make sure that all leaders think carefully about what they want to improve in school so that it makes the biggest difference to the progress you make.

You can help your school to improve further by continuing to work hard for your teachers so that you achieve the very best that you can.

Yours sincerely

Lee Owston

Lead Inspector

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