

St Patrick's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Dipton

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114246
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	311530
Inspection dates	16–17 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Andrew Saunders

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	142
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Michael McKenna
Headteacher	Mrs Catherine O'Sullivan (Acting)
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2004
School address	North Road Dipton Flint Hill Stanley County Durham DH9 9BB
Telephone number	01207 570316
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Patrick's is a smaller than average school in a rural village near Durham. Pupil numbers are rising. Most pupils are of White British origin and the number of pupils entitled to claim a free school meal is below the national average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above the national average. The school received Beacon status in 1999; they also have the intermediate International Dimension award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Patrick's is a good school where pupils are able to flourish both socially and academically and where their achievements are celebrated with pride. Pupils achieve high standards and enjoy an exciting and varied curriculum which is delivered with enthusiasm. Behaviour is excellent and pupils develop into confident and well rounded young people. Parents are very supportive of the school and are pleased with the education their children receive. The school is highly regarded within the local community.

Children start school with skills and capabilities that are below those typically found at that age. They make rapid progress in Reception and this gives them a flying start to their education. Progress is satisfactory in Key Stage 1 and pupils reach the level expected for their age. Progress accelerates in Key Stage 2 so that pupils in Year 6 achieve significantly above average standards in English, mathematics and science. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported from an early age and achieve at least as well as their peers. Although pupils make good progress overall, the school recognises that more consistent achievement in Key Stage 1 would raise standards by the end of Year 2.

Teaching and learning are good. Pupils enjoy lessons, particularly art and science practical work. Their personal development is excellent, as demonstrated by their exemplary attitude to learning and their respect and care for each other. Positive relationships between staff and pupils also contribute substantially to success in lessons. Pupils are confident to ask questions to make sure they have fully understood. The school is aware, however, that marking could be used more effectively to help pupils know how to move forward in their learning.

The curriculum is good because the school has a firm commitment to teaching basic skills but also to learning in foreign languages and the arts. French is taught throughout the school, making good use of the local college's specialist status in languages. There is a wide range of expertise and talent among staff that is shared and contributes to the high quality learning experiences that the pupils enjoy. Pupils are provided with an extensive range of extended opportunities which are both rich and diverse, ranging from history trips, visiting artists and sporting activities to residential visits.

The school enjoys the overwhelming support of its parents, some of whom volunteer to help on a regular basis. This support is typified by the comment, 'There is a wonderful ethos about the school, which makes it very special. The children are loved and are taught to a very high standard.' Concern was expressed, however, about the limited opportunities for parents and carers to express their views to the school and a few comments indicate that parents would appreciate even more opportunity to be involved.

The acting headteacher effectively demonstrates clear leadership, commitment and determination to maintain high standards and improve key aspects of the school. The staff work energetically to support new initiatives focused on securing better outcomes for pupils. Together, they make a considerable contribution to driving the school forward. Governors are committed, well informed and provide an effective balance of support and challenge. Areas for improvement in the previous report have been successfully addressed and the school provides good value for money and is well placed to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Provision in the Foundation Stage is outstanding. Children make excellent progress during the year so that many children reach levels that are higher than expected for their age. This happens because learning is carefully planned through a range of child and teacher directed activities, provided with enthusiasm and expertise. Due to the effective induction programme, they settle quickly, showing enjoyment and developing independence. The support of the Year 6 buddies plays a big part in this process.

Teaching and learning are excellent. The indoor and outdoor environments are used well to provide a wide range of stimulating opportunities and fun learning tasks. Children are well cared for, guided and supported. Specific needs of individuals are considered; there are helpful support procedures and parents are fully involved and encouraged to participate in their child's education whenever possible. The Foundation Stage is very well led and managed by the Foundation Stage leader, ably supported by an effective team.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in Key Stage 1.
- Make sure teachers' marking provides clear guidelines for improvement so that pupils understand what they must do to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards are high. Pupils enter Reception with skills below those typical of their age and make excellent progress during the year. Progress in Key Stage 1 is satisfactory. Teachers' assessments in 2006 show that pupils reach average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. However, provisional assessments in 2007 show a slight dip but remain broadly average. This was due to changes in staffing and organisation that have now been resolved.

Progress is outstanding in Key Stage 2. Results of national tests for Year 6 pupils show standards have been significantly above average for several years in English, mathematics and science. In line with national trends, girls perform slightly better than boys. The school has introduced strategies to address this, including a new reading scheme and alternative approaches to writing which are helping boys, in particular, to improve. In 2006 and 2007, the school achieved or exceeded all of their challenging targets.

Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and make better progress than similar children in schools nationally. The more able children have some opportunities to extend their work, although this could be developed further.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. There is excellent development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding through regular opportunities for prayer, reflection and discussion. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary in lessons and around the school. Along with a tidy environment and excellent displays, this contributes to a good learning environment.

