

St Robert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122312
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	314264
Inspection dates	23–24 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Joan Elton

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	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	126
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father John Cooper
Headteacher	Mrs Nicola Langan
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2004
School address	Oldgate Morpeth Northumberland NE61 1QF
Telephone number	01670 512031
Fax number	01670 513439

Age group	4–9
Inspection dates	23–24 January 2008
Inspection number	314264

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St. Robert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School is a small town school where socio-economic conditions are above average. A very small percentage of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. Of those from minority ethnic heritages, a small number are at the early stages of learning English. Most children attend the independent nursery on site. There is provision for before and after school care. The school has been awarded the Healthy Schools Award and National School Sports 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 Robert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided School is a good school with some outstanding features. These include pupils' personal development, the care, guidance and support given to pupils and the quality of its curriculum. The school's self-evaluation is accurate, although rather modest in some of the judgements it makes about the quality of its work. It has addressed effectively all issues identified at the time of the last inspection.

The school is much loved by pupils and parents. 'It is a warm, caring environment, where children feel secure and valued,' was a typical comment. They appreciate 'the emphasis the school places on literacy and numeracy, and the encouragement of good manners and respect for others'. All staff are appreciated 'from caretaker to headteacher', whilst the range of exciting activities to engage pupils is described as 'dynamic'.

Children enter Reception with skills above those typical for their age. They develop skills at a good rate and make good progress. By the end of Reception, their development surpasses that expected for their age in all aspects of learning. Good progress is maintained in Key Stages 1 and 2 so that by the time they leave the school, pupils are mostly performing well above what is usual for their age group. This good progress is the result of good provision and management. Careful match of work to abilities and interests, high expectations and very efficient classroom management typify the good teaching. The excellent curriculum is broad, balanced and vibrant: it gives high priority to the development of basic literacy and numeracy skills alongside the successful development of pupils' personal, social and health education.

The pupils are highly motivated, courteous and exceptionally well behaved. They understand how to keep happy, healthy and safe; they enjoy responsibility and collaborate very well on fund-raising and projects with other schools. The school gives them excellent support and guidance. Pupils are involved in the process of their own assessment and know what they can do well and what they can do to improve. Pupils' progress is tracked most effectively so that problems can be identified quickly and appropriate support put in place. The school works very well with outside agencies, especially to ensure that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as their peers.

The school is well led and managed. The staff work well as a team and ensure there is good progression between teachers in the same class and between classes so that achievement is consistently good. The headteacher, staff and governors have a clear view for development. They are aware not only of the school's many strengths but of its areas for development. They know they must improve boys' writing and the outdoor environment for Reception and all other pupils. They are regularly reviewing the available space for school, church and parish activities and the potential for development within financial constraints. Reception children need space and equipment for more vigorous play and curriculum development. Pupils in Years 1 to 4 have restricted access to ball games and other more robust play during play and lunchtime periods. Overall, the school has a good capacity for further improvement and currently provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good. Children make very good progress in all areas of learning. They are happy, confident and quickly adjust to efficient routines. Teaching is good

with some outstanding elements. A highly skilled team of staff create a warm and stimulating environment where children experience a wide range of imaginative activities. These ensure their achievement of nationally agreed early learning goals and progress beyond. Assessment is continuous, detailed and very effective. Individual needs are quickly identified and appropriate programmes put in place. Basic skills are very well taught because there is much consolidation using a wide range of strategies and resources throughout the day. Behaviour is excellent because staff have high expectations, set very good examples and provide a curriculum which is challenging. Communication with parents is very effective. Parents know what their child is learning and how he/she is progressing. They are also guided on how to develop their child's learning at home. The Foundation Stage is very well led and managed. There is excellent liaison with the Sure Start Nursery. Reception and Nursery children share the same outdoor play area but this does not fully meet the curricular needs of Reception children, who require more space for vigorous play and more demanding climbing and mobile apparatus.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the standards of boys' writing across the school.
- Improve the outdoor learning facilities for Reception children.
- Develop the outdoor area for pupils in Years 1 to 4.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good. Their current work and the school's data show that standards are well above average. When children begin school, the majority have skills above those typical for this age group. They make good progress and, by the end of Reception, most exceed the nationally agreed early learning goals.

Pupils continue to make good progress in Key Stage 1 and many are currently performing well above national standards. Since 2003, all national assessment results have been above or well above the national average. In 2003 and 2006, results were exceptionally high. In 2007 reading and writing were above average with mathematics broadly average. In Key Stage 2, good progress continues, with many pupils currently working well beyond typical standards for their age. This is consistent with the 2006 assessment data and is an improvement on 2007. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as their peers because of regular monitoring and appropriate catch-up programmes. Girls tend to outperform boys, particularly in writing, although this broadly reflects the national picture.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils' behaviour is excellent and pupils have very positive attitudes to learning as their excellent and much improved attendance demonstrates. All pupils enjoy school. They appreciate their friendly teachers, who make learning fun. Pupils know how to keep healthy, safe and happy. Although the limited outdoor area restricts some activities, pupils value the new physical education equipment and speak with enthusiasm about dance and music festivals, school football matches and their community garden. A highlight of the year is the residential visit to Robin Wood at Alston. The dangers of Internet chat rooms are well understood and pupils can explain the school's precautions.

