

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

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	114265
<b>Local Authority</b>	Durham
<b>Inspection number</b>	311538
<b>Inspection dates</b>	29–30 April 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Dean Jackson

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	164
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Father Michael Campion
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Gerrard Conor
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 January 2005
<b>School address</b>	Central Avenue Newton Aycliffe County Durham DL5 5NP
<b>Telephone number</b>	01325 300339
<b>Fax number</b>	01325 300339

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<b>Age group</b>	4-11
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

St Mary's VA RC Primary is a smaller than average school with 168 pupils from both Catholic and non-Catholic families. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also below average and there are no children with English as an additional language.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

St Mary's is a satisfactory school where pupils make sound progress in their academic work and good progress in their personal development. The school has a calm, safe and orderly environment and pupils enjoy being there. When pupils join the school, their attainment is below that expected for children of their age and they quickly reach the expected levels for their age. By the time pupils leave Year 6, their standards remain similar to the national averages, indicating satisfactory overall achievement. Recent measures to improve the rate of pupil progress, particularly in Key Stage 2, are positive but have not yet shown their full impact. More able pupils make slower progress in English than they do in other subjects, because the opportunities they are given to develop their writing in all areas of the curriculum are not sufficiently effective or challenging.

The school has introduced a number of measures to improve the quality of teaching and lessons have become more interesting as a result, with technology used well to support learning. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively throughout the school and the good progress that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make can be attributed to the high quality support they receive from teaching assistants. Sound leadership and management are strongly focused on raising attainment and subject leaders have a satisfactory understanding of what they need to do to increase rates of pupil progress. The school now collects plenty of useful information about individual pupils' progress and is able to intervene appropriately when individual pupils require additional support. However, the school's self-evaluation is not yet sufficiently rigorous. It does not accurately use all the information it collects to inform whole school development issues, such as fully meeting the needs of higher ability pupils. In addition, governors are not sufficiently involved in evaluating progress and determining future developments. This slows the effectiveness of school improvement initiatives and restricts the school's capacity to improve.

Parents are positive about all aspects of the school. They particularly appreciate how much their children enjoy school and how caring and friendly the staff are. A typical comment was, 'I am secure in the knowledge that my child is well cared for in a friendly and stimulating environment.' Pupils develop well in their confidence and social skills. They behave well and they have plenty of opportunity to work together as 'playground buddies' or school councillors, which they do in a mature and productive way. They cite the friendly atmosphere, the good range of extra-curricular activities and the fact that 'teachers are good at what they do and try to help you' as some of the reasons they like school. The curriculum supports pupils' good personal development well and provides plenty of opportunity for them to contribute to the community, for example. Pupils also have a say in which extra-curricular clubs are offered at the school and, as a consequence, a large number of pupils participate in these activities.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 2

Children start at the school with social and language skills which are typical for their age. They are not as well advanced, however, in other areas of their learning. They make good progress and by the time they start in Year 1 most have reached the expected levels in their development. This is because of good teaching, effective support and care and the good leadership and management of the Reception class. Children settle quickly and soon feel welcome and secure because of the very good transition arrangements with the Nursery class. They learn to share

and to be sensitive to other's feelings. They are encouraged to talk about their experiences and to listen when others are speaking. Children's progress is monitored carefully and good use is made of these assessments to structure learning activities to meet the needs of each child. There are extensive opportunities for children to play and learn together in class but opportunities to learn and explore outside are limited by the slow progress of the plan to develop an appropriate outdoor area.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve the rigour and accuracy of school self-evaluation.
- Improve the ability of pupils to write flexibly and accurately in all areas of the curriculum in order to improve standards in English.
- Ensure greater involvement of the Governing Body in evaluating the school's development.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Children enter the Foundation Stage with attainment that is below that expected for children of this age. They make good progress and leave the Foundation Stage with attainment broadly in line with the expectations of children this age.

In Key Stage 1, pupils continue to make good progress and reach broadly average standards. Test results at the end of Key Stage 1 have been broadly average, and sometimes better, over a number of years. In 2007, standards were higher in reading and writing than they were in mathematics.

Key Stage 2 pupils make satisfactory progress in mathematics and science. This has been reflected in the broadly average standards in the Year 6 tests for these subjects over recent years. Progress in English has been weaker. In 2007, this was mainly because a number of pupils, especially the higher ability pupils, made insufficient progress in writing and did not achieve the higher levels. However, new measures are beginning to have a positive impact. Evidence from the school's effective tracking system, assessment data and the quality of work seen during the inspection indicate that most pupils are currently making satisfactory progress.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Behaviour is good; pupils say they feel safe and that any occasional incidents of teasing or falling out are dealt with quickly and effectively by staff. Pupils know right from wrong and show sensitivity to those less fortunate than themselves. The older pupils take on responsibility by helping to care for the younger children and all are involved in fund raising and in charitable activities in the parish and the wider community. The school council is active in ensuring that pupils' views are heard and has been instrumental in securing improvements in lunch arrangements and the decoration of the toilets. Pupils understand how to stay fit and well; they eat healthily and take plenty of exercise. Attendance is average and pupils speak about their enjoyment of school and their liking for their teachers and the assistants. Pupils have the personal qualities to be successful in what they do because they are confident and self-reliant

and have increasing ability to work independently. Their satisfactory literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills ensure that they are prepared for the next stage of their education.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The teaching contains many strengths including teachers' good subject knowledge, comprehensive planning and preparation and the increasingly useful tracking of pupils' progress. Teachers effectively deploy the skilled teaching assistants who provide valuable support for all groups of pupils, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teachers use the interactive whiteboards well to enliven lessons and engage the pupils. However, the quality of pupils' learning remains broadly satisfactory as most of the new procedures introduced to support teaching have not yet had sufficient time to show their full impact upon pupils' progress. Standards of presentation and handwriting are variable and a number of pupils have still not developed their listening skills sufficiently, an issue from the last inspection. Throughout the school, there are occasions when teachers do not expect enough of pupils in their written work in different areas of the curriculum and writing in books is unfinished or of insufficient quantity.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets statutory requirements. Appropriate provision is in place to improve pupils' basic skills and also to extend their knowledge of the world. For example, older pupils improve their independent working skills and increase their understanding of the past by investigating the lives of prominent people. However, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to use their writing skills in all areas of the curriculum. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities which are well supported and these extend pupils' understanding and enjoyment of the work done in the classroom. A personal, social, health and citizenship programme caters well for pupils' personal development and their understanding that with rights come responsibilities. Extensive use is made of outside agencies to promote pupils' safety and well-being.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 2**

This aspect of the school's work is good. Christian beliefs and values underpin all activities and centre on the welfare of each pupil. As a result pupils feel well cared for and supported and know that their concerns will be heeded and resolved. They say that there is always someone to turn to if they feel uncertain or worried. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are in place. Very good use is made of outside agencies to support those who might be vulnerable and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. As a result these pupils make good progress in their personal and academic development. The school has improved its assessment and tracking procedures and these are now good. As a result, timely and appropriate advice and guidance is given to most pupils about their academic progress and additional help given when weaknesses are uncovered.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school is committed to equality of opportunity for every pupil and to ensuring their well-being. School self-evaluation, although satisfactory, lacks rigour, and key issues emerging from school results, such as the need to develop writing in Key Stage 2, are not sufficiently addressed in the school improvement plan. There have been satisfactory improvements overall since the last inspection although some issues have not been fully resolved. Aspects of the leadership and management of subjects are good. Subject leaders frequently assess the quality of pupils' work and they have been instrumental in implementing improved monitoring procedures, resulting in good guidance to pupils on how to improve their work. They have not yet, however, had the opportunity to monitor teaching on a regular basis in order to share good practice and so help to drive up standards. Governors are aware of their responsibilities and many are involved in the day-to-day life of the school. However, they are not closely involved in evaluating the school's progress and have limited influence in shaping future direction.

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**Annex A**

## Inspection judgements

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

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3
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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	3

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	3
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
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	3
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

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**Annex B**

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

1 May 2008

Dear Pupils

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

Thank you all for your friendliness and help when we visited your school. We were very impressed with your good behaviour, the ways in which you look after each other and the confident way in which you spoke to us whenever we needed to ask you any questions. Special thanks go to those pupils on the school council who had meetings with an inspector.

You told us that you enjoy school, people are friendly, your teachers are kind to you and that you feel safe. You said that if there were any problems, the teachers sort them out quickly and fairly. We agree with you and we feel that not only does your school gives you a satisfactory education, it provides you with many opportunities to play sport, stay healthy and join in with a number of activities in the local area. The teachers are checking on your progress carefully to see what you need to do next and those of you who sometimes find your work to be a little difficult receive plenty of help from all the adults in school.

Here are some of the things we have suggested your school could do better:

- Carefully look to decide which things the school is doing well and which things it needs to concentrate on even more.
- Help you to improve your writing in all subjects, like history and science, and not just in English.
- Make sure that all the adults who help to run the school, including the Governors, work closely together to make your school even better.

You can help by working hard and always doing your best. We hope that you will continue to enjoy school and we wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Dean Jackson

Lead inspector