

St Paul's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122310
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	380449
Inspection dates	12–13 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Clive Petts

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	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	145
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Simon Lerche
Headteacher	Felicity Penny
Date of previous school inspection	19 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors visited eight lessons and observed six class teachers. They held meetings with members of the governing body and spoke to staff and groups of pupils. They analysed 97 questionnaire responses from parents and carers and looked at questionnaires from staff and pupils. The inspectors also looked at: pupils' progress and achievement data; intervention and support programmes; documents relating to the safeguarding of pupils; school policies; and plans for improving the quality of learning. They scrutinised pupils' current and past work and spoke to the local authority's school improvement partner to discuss her reports.

The inspectors reviewed many aspects of the school's work and looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The quality of learning and the rate of progress made by pupils in Years 1 to 4, including boys and those who are more able, especially developing their writing skills.
- The quality of teaching and its effectiveness in accelerating pupils' progress and raising achievement and attainment.
- The effectiveness of senior leadership in bringing about further improvements in the quality of learning and sustaining the school's existing improvements.

Information about the school

St Paul's is a smaller than average voluntary aided first school. The school is federated with St Peter's Middle School and St Benet's Biscop High School. The middle school and St Paul's operate with one headteacher and governing body, but are two separate schools. The Year 3 and Year 4 pupils are taught at the St Peter's site. The privately-run St Paul's Pre-School shares an Early Years Foundation Stage facility with the school. The pre-school provision is subject to a separate inspection and will receive its own inspection report. Nearly all pupils are from a White British heritage and very few speak English as an additional language. A well-below average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average, with very few pupils with a statement of educational needs.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good and constantly improving school, as a consequence of the outstanding drive and ambition of the headteacher. She is effectively supported by an astutely-led governing body which is committed to high-quality partnership working. Almost all parents are happy with their children's school experiences. They particularly appreciate how very effectively their children are kept safe. Pupils agree and all state that they feel extremely safe. One parent comment, 'My child loves every day at school so much he runs into school', sums up the views of most parents.

Most children start school with skills and experience broadly typical for their age, although communication skills are often a weakness. Pupils achieve well to reach above-average attainment by the end of Year 4; attainment is higher in reading and mathematics than in writing. Although this represents good progress overall, progress is variable in Years 1 and 2. Positive action taken by the school has improved writing skills considerably, especially those of boys and the more able. This is because more interesting approaches are successfully capturing interest and stimulating creative writing. As a consequence, an increasing proportion of pupils are on course to reach higher levels in writing. Yet, expectations of what all pupils can achieve are not always high enough. Those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress, because the support they receive is effective. Pupil progress information is regularly collected and accurate, which adds to the drive to accelerate progress. However, this information is not used systematically by teachers to tailor activities to meet individual needs and abilities. Pupils enjoy their lessons as the majority of teaching is good, but there are occasions when demands made of pupils' thinking are not consistently high enough. Marking is helpful, although it does not always provide each pupil with written feedback which spells out clear steps for improvement. Pupils' good and often thoughtful and considerate behaviour, around school and in lessons, reflects their positive attitude to learning. Pupils report that bullying is rare.

Senior leaders are determined to accelerate the rate of improvement and eradicate inconsistencies in the quality of pupils' learning. Concerted action has improved the richness of pupils' learning experiences. Open and honest self-evaluation accurately identifies strengths and key actions for improvement. Middle leadership has been improved and is increasingly proactive, adding to the drive for improvement. Consequently, the school has a good and strengthening capacity for continued improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to accelerate the rate of pupils' progress and boost their achievement, especially in Year 1 and Year 2 by:
 - raising expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - using progress information to provide activities which more closely match the needs and abilities of individual pupils and present greater challenge.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - providing more tasks and activities that use thought-provoking approaches that excite and inspire pupils
 - ensuring that teachers' written feedback to pupils on how to improve their work is clear and precise.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' progress and their achievement are good from their starting points. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning and become increasingly confident, independent learners as they move through the school. Their attendance is above average. Progress rates are accelerating. In lessons learning is becoming more active and thought-provoking, although rates do vary across age groups, especially in Years 1 and 2. Inspection evidence, confirmed by school information, shows that pupils make consistently good progress in Years 3 and 4. Achievement gaps, such as in writing and between boys and girls, are being systematically closed, because teaching captures interest and questioning challenges pupils' thinking. Evidence from lesson observations indicate increased proportions of pupils are now reaching higher levels, including in their writing. Occasionally, activities are not always matched closely enough to meet individual abilities, needs and interests, and questioning does not always encourage pupils to think for themselves. Consequently, progress is slower and more variable in these lessons.