Pupils relish responsibilities such as play buddies, dinner helpers and register monitors. They want to help others and play an active part in church and community projects, such as fund-raising and sponsorship of a South American child. They appreciate that most pupils are considerate and bullying is rare. The school council gives everyone the chance to represent others and to express opinions which will be listened to. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school's Catholic values, nurtured through links with the local church and middle school, are a significant influence on pupils' spiritual development. Excellent personal development and well above average academic skills give pupils outstanding preparation for their future education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. The hard working and talented staff work very well as a team, monitoring each other's lessons and sharing information and ideas. This ensures consistency in lessons and a positive response by pupils to a variety of staff. Analysis of pupils' work reveals good continuous progress across the subject range in all classes. Features of outstanding lessons include very clear explanations using appropriate technical language, well prepared and imaginative resources, well consolidated learning and the effective use of pupil collaboration. As a result, pupils' interest and concentration are well sustained throughout these lessons and pupils are motivated and supported towards further challenge. Staff use homework very well to support classwork. Their marking of pupils' work is constructive and gives very good guidance to pupils on how they can improve. Relationships in classes are very good. Pupils are relaxed and confident they will make good progress. Overall, work matches ability and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported by highly skilled teaching assistants. Reading is particularly well taught but boys' writing is not as successful as that of girls. Work scrutiny shows boys have excellent ideas but often pace is unvaried and there is not enough character development, description or reflection.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding, offering excitement and depth of study to all pupils. Work scrutiny reveals pupils have explored a broad range of topics, using investigation, practical work and role-play. Basic skills, such as literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are very well developed across the curriculum. Staff carefully assess and mark work across the subject range and thereby sustain high expectations and achievement. Wherever possible, teachers make intelligent links between subjects. This happened in a Year 4 lesson, where science results were recorded in block graph form and then presented using a software package. The teaching of two foreign languages, special project weeks and an effective range of visits and visitors enrich the curriculum greatly. There is also a very good range of after-school clubs. Break times are well organised so that pupils have a good variety of equipment and activity.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Staff training in health, safety and child protection is regularly updated. Procedures for safeguarding pupils and risk assessment are in place. Pupils feel safe in school and, because staff know their pupils and families very well, they are able to notice particular needs quickly. Guidance for personal development is very effective. Pupils are developing into active citizens. Academic guidance is excellent. The school scrupulously maps pupils' progress each term across the national curriculum levels of attainment. If individuals do not make the expected progress, the school responds with appropriate programmes of study and/or contacts outside agencies. Pupils know the purpose of each lesson and can assess their own competence against criteria. Much time is spent explaining to pupils how they can improve their work and this advice is very well supported by a clear marking policy. As a result, pupils are quite clear what they do well and what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is highly committed to the development of each individual pupil and to his or her place in the community of church, school and parish. To this end, she has led a very successful review of all aspects of school life, which has improved the effectiveness and accountability of educational provision. The headteacher is ably assisted by a very experienced and knowledgeable deputy headteacher and a strong team of staff, who are committed to pupil achievement. All staff have a good overview of the school and use data well to set challenging targets for pupils, which have raised standards. Governance is good. Governors have clearly defined responsibilities and a very secure knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for development. They are highly committed to the school's success and frequently grapple with tight budget constraints to improve resources. They are kept very well informed by the headteacher and local authority and they gather other evidence by visits to the school and by questionnaires to pupils and parents. Their knowledge of data is developing and some governors have observed lessons and spoken to coordinators. When making any decision, they work well with the staff team to access as much information as they can and endeavour to incorporate fairness and the principles of best value when there are financial implications. They are very aware of the school's current concerns for parking and outdoor space and are reviewing the needs of school, church and parish to resolve these.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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	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	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?	1
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

25 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Robert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School, Northumberland, NE61 1QF

Thank you for making me feel so welcome in your school. I enjoyed listening to your views, observing your lessons and reading your work.

Your school is a good school with some outstanding features. It is well led and managed by your headteacher, teachers and governors. The care, guidance and support you receive from your teachers are excellent and have ensured that you are happy, healthy and safe. I was most impressed with your excellent behaviour. You are most considerate and enjoy helping others. You take responsibilities very seriously and perform them very well. I agreed with you when you told me your teachers are friendly and make learning fun. You are learning your basic skills very well and appreciate the excellent range of topics and activities your teachers devise for you. Your progress is good because of good teaching and learning. Your assessment and class work also confirm that you are achieving well.

I have asked your school to do three things to make it even better.

- Improve boys' writing.
- Improve the outdoor learning environment for Reception children.
- Improve the outdoor area for Years 1 to 4.

I hope you will continue to attend well and to enjoy school. You can help your teachers and yourself by taking care with homework and by making reading a hobby.

I send you all my good wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs. J. Elton

Lead inspector