

St John's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122305
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	314262
Inspection dates	4–5 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Moira Fitzpatrick

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	114
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Raymond Huntly
Headteacher	Mr Doug Borthwick
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2004
School address	Lisburn Street Alnwick Northumberland NE66 1UR
Telephone number	01665 602547
Fax number	01665 602547

Age group	3–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a much smaller than average school, where the majority of pupils are from a White British background. Nearly all have English as their first language. Fewer pupils than usual are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Currently there is a small number of looked after children in the school. In some years, there are high levels of pupil mobility because of the number of pupils from service families who move out of the area.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St John's is a good school, which is very highly regarded by parents and very much enjoyed by the children. Parents value the way it cares for their children in a 'happy, secure family setting', and enters into a positive partnership with them to support their children's learning. They feel that the school lives up to its motto, 'All are Welcome.' Inspectors agree that the care, guidance and support of pupils are good. The school successfully promotes the learning of all pupils, and effective guidance ensures that they achieve well regardless of their starting points. Carefully planned provision and well trained staff give good support to the most vulnerable pupils and help them develop confidence and self-esteem, so that they learn as well as their peers.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. The headteacher provides excellent spiritual guidance encouraging pupils to live their Catholic faith in all that they do. Pupils are courteous and considerate, and they show high levels of care for each other. Pupils work hard because they find lessons interesting and enjoy supporting each other in their learning. They are tolerant of differences and understand well the need to repair relationships and make friends. Older pupils relish the responsibilities they have and are always keen to volunteer for more, especially those which allow them to care for younger children. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe and lead healthy lifestyles, responding with enthusiasm to the many physical activities provided in and out of school. These excellent qualities and good basic skills prepare them extremely well for the future.

Standards are above average and pupils' achievement is good. By the end of Year 2 pupils reach above average standards in writing and mathematics. Standards in reading are beginning to rise because of the school's actions to improve this aspect of learning. By Year 4, pupils usually exceed the expectation for their age in English, mathematics and science because they have continued to make good progress from the end of Year 2. Pupils' good progress is based on a well planned, varied curriculum and good teaching which take account of pupils' needs and set good levels of challenge for all, regardless of ability. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning, as do teachers' careful marking and the advice given to pupils on how to improve their work.

The school is well led and managed. A strong collegiate approach makes good use of the talents of all staff and governors, and enables all to be involved in evaluating and improving the work of the school. The headteacher and deputy headteacher give very good direction to the work of the school. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection including a rise in standards, the establishment of a Nursery on site and an increase in the number of well trained assistants who support pupils' learning. As a result of these improvements and the school's consequent growing reputation in the community, school numbers have almost doubled.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children start Nursery with skills that are usually below what is typical for their age. They make good progress in the Nursery and the Reception classes so that by the time they start in Year 1, standards in all areas of learning are usually at nationally expected levels. Children in both classes work in harmony, learn to share and choose from an interesting range of activities. Personal and social development is given a high priority, as is the learning of the initial sounds of words and handwriting skills in Reception. Children have regular access to a shared outdoor

area in order to develop their physical skills and learn outdoors. Teaching is good; resources and activities are exciting and motivate children really well. Parents are very pleased with the caring introduction their children have to school. While both classes make good provision for children's learning, joint planning is needed to ensure that the best progress possible is made by all children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve planning to ensure that there is clear continuity and progression from the start to the end of the Foundation Stage.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good and standards are above average. Pupils make good progress from their starting points at the beginning of Year 1. By the end of Year 2 standards are above average in writing and mathematics and broadly average in reading. Standards in reading are improving because of the actions taken by the school in the last year. The school's performance in national tests at the end of Year 2 has improved steadily since the previous inspection. By Year 4, pupils usually reach standards that are above those expected for their age in English, mathematics and science. Pupils' standards reflect the good progress they have continued to make from their test results at the end of Year 2. Pupils of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress in their learning because they have their needs identified early and are well supported.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils are enthusiastic about school and show very positive attitudes to learning. They enjoy school and attend regularly. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a particular strength leading to a close, cohesive and supportive community. Pupils live out their faith while showing tolerance and understanding of other faiths and backgrounds. Clear and consistent expectations and positive relationships lead to consistently good conduct. Pupils feel safe. They collaborate well and support each other in and out of the classroom by sharing and being kind to each other. Peer massage sessions add to their general well-being and help to develop trust. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles and possess a good understanding of the importance of healthy diets and taking regular exercise. Pupils thrive on additional responsibilities. Those on the recently established school council take their responsibilities extremely seriously. Pupils are very well prepared for the future having excellent personal and social skills, and good English, mathematical and information and communication technology (ICT) skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers' planning is based on accurate assessment of pupils' needs and usually takes good account of their interests and stage of development. Pupils are highly motivated by the activities and tasks that teachers set for them and say that teachers make learning fun. Consequently, they work hard towards their targets in lessons, making good use of time to achieve and sometimes exceed the high expectations their teachers have of them. Teachers set a brisk pace