Good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is reflected in the pupils' positive relationships with each other and adults. One pupil's remark, 'If you are stuck with your work teachers always help', echoes the view of most pupils. Their behaviour is good with much sensible behaviour in classrooms. Pupils respond really well to the positive role models that staff provide. They are encouraged to reflect upon their actions and listen to and value each other's opinions, which help them to develop a good grasp of social and moral issues. They willingly take on responsibilities across the site, such as organising a litter pick around the site. Their good academic skills and increasing confidence in using their initiative prepares pupils well for the next stages of their learning.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2

¹The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching and learning is good, with examples of more imaginative approaches which inspire pupils' thinking, for example, using the natural environment to encourage their creative writing. Classrooms are friendly places and are increasingly vibrant, reflecting the headteacher's drive to enliven the quality of learning. When assessment information is used to tailor activities, pinpoint gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding and devise thought-provoking open-ended questions, the rate of pupils' progress quickens. For example, pupils were observed confidently describing their feelings when they discovered that the newspaper article detailed a theft from an ambulance. When progress is slower, activities often lack variety and challenge and classroom routines are not well enough established, for example, when sitting on the carpet answering questions in turn. Sometimes too much time is spent on the same task leading to individual pupils becoming restless. Marking is systematic and positive, but pupils are not given a clear sense of what exactly they need to do to improve through feedback.

The good curriculum is being systematically enriched as opportunities are developed to present activities in more imaginative ways. For example, visits to nearby Plessey Woods Country Park and Woodhorn Colliery help bring learning to life. This all adds to pupils' interest, enjoyment and achievement. Activities designed to develop personal skills and extend pupils' experiences, such as participation in a residential visit, are having a very positive impact. The excellent partnership working adds to the richness of experience, for example by providing opportunities to speak Spanish and participating in Show Racism the Red Card.

The good care, guidance and support are clear strengths of school life. They ensure that pupils of all abilities and backgrounds can make the best of opportunities and achieve success. The school can point to some impressive examples in helping pupils overcome difficulties and barriers to their learning. Excellent links with specialist support staff enable personalised support to be provided for pupils and their families, some of whom are vulnerable as a result of their circumstances.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3

The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher is an effective driving force in the school, establishing high expectations for both pupils and staff. The positive and very inclusive climate for learning infuses the whole school, because senior leaders have energised the commitment of the whole staff to improving the quality of the pupils' learning experiences. The school's self-evaluation is accurate, so that unevenness in the rates of pupil progress and achievement, especially in writing and for the more-able pupils and boys are being addressed successfully. Robust systems are in place to check how well pupils are doing and the developing confidence and expertise in using this information is evident in the best lessons. However, inconsistencies remain when using progress information to add to the variety, challenge and pace of learning in lessons.

