

# St Joseph's Catholic Infant School, Birtley

Mitchell Street, Birtley, Chester le Street, County Durham, DH3 1LU

**Inspection dates** 6–7 May 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- The passion and quiet determination of the headteacher ensures that the school continues to improve and that all pupils make the best of the learning opportunities available. Governors and staff share her passion and high ambitions.
- An unmistakable ethos of nurturing and high-quality care permeates the whole school. Pupils, parents and carers are warmly welcomed in this happy and friendly school.
- Good teaching results in pupils making good progress and achieving well from their starting points. This is because a firm focus is maintained on constantly improving the quality of teaching.
- Those pupils who have special educational needs, those with English as an additional language and those who join part way through the year receive well-targeted and effective support to enable them to achieve well.
- The exceptional quality of links with parents and carers enhances the school's high ambitions and adds to the continuous drive for improvement.
- The interesting curriculum and enrichment activities inspire pupils to become eager learners. The school's focus on promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development makes a strong contribution to their respectful, caring and tolerant attitudes.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils are considerate, polite and helpful. In classrooms and at social times behaviour is consistently good and at times pupils' conduct is exemplary.
- Pupils feel safe and secure in school. In their responses to the online questionnaire, all parents agree.
- Children make a positive start in early years, quickly acquiring good self-control and independence. This results in good and sometimes rapid progress.
- The effective governing body, strengthened since the previous inspection, is well informed and highly supportive. Governors challenge and hold leaders and staff to account in positive ways.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The teaching of letter and sound relationships (phonics) and reading in Key Stage 1 does not result in a consistent pattern of rapid progress.
- The expectations of what each pupil can achieve are not always high enough.
- The high quality of teaching that exists in the school, including in some phonics teaching, is not shared widely enough.
- Opportunities are missed for pupils to practise their essential skills in all subjects, complete corrections and provide clear steps for improvement.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in all classes and carried out six paired observations with the headteacher. Work scrutiny was also undertaken with the headteacher. In addition, the inspector made a number of short visits to lessons and undertook walks around the school in order to check the quality of what is provided for pupils.
- The inspector spoke with pupils and had discussions with the headteacher, middle leaders, staff, governors, parents, carers and the local authority link adviser. He also examined a range of documents including those related to safeguarding, the school's view of how well it is doing, the monitoring of staff performance, the school's improvement plan and records relating to pupils' progress and behaviour.
- The inspector took account of the 31 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and of the six responses to the staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Clive Petts, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- This is a much smaller-than-average-sized primary school.
- A large majority of the pupils are of White British backgrounds with a few who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above average.
- Currently, there is a lower-than-average proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for support through pupil-premium funding. The pupil premium is additional funding the school receives to support those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- All Reception children attend full time.
- The proportion of pupils who join the school at other than the usual time is much higher than average.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teaching is at least good, especially in the teaching of letters and sound (phonics) and reading in Year 1, by:
  - sharing the high quality practice that exists in the school more widely
  - raising expectations further of what pupils of all abilities and starting points can achieve
  - making certain that pupils are constantly encouraged to apply their skills of phonics to make sense of new and tricky words in all subjects
  - ensuring that all marking demands corrections, that these are completed and that pupils are provided with clear steps for improvement.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- The high aspirations of the headteacher have helped to create a harmonious atmosphere and make the school a positive place for learning. Strengthened governance and recent changes to staff responsibilities are enabling the school to continuously add to its many strengths.
- At the heart of the school's highly positive nurturing ethos is a staff highly committed to ensure that all pupils behave well and have an equal opportunity to achieve success. Any form of discrimination is not tolerated. Thorough checking of school performance ensures that the judgements on the quality of teaching are accurate. Increasingly, middle leaders use their expertise and skills to identify any shortcomings or gaps in pupils' learning and address any misconceptions.
- Staff performance is shrewdly managed and ensures that teaching is good. Pay progression is closely linked to pupils' progress and achievement; it is not automatic. Staff skills are fostered effectively, using well-targeted training. This includes that provided for newly qualified teachers. However, opportunities are missed to share the staff's talents and skills more widely, such as those in teaching phonics and early reading skills.
- The curriculum is good, with increasing opportunities taken to organise learning in creative and imaginative ways. The range of enrichment activities, such as when the dance club performed a routine from the musical *Cats*, is a strength of what the school offers. Regular visitors and visits reinforce the school's excellent promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This constantly strengthens the key British values of broad mindedness and being respectful, fair and just.
- Exceptional working relationships and links with parents and families have a highly positive impact, providing parents with the confidence and skills to support their children's learning. Parents feel that their views and contributions are valued and appreciated.
- Primary school sport funding is used effectively to promote healthy lifestyles. The sporting skills of pupils are developing well because the staff's coaching skills are improving as they work alongside qualified coaches. As a result, pupils' participation rates and enjoyment in a wide range of sports are good. An impressive school ambition is to ensure that all pupils learn to swim before the end of Year 2.
- Pupil premium funding is used to good effect to support disadvantaged pupils through well-targeted extra help and support. This enables disadvantaged pupils to catch up with their peers.
- Safeguarding and child protection meet requirements. Procedures are securely established and much very effective practice is adopted in the day-to-day management, care and protection of pupils.
- The local authority has a clear and accurate view of the school's performance. The link adviser works successfully with the school, challenging and supporting senior leaders and providing essential training for staff and governors.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The highly committed and effective governing body brings much experience and drive to leadership. Members of the governing body have an accurate view of school performance because they check information about the school's performance confidently and the quality of teaching regularly. They ensure that the systems to check the performance of staff hold them to account for the progress and achievement of all pupils.
  - Governors are assiduous in checking the impact of the extra funding for disadvantaged pupils and for sport. They have a clear view of what is required to continue and sustain school improvement.