in lessons. Good use is made of questions to develop pupils' thinking. Pupils enjoy sharing ideas and learning from each other. Teachers mark pupils' work conscientiously and give positive feedback and advice on how and what to improve. Older pupils are increasingly evaluating their own work and some commented that this can 'spur you on because you can see for yourself where you need to get better.' Although at an early stage of development, this practice is helping to increase pupils' rate of progress. Since the previous inspection there has been a significant increase in the number of teaching assistants. They are well trained and give good quality support to pupils' learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

There is good curriculum provision for developing basic skills, including ICT. Actions taken to improve reading and writing skills have been successful in raising standards and increasing the number of pupils who attain the higher levels. The school is beginning to develop links between subjects to help pupils understand that ideas developed in one subject strengthen learning in other areas. The needs of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are met through appropriately structured programmes, while in lessons, more able pupils are set more demanding tasks.

The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities including drama, sport, music and chess. The school further enhances the curriculum through visits, visitors, links with other schools and external agencies. Personal, social and health education is of a high quality and ensures that pupils understand how to stay safe. Provision to develop social skills helps boost self-confidence and integrate pupils fully into the school community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school is calm and well ordered. The health and safety of pupils have a high profile and full risk assessments are carried out whenever needed. Child protection procedures are fully implemented and safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements. Pupils know how to keep safe and feel valued because teachers know them individually, take a great interest in them and are fully committed to their welfare. Pupils readily explain how adults help them and say they always have someone to confide in if they are troubled. The school encourages pupils to eat healthily and the school lunch menu reflects this priority.

Pupils are well informed about their learning targets, progress and future options. Older pupils are beginning to assess their work and look for ways to improve. The school works well with parents and other agencies to ensure pupils make good progress. Parents value the care the school provides. 'I can only praise this small, family-orientated school,' was a typical comment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leaders at all levels are involved in evaluating the work of the school and in identifying areas for improvement. Evaluation is accurate and actions taken to bring about improvement are effective. Occasionally, the school's challenging targets are missed, particularly when a number of pupils leave the school during Year 4, as happened in the last school year. The strong staff team is very well led by the headteacher and deputy headteacher who share a clear vision for

high standards in academic achievement and in the care of the children. Consequently, the school has made good improvement since the previous inspection. The school ensures that the needs of different groups of pupils are well known and acted upon. Provision for equality is firmly underpinned by policies and practices which ensure that minority ethnic pupils, boys and girls, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have equal access to all that the school has to offer.

The headteacher has shown exceptional determination in successfully establishing Nursery education as part of the school's provision. This provision, combined with the school's good standing in the community, has resulted in school numbers almost doubling since the last inspection. Governance is good. Governors have first-hand knowledge of the school and are very supportive of staff and pupils. Strategic planning is good. The school has good capacity for further improvement and gives good value for money.

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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	2
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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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	1

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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

6 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School, Northumberland, NE66 1UR

Thank you for the lovely welcome you gave us when we visited your school. Thank you too for the help you gave us in finding out about your school. We agree with you that it is a good school, and that your teachers care for you well. We also agree that your learning is fun and interesting. We think that is why you work so hard and make such good progress. You are lucky to have such skilled teachers who plan exciting activities and encourage you to learn for yourselves. They also plan some good visits and after-school clubs so you can develop your special interests and talents.

Your behaviour and the way you care for each other stood out during our visit. We think that your personal qualities, such as consideration for others, and taking responsibility for yourselves, your friends and people in the wider community, are excellent. It is not surprising that your families and your teachers are very proud of you. We could see why you enjoy coming to school every day because you do such lovely things.

We were pleased to see that the school now has its own Nursery so that young children do not have too many changes when they start school. Teachers will be making a few changes here to help the youngest children get the benefit of being in one unit.

Thank you again for supporting the school motto – 'All are Welcome.' We certainly felt as if we were and enjoyed our visit immensely.

With all good wishes to you for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs M Fitzpatrick, Lead Inspector

Mr B Dorans