

Our Lady Star of the Sea Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114281
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	289864
Inspection dates	7–8 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Keith Oglesby

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 on roll	118
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Julian Hunt
Headteacher	Mr Michael Carter
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2005
School address	Thorpe Road Horden Peterlee County Durham SR8 4AB
Telephone number	0191 5863895
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average school. It serves an area of high deprivation in a former coal mining town. Pupils come from a range of socio-economic circumstances. Nearly all are White British; none is at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average, as is the proportion known to be entitled to free school meals. Following its previous inspection in 2005, the school was judged to have serious weaknesses.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school which has transformed itself since the last inspection. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Everyone associated with the school has worked successfully to raise standards and achievement and to improve leadership. The school's own evaluation is that it provides a satisfactory education for its pupils with some good features. Inspection findings indicate that this is too modest; all aspects of the school's work are good. The great majority of parents support this view.

Strong, good leadership and management have been the key to this improvement. One governor described the previous report as 'a wake up call'. Senior staff have responded to this with a determined drive to raise standards. The school has welcomed high quality advice and support from the local authority. Well informed governors have been closely involved and have made a significant contribution to the improvement. Procedures are now much more effective for checking the effectiveness of the school's performance and for setting challenging targets for pupils. As a result, all staff have a clearer view of how well the pupils are learning. There is a shared focus on raising achievement, which has motivated staff and pupils. Consequently, the quality of guidance and support has also improved. Pupils are closely involved in evaluating their own progress and know precisely what to do to move on.

Pupils are proud of their school; they enjoy lessons and work hard. Behaviour is good and they feel safe. They like their teachers, get along well with each other and want to do well. Pupils have lots of opportunities for physical exercise and understand the importance of a healthy diet. This has been recognised by the Activemark and Healthy School awards.

Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. Pupils have a good range of well planned and interesting activities to help them to learn, including visits out of school and expert visitors to school. Work is usually carefully matched to pupils' needs and abilities, so all pupils achieve well. In a small number of lessons, learning slows at times. This happens, for example, when teachers try to include too much in a lesson or they do not give enough time for pupils to absorb new ideas.

Good teaching, positive attitudes and an interesting curriculum are the main reasons for pupils' good achievement. Many enter the school with skills well below those usually seen for their age, particularly in language and communication, and by Year 6 they reach standards that are broadly average. They make a good start in Reception, because the teaching and provision are good. Thereafter, progress continues to be good and pupils do particularly well in the Year 5 and 6 class. They reach average standards in English and above-average standards in mathematics. Science has not been a school priority in recent years and pupils' knowledge and understanding are not as good as the other subjects. This is because there is insufficient emphasis given to investigative work, and assessment procedures are not as rigorous as in English and mathematics.

The school works well with a range of partners, including a learning network and neighbouring schools, to enhance what it offers to pupils. It has improved well since the previous inspection and has good capacity to continue to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give more emphasis to investigative work in science and improve assessment procedures in the subject.
- Ensure that teachers manage the use of time more effectively in all lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are broadly average by Year 6. This is good achievement, because when children start school, many have skills which are well below what is typically seen for their age, particularly in language and communication.

The good provision in the Foundation Stage ensures that children settle quickly and make good progress. By the time they join Year 1, more than half are on course to reach the expected early learning goals. They continue to achieve well. Pupils reach average standards in mathematics by the end of Year 2, though they remain below average in reading and writing. Achievement has been satisfactory in Years 3 and 4, but this is improving as new staff settle in. Progress accelerates in Years 5 and 6, because teaching is outstanding and pupils are keen to learn. Standards here are above average in mathematics and average in English. Standards in science are below average.

In the 2006 national tests results for Year 6, standards dipped in English and science. This was due to the number of pupils with learning difficulties in this cohort. Nevertheless, given their starting points on entry to Year 3, this group of pupils made good progress and achieved well.

Since the last inspection the school has worked hard to make sure that pupils of all abilities succeed. Effective tracking of pupils' progress gives a clear picture of their strengths and weaknesses and what they need to do to reach their targets. One result is that the more able pupils are constantly challenged. These are making much better progress than they were at the last inspection and a good proportion are working above the expected level for their age. There is no significant difference between the performance of girls and boys.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

All aspects of pupils' personal development are good. The pupils love coming to school and are considerate to each other and to the adults. Behaviour is nearly always good. Pupils who sometimes find it difficult to behave properly are managed by the staff very well. All pupils say that they enjoy lessons and appreciate the teachers' efforts to make learning fun. As one boy put it, 'It's not just do this, do that, we get involved and do interesting things.' The level of attendance is below average, although the great majority of pupils attend regularly and are punctual. The school works hard to encourage families to attend and this is bringing about an improvement.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school celebrates every achievement, however small, to raise self-esteem and encourage everyone to do their best. Internet links with schools in other countries are helping pupils to appreciate cultural differences. Pupils enjoy taking responsibility, for example, as trained playground mediators or serving on the effective school council. They say there is no bullying and any minor incidents are sorted out quickly. They are learning to live safe, active and healthy lives and make sensible decisions.

Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. They make good progress in English and mathematics and use technology confidently. They leave this school with positive attitudes, good social skills and the confidence to face the challenges ahead.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. It is excellent in the Year 5/6 class. Common strengths lie in the warm relationships staff have with their pupils and the efficient way that lessons are planned, prepared and managed. Pupils find lessons interesting and enjoyable. This is because teachers explain clearly, often using technology very well, and make sure that everyone is involved. Pupils make good progress because work is nearly always well matched to their needs. They are happy to tackle new challenges because patient support is never far away. The energetic team of teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning and confidence. Very occasionally, the pace of learning slows, for example, when planning is inflexible or pupils need more quiet time to practise new skills.

The more able pupils are stretched; this is an improvement since the last inspection. As one put it, 'In this school it's not what we want to do, but what we can achieve.' One reason for such positive attitudes is that teachers encourage pupils to think about their learning and show them precisely what they have to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It provides pupils with a wide range of interesting learning experiences and enables them to achieve well in their academic and personal development. The Foundation Stage curriculum is well planned and children make progress through a good balance of adult-led and child-chosen activities. In the rest of the school, thorough tracking of each pupil's progress helps teachers to plan work at the right level. The school is quick to evaluate and adjust the curriculum when needed. For example, leaders analyse pupils' performance in tests to see what is working well and which areas need more attention. This has helped to improve learning in English and mathematics. The school is now turning its attention to science, where practical work does not extend pupils' scientific understanding sufficiently. There is a strong programme of personal, social and health education. Pupils have good opportunities to learn how to be responsible and tolerant citizens.

The school offers a good range of clubs, visits and events. Pupils enjoy the skills brought by visiting experts, for example, in sport, dance, drama and music. There is a wealth of opportunities to take part in sports and physical exercise. Good links with other schools enrich the curriculum; for example, the school is successfully leading a local project on the use of hand-held computers to improve writing. It holds an achievement award for its use of technology.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school cares for its pupils well. Procedures for health and safety are clear and ensure that pupils feel safe, valued and listened to. They are confident that help is never far away and that any concerns they have will be dealt with fairly.

Arrangements for child protection and safeguarding meet current requirements. Close links have been established with secondary schools and pupils say they have no worries about moving on.

The quality of guidance and support is also good. This has improved since the last inspection. Accurate assessment of each pupil's progress enables teachers to spot where extra help or a fresh challenge is needed. They share this with the pupils, who are now much more involved in reviewing their own learning. Pupils in all classes say that they like having their own targets and receive helpful advice on how to move up to the next level. One thought her teacher was 'a bit like a mind reader, she knows what we can do already and what our weaknesses are and she puts the two together to help us'. The school is in a strong position to implement similar procedures in science.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The school has made a great improvement since the 2005 inspection, when both were judged to be inadequate. The headteacher, very ably supported by a new deputy headteacher, provides a clear sense of direction and is determined to push the school forward. Staff and governors share this vision. They are proud to be part of a school, which has emerged from a difficult period. As a result, there is a strong sense of ownership, morale and teamwork is strong and staff are keen to try new ideas to improve further.

The main improvements are in the rigorous way that the school monitors and evaluates its own performance. Leaders are keeping a much closer eye on the standard of teaching and how well pupils are learning. Effective and thorough systems are in use to track every pupil's progress. This information is used by teachers and leaders to see where improvement is needed.

The school has moved a long way in a short time. Its plans for further improvements are achievable. Finance is well managed and the school offers satisfactory value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Our Lady Star of the Sea Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary, County Durham, SR8 4AB

As you know, I visited your school recently for two days. I am writing to thank you for being so helpful, welcoming and polite. I enjoyed my visit, especially watching you and your teachers in action. Many of you told me you were proud of your school and pleased about how well you are doing. I think you should be.

Many of your parents wrote to me to tell me how much they value your school. One thing that struck me straight away was the way everyone seems to get on so well. Adults and children support each other, making your school a happy and safe place for you to learn. I remember the poor playground mediator who complained that he had nothing to do because there were no disputes.

I also like the way you enjoy interesting lessons and get involved. You work hard and are determined to improve. No wonder you are learning well. Keep it up.

We usually leave some suggestions for things that could be even better. In your case there are two.

- I saw some good work in science, but sometimes it doesn't have the quality that I saw in other subjects, for example your mathematics. This would be a good thing to work on before the next inspection.
- You have a good team of teachers and I saw many lessons where you made good progress. Just now and then you don't learn quite as well because you get a bit muddled. I have suggested that the school tries to make sure that teachers always ensure that you have time to fully understand what you are learning.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Keith Oglesby

The inspector.