

St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122369
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	363954
Inspection dates	7–8 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Moira Fitzpatrick

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	339
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Mary Pyle
Headteacher	Mr Alan Hodgson
Date of previous school inspection	27 March 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 21 lessons and observed 17 teachers. They held meetings with staff, members of the governing body and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked closely at documentation including the school's development plan, assessment and tracking data, teachers' planning and safeguarding policies and procedures. The responses in 92 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, and those returned by staff and pupils were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- If provision is meeting the needs of all groups of pupils so that they make at least good progress.
- Why pupils with special educational needs make consistently good or better progress through to the end of Year 6.
- If the gap in performance between English and mathematics is being narrowed by the end of Year 6.
- The extent to which staff and governors contribute to improving the school.

Information about the school

The school is an average size for schools of this type. It serves a predominantly White British community. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, though there is a higher-than-average proportion with a statement of special educational needs. The school was awarded Arts College status in 2008. It also holds numerous awards including Healthy School status, the British Council International School Award and Artsmark Gold.

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 school where pupils make good progress in their learning and achieve well. Some aspects of the school's work are outstanding because the headteacher and the recently expanded senior leadership team have given a very good lead in developing the school since the previous inspection. The award of Arts College status has given a great impetus to music and the arts, which provide numerous opportunities for pupils to recognise and develop their talents and interests. The school's sustained above-average performance in national tests and the outstanding outcomes for pupils demonstrate that it has a good capacity to improve further. The school has an accurate picture of its strengths and areas for improvement. While school