The chair of governor's comments, 'We know where we are at', and 'We ask challenging questions', reveals the proactive role of the governing body in shaping the strategic direction of the school and the wider federation. The effective engagement of parents and carers can be seen in the positive relationships most have with staff. The close links with the local community, parishes and nearby schools is evident in the strong sense of belonging all have. The school adopts good procedures for safeguarding which fully meet requirements and include secure child protection practice. Community cohesion is promoted well with a developing range of experiences for pupils of the diversity that exists in the world around them. This includes supporting the world's poorest children through Cafod, the international aid agency, to develop 'one world-ness'. The improving consistency in the rates of pupils' progress and rising attainment, illustrate the school's commitment to promoting equal opportunity effectively.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The excellent links with the pre-school provision enable children to settle happily and quickly in the friendly reception atmosphere. On entry, skills and experience are broadly those expected for their age. Despite their confidence and positive attitudes, communication skills are often underdeveloped. As children develop, the large majority make good progress working towards the goals expected of them for their age by the time they enter Year 1. In all activities, whether indoors or outdoors or working with pre-school children, they behave well and show a developing grasp of right and wrong. They are encouraged to work independently and think for themselves, for example using computer technology to plan a route to a swing for Flump, the puppy dog. Yet, when outside opportunities are missed to challenge children's thinking even more by enabling them to explore, act out roles and investigate things for themselves.

Children regularly practise the use of sounds and letters in fun ways to accelerate early reading and writing skills. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to apply their skills intensely across all learning activities and tasks. Welfare requirements are fully met ensuring that all children are kept safe and happy. Regular observations and reliable assessment of children's development are assembled in an individual learning journey record. This enables accurate judgements of the children's development to be made. Good links with parents and carers support children's development well, although these links could be exploited even more to add to the richness of the children's learning and development. The recent improvements to provision, amalgamating both reception and pre-school in the same facility, reflect the drive and ambition of leadership and management to provide uninterrupted learning for children.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Just under two-thirds of parents and carers returned the questionnaires to express their views of the school. This is well above the national average level of returns for primary schools. Almost all parents and carers are happy with their children's school experience and the vast majority feel that their children are kept safe. A few parents and carers expressed concerns about how the school deals with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors judged behaviour to be good and saw some considerate and sensible pupil behaviour in lessons and at play. They observed teachers dealing with any minor incidents effectively. A very few parents spoke of concerns about the quality and management of learning in reception. The significant improvements recently made, successfully integrating the privately run pre-school provision with reception, reflect the management's drive and ambition to established seamless Early Years Foundation Stage provision. In those reception lessons observed, children

were seen making good progress as a result of the good teaching, learning and support in a happy, friendly environment.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Paul's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspector received 97 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 145 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	55	57	38	39	2	2	2	2
The school keeps my child safe	61	63	35	36	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	36	37	52	54	7	7	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	39	40	47	48	8	8	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	47	48	41	42	7	7	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	38	39	42	43	14	14	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	32	33	61	63	3	3	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well-prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	40	41	51	53	4	4	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	37	38	50	52	7	7	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	27	28	47	48	13	13	4	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	28	29	52	54	11	11	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	40	41	47	48	8	8	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	46	47	44	45	6	6	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Sixth-form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



14 September 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Paul's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School,
Cramlington, NE23 6DF**

I want to thank you all for the warm and friendly welcome that you gave the other inspector and me when we visited your school. We thoroughly enjoyed our time talking to you.

St Paul's is a good and improving school, which has a number of strengths. Your school enjoys excellent partnership working with other local schools. This helps to make your work more interesting. We were pleased by your sensible and responsible behaviour and the good care taken of you all. You obviously feel extremely safe and happy because of this. You understand well the benefits that a healthy lifestyle can bring. You take pride contributing to school improvement and enthusiastically join in all school activities. Your school is taking positive action to improve and this can be seen in your faster progress and improving skills, especially for boys and in your writing.

We have asked your headteacher, staff and the governing body to look at more ways of helping you to improve your work and make even faster progress. We would like staff to use the information they have on how well you are doing to arrange activities which can excite and interest you more. We have asked that when marking your work, you are provided with more detailed help to improve. We have also asked that staff expect more of you and make your work more demanding. Lastly, we have asked that teachers make certain that your tasks are even more thought-provoking.

You can play your part by working as hard as you can. Thank you for helping with this inspection.

Best wishes for your future.

Yours sincerely

Mr Clive Petts
Lead inspector

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