### The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

#### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils enjoy coming to school and being with their friends in the happy, friendly and busy learning atmosphere. Pupils take much pride in their achievements and those of the school.
- In lessons, pupils' behaviour is at times excellent and their keenness to learn unmistakable. This is the consequence of a highly positive school ethos which fosters cooperation, consideration and respect for difference extremely well.
- In discussions, pupils observe that any inappropriate behaviour is uncommon. This is the result of well-established routines, clear expectations and the boundaries which are set for their conduct. On the few occasions when concentration drifts and commitment slips, the flow of learning remains uninterrupted.

## Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. On occasions it is excellent, such as when the fire fighters from the station next door visited to teach pupils how to remain safe in the kitchen at home. This serves to reinforce pupils' common sense and the safety conscious approaches that they demonstrate during the school day.
- High quality care and support is provided for those potentially vulnerable pupils, those who arrive at short notice and those at the early stages of learning English. This includes support for those pupils who are anxious or worried. Pupils' low levels of absence for their age reflects the school's increasing success in promoting the value of regular attendance in preparation for their move to junior school.
- In conversations with pupils, it is evident that they are well informed about bullying in its different forms. They observe that any unkind or offensive behaviour is very infrequent. Their comments reveal that they are well aware of what action they need to take if it does occur. School behaviour records confirm this to be the case.

## The quality of teaching is good

- Good teaching and effective classroom support result in good achievement. At times, inspiring and resourceful practice, which makes it clear to pupils of all abilities what they are expected to learn, results in rapid progress and high achievement, such as in the teaching of letters and sounds in the Reception class.
- Teachers' secure expectations of behaviour and skilful management of classroom routines foster much mutual respect. Relationships are typically excellent because staff have a detailed insight of each pupil's abilities and needs. This includes encouraging pupils to read frequently. Energy and vitality are added to tasks in thought-provoking ways to capture and hold pupils' interest.
- When pupils' progress exceeds expected rates and achievement is high:
  - staff carefully match tasks and approaches to pupils' individual abilities and needs to promote a consistent pattern of fast progress
  - high quality relationships underpin the thought-provoking challenges and demands that are presented to pupils
  - questioning constantly checks and tests pupils' knowledge and understanding to ensure any misconceptions are quickly eliminated
  - helpful and frequent marking ensures that pupils are fully aware of what they have done well and what they need to do to improve.
- At times when progress rates are a little variable and require improvement:
  - activities lack that essential trigger to stretch pupils' thinking, skills and understanding
  - tasks are not always well enough tailored to ensure the correct level of challenge
  - opportunities are missed for pupils to practise essential skills in other subjects and activities.
- When staff expectations are consistently high and well-matched tasks capture interest, pupils' progress speeds up. Staff demonstrate skills well, such as in reading and writing. This encourages pupils to read and write independently and confidently; they write imaginatively, thoughtfully and accurately, incorporating the direct speech of story characters. However, this inspiring practice, including that seen in the teaching of letters and sounds, is not always shared widely enough among staff. Consequently, progress can vary a little at times and in some classes.
- All work is conscientiously marked by staff in helpful and encouraging ways. Pupils are provided with clear-cut comments about how well they have done. Requests for corrections are regularly made but not all are promptly responded to by pupils. Opportunities are missed to add to the steps for improvement and bolster the drive for rapid progress. Teaching assistants provide effective intervention and support, although now and then in whole-class sessions pupils' thinking is not always followed closely enough and opportunities are missed to adapt tasks to ensure faster progress.

## The achievement of pupils is good

- The skills, experience and knowledge of children on entry to the Reception class vary considerably year-on-year as a result of small numbers and an increasing proportion of children who arrive after the usual time.
- From their varying and below typical starting points, most of the time pupils make good progress during

Key Stage 1. This includes disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and those with English as an additional language. However, in the 2014 national tests there was a fall in standards. This was expected as more than one third of the year group arrived after the start of Year 1. Additionally, the group contained a higher-than-average proportion of disadvantaged pupils and those at the early stages of learning English.

- In the current Year 2, pupils are on course to reach average standards in writing and mathematics, and broadly average standards in reading. This is confirmed by the school's progress information and the work in pupils' books. Imaginative and thought-provoking activities continuously stretch pupils' thinking and hold their interest. Consequently, progress is good with skills constantly improving. This is evident in pupils' writing about their experiences of holding a large tropical snail, a cockroach and a tarantula during a visit to school from an educational group.
- In the most recent national phonics screening test at the end of Year 1, a below average proportion of pupils reached the expected standard. Pupils do not always build quickly and consistently enough on the excellent start that they make in the Reception class in using their skills to make sense of unfamiliar words.
- Staff work hard to ensure that the demands made of the most-able pupils are well matched to their abilities and interests. Activities are thoughtfully arranged to develop their skills and encourage them to work problems and puzzles out for themselves. As a result, an above average proportion of pupils are on track to reach the highest level in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make the same progress as their classmates. This is because their abilities and needs are accurately identified and their support well planned and effective. In individual cases, they make rapid progress in acquiring and developing essential social and emotional skills.
- In the 2014 tests at the end of Year 2, the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and others nationally widened significantly in reading, writing and mathematics. In previous years, any attainment gaps were minimal. In the current Year 2, gaps in comparison to other pupils, both nationally and within school, are on course to narrow strikingly with gaps of less than one term in all subjects. This is a result of their good progress, particularly in Year 2.
- Good progress is made fostering pupils' enjoyment and interest in reading. Staff work hard to encourage pupils to practise their skills in making sense of new or tricky words, although opportunities are sometimes missed to do this in all subjects. Pupils' skills at the end of Year 2 are broadly typical for their age. Parents and carers are more frequently displaying initiative, encouraging and listening to their children read.

### The early years provision

is good

- Most children start the Reception year with skills that are below those typical for their age. Speech, language and number are particular weaknesses. The warm, friendly and bustling atmosphere in the classroom ensures that children settle happily and confidently. They quickly acquire essential confidence to work independently and develop good self-control.
- Evidence of the children's good progress and achievement is effectively recorded in their learning journeys, writing and number books. High quality observations and accurate assessment of children's abilities and progress are emerging as strengths of the provision. These helpful records are shared with parents.
- Teaching is good and occasionally inspiring. Excellent opportunities are provided for children to develop their listening, speech and language skills. A strong focus upon building their skills, blending letters and sounds together to read words, is paying dividends as children add to their early reading and writing skills at a good rate.
- Good opportunities are provided for children, including the most able, to explore and investigate, such as when discovering the different shapes and textures of a variety of fruit and vegetables. Despite the vibrant learning environment indoors, the outdoor area is at times not quite so stimulating.
- The children who join part way through the year are made to feel very welcome because staff are extremely caring and thoughtful. This ensures that relationships between adults and children are of a high quality. Consequently, behaviour is good and children feel safe and secure.
- Disabled children or those who have special educational needs are effectively supported and encouraged. As a result, they make good progress from their starting points.
- Leadership and management are good. The early years leader, well supported by other adults, has established high expectations of what all children can achieve. Since her recent move to take responsibility, she has continuously enhanced the quality of learning that is provided. As a result,

children's progress is quickening acquiring skills in all areas of learning. This prepares children well for Year 1.

## What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	108389
<b>Local authority</b>	Gateshead
<b>Inspection number</b>	461883

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4-7
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	85
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Michelle Irwin
<b>Headteacher</b>	Valerie Gibson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	29 February 2012
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