

St Joseph's Catholic Junior School, Birtley

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108388
Local Authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	309678
Inspection dates	7–8 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Clive Petts

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	104
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Anthony Duffy
Headteacher	Mr David Slowey
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2004
School address	School Street Birtley Chester le Street County Durham DH3 2PN
Telephone number	0191 4102231
Fax number	0191 4922400

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Joseph's is a smaller than average junior school in the small town of Birtley. The large majority of pupils are from a White British background with a small, but increasing number of children, from mainly Polish families, learning English for the first time. Although an average proportion of pupils is entitled to free school meals, the school serves an area with pockets of high social disadvantage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below average. The number of pupils with a statement of special educational need is broadly average. The school has the Healthy School award and Activemark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Joseph's is a good school where pupils attain above average standards, are exceptionally well cared for and develop outstanding personal qualities. Its success is the result of the strong leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher who have established an extremely caring, inclusive and supportive family atmosphere. They are well supported by a highly committed team of staff. This ensures that personal development and well-being are outstanding. As one pupil remarked, 'nobody is left out'. All have a keen sense of belonging and all look out for each other. Pupils really enjoy school, feel safe and secure, put into practice the good advice they receive about keeping fit and healthy and make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community. Pupils thrive in the challenging and happy school environment and are well prepared for the next stage in their education. Highly successful working partnerships with local schools are used increasingly to quicken the rate of improvement. Consequently, the school has the capacity to do even better. Parents appreciate the high quality of care and support. The view of one parent typifies that of many, 'the most important thing is that children are taught to care for each other'.

Pupils enter school with broadly average skills, achieve well and make good progress in all years to reach above average standards. More able pupils do particularly well in English and science though less well in mathematics. The achievement of those with learning difficulties and those learning English for the first time is consistently good. This is the result of lively, often inspiring teaching, and well-thought-out support and intervention. The good curriculum is adapted to meet individual needs; for example, catering for the needs of those new to English. Rich extra curricular experiences add to the variety of learning; for example, residential visits and trips such as the one to the Houses of Parliament to meet Tony Blair. Nevertheless, not all activities provide sufficient opportunities to introduce mathematical skills and apply them in a practical way.

Progress is checked carefully and assessment information is used well to plan learning and extend challenge. Pupils' mature attitudes are reflected in the way in which they can judge the quality of their own work and talk about what they need to do to improve. Good leadership and management throughout the school play a decisive part in making sure pupils' enthusiasm for learning is successfully fostered. Governors, the headteacher and staff work conscientiously to make certain the school obtains good value for money from the resources available. All are involved in making sure the school builds on its strengths and addresses any areas for development. Effective monitoring and evaluation, bolstered by strengthening governor approaches, give the school a clear sense of direction and a good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards in mathematics for more able pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and pupils attain above average standards. Pupils arrive at school with a broadly average range of experiences and skills. Test results fluctuate from year to year but overall subject standards remain above average. For example, in 2007 Year 6 had a much higher proportion of pupils learning English for the first time and more pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Yet, results in English and science revealed a high proportion of pupils

exceeding the level expected of them. Although standards in mathematics were just above average, fewer pupils reached the higher levels as they did in science and English. The school's thorough checking of performance revealed that pupils' use and application of mathematical skill is a relative weakness. Strategies are being successfully employed to improve this skill. More able and talented pupils, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with English as a second language make good, and often better, progress because of the effective teaching and support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils are polite and considerate. They reveal their mature attitudes in their respect for the feelings of one another, especially younger pupils. Pupils blossom under the praise and encouragement they receive from staff. The high quality displays celebrating their work include many photographs of visits and events, making them feel really special. Their enthusiasm for school life is reflected in their excellent attendance and high levels of participation in all the school organises. Pupils are confident, feel safe and know how to stay safe. They are aware of the consequences of failing to adopt a healthy living style. Pupils' contributions to school life are exceptional. They relish responsibility, help others freely and they value their decision-making role on the school council. This includes leading play activities, working with charities and extremely strong links with the local community and parish. Broad experiences of other cultures and beliefs prepare them exceptionally well for life in a diverse society. Skills gained working with others, good basic skills and their commitment to being a good citizen prepare them well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall with some outstanding teaching seen. All staff have high expectations of what pupils are expected to achieve and enjoy excellent relationships with pupils. Teachers, including specialist support staff, know their pupils very well, check progress thoroughly and provide a range of activities that match abilities and interests closely. This helps create a positive climate for learning in which all can achieve and accounts for the consistently good progress pupils make. Pupils are taught to reflect on what they have learned which helps them to identify how they can improve their work. More deliberate planning of opportunities to use and apply mathematical skills in all subjects is leading to improvements. For example, more Year 6 pupils are currently on target to reach higher levels.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum with an excellent range of extra-curricular activities. It makes full use of the exceptionally good partnerships with local schools, the parish and local community, sports clubs and businesses. The determination to ensure all pupils are included adds to pupils' enjoyment and achievement. The impressive range of learning experiences, including visits and a residential experience, enables pupils to successfully develop their personal skills. Effective personal, social and health education programmes lie at the heart of all that

the school does. Successful strategies to raise achievement are well embedded across the curriculum; for example, extending reading skills. Imaginative initiatives for the gifted and talented make use of themes and events to enliven and inspire thinking. There is good provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology with a strengthening focus on the application of numeracy skills in all subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support and this makes an exceptional contribution to pupils' personal development. Parents really appreciate the fact that staff are very approachable, resolve difficulties promptly and are quick to identify any pupil who needs extra support. New arrivals, especially those new to the country, benefit from the warm, friendly atmosphere and as a consequence settle very quickly. Procedures to safeguard children, with established routines for child protection and health and safety, are in place. Pupils' progress is painstakingly monitored and information is effectively used to plan their learning and set challenging targets. Pupils are involved in self-assessment, know how well they have done and how they can improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides a clear, outward looking vision for the school and he is exceptionally well supported by the deputy headteacher and staff. There is a determination not to stand still, and to always do better, and all work extremely hard to fulfil this aim; for example, the introduction of an imaginative gifted and talented programme. All aspects of school life are carefully monitored. The self-critical, reflective approach has resulted in sustained improvement since the last inspection; for example, the dogged way in which funding was secured to build an extra classroom. Evaluation is accurate though judgement of what has been achieved sometimes modest. Governors are extremely supportive and check what is going on in school. They have recognised the need for more focused methods for their own monitoring and evaluation in order to enhance capacity and boost the school's high expectations to improve even further.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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?	1

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	2
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

9 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Junior School, Birtley, Gateshead,

DH3 2PN

I really appreciated and enjoyed your friendly, warm welcome when watching you all work and talking to you. I was extremely impressed by your eagerness to learn and your willingness to work really hard in all school activities. I really enjoyed talking to the members of the school council, joining you in assembly and listening to you rehearse your singing for Friday mass.

You go to a good school. Here is a reminder of a number of the many strengths that make St Joseph's a good school:

- you are all making good progress because your school makes learning interesting and gives you help when you need it
- you have excellent relationships with staff, with each other and when you are on visits meeting people for the first time; for example, when you are playing games in the yard or meeting with Tony Blair in the Houses of Parliament
- your school's leaders are determined to continually improve your school and make sure that you are all happy, enjoy your work and make really good progress
- your outstanding behaviour throughout the day and the great pride you take in all of your work and achievements.

To make your school even better and continue to improve the quality of your work, I have asked your school to do one thing. I have asked the school to help you to improve the way you use your mathematical skills. For some pupils this will mean reaching even higher standards.

You all have an important part to play in continuing to raise the quality of your work. You can help by continuing to listen carefully to the advice of staff, helping each other and working hard to produce the best work you possibly can.

I hope the school will continue to build on its many successes.

Best of luck

Clive Petts

Lead inspector