Through international links and links with local companies, the school provides helpful opportunities for pupils to learn about and appreciate other cultures. Circle time gives pupils the chance to say what they think and they value each person's contribution. The newly introduced creative curriculum is providing topics that are clearly interesting to the pupils and allows them to explore learning in a range of different ways. Pupils said that they like the lessons and parents report that their children enjoy school. As a result, attendance is above average.

The buddy scheme linking Year 6 pupils with children entering Reception, the peaceful problem solvers, play leaders and the prefect system give pupils a wide range of opportunities to take on real responsibilities. They thrive on this and provide excellent role models for younger pupils. Pupils said that their role has an impact so that other pupils are learning to be more considerate.

Pupils remind each other about keeping safe and are aware of the needs of those around them. They speak enthusiastically about staying healthy and know how they can help themselves in this. They said that they would like to have a bicycle shed so that they can cycle to school. They support a range of charities, as well as raising funds for some of their own important projects, such as equipment for the outdoor area.

The school council and class councils help to decide how to spend their own budgets and are involved in making decisions about improving the school. Pupils' academic and personal skills prepare them very well for their future learning and life as they move on to their secondary schools. Their awareness of their feelings is further strengthened through personal, social and health education. The school emphasises and values positive attitudes, giving of your best, cooperation and respect for each other, and the pupils are good ambassadors for this ethos.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Warm relationships and well planned lessons ensure that pupils enjoy learning. Teachers use probing questions to encourage pupils to clarify their thinking. With very good subject knowledge and clear aims, teachers ensure lessons are engaging for pupils and as one pupil stated on hearing what the task was, 'This is going to be cool'. A good variety of strategies, including paired work and some self and peer assessment are used to involve all pupils in learning. The use of interactive whiteboards is developing and pupils are keen to participate. There is good teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants, and pupils appreciate the support and encouragement they receive. Target setting has been implemented in some subjects, although this is not consistent, and not all children are clear about what the targets are or how to move forward to the next level. Marking does not always make it clear to pupils how to improve and this holds back progress in some classes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a broad and enriched curriculum. The strong focus on the core skills of literacy, numeracy and science is not at the expense of other subjects. Information and communication technology (ICT) is widely used to support the curriculum. The school also provides a wide range of additional activities which all help to stimulate interest and encourage learning. For example, the pupils speak highly of the educational visit to a Roman village which

is followed by a range of exciting topic work. The school has recently introduced a creative curriculum to support the development of a range of learning skills. Although in the early stages of development, work done so far is having a positive impact on the pupils' enthusiasm for learning. Strong provision for personal development contributes significantly to pupils' excellent personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, support and guidance are good and parents are highly appreciative of the way their children are looked after. Staff know pupils very well and react promptly to any concerns. Pupils' progress is monitored regularly and informally within lessons, which leads to appropriate support as necessary. The school provides a supportive environment in which pupils feel safe, secure and nurtured; they say they are confident about going to staff with any worries. Safeguarding and child protection policies are in place, as are risk assessments for outside visits and curriculum activities. Induction arrangements are well established and the buddy system helps to make this aspect exemplary. There are good arrangements to underpin the transition of pupils to the next stage of their education. Pupils are given opportunities to reflect on their progress at the end of lessons.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. Following the recent retirement of the headteacher, the acting headteacher has been able to ensure that the high quality of education has continued. She has accurately identified appropriate key priorities and begun the process of improving the curriculum to ensure enjoyment and enrichment. With a small staff, all teachers take on some aspect of management and they are focused on maximising learning opportunities, ably supported by the other staff.

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Governors have received appropriate training and are active partners in the school's general development. They are supportive, well informed and are consequently able to work effectively with the school. The staff and governors work as a team with pupils' best interests at heart and the school is well placed to improve 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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	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	2
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?	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 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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

18 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Patrick's Roman Catholic Primary School, County Durham, DH9 9BB

Following my visit to your school, I would like to thank you for the warm welcome you gave me. I was very impressed by your excellent behaviour and how polite and helpful you were; I particularly enjoyed chatting to so many of you at break and lunchtime.

Your school is a good school and there are many things to be proud of. I spent a lot of time finding out how well you are learning. In lessons, you listened carefully to your teachers and worked hard. By the end of Year 6 you get very good results in your tests, so well done! Keep trying your best!

You told me that you enjoyed coming to school and that the adults take good care of you. You have lots of opportunities to be responsible, such as through the school council, the buddies, the peaceful problem solvers and the prefects, all of which help everyone get along. You said how much you enjoyed going on all the interesting visits and trips which the school organises, and which help make lessons interesting. Your school is a friendly place which shows you how to care for each other and helps you gain confidence. I think your teachers care for you well and your teaching assistants also do lots to help you in the lessons. You are all very proud to be there.

Although I know you are doing really well, the school is going to make sure you respond to the marking your teachers do in your books so that you learn from what they are showing you. The school is also going to make sure you do just as well in Key Stage 1 as you do in Key Stage 2.

Congratulations on helping to make your school such a super place to be!

Andrew Saunders

Lead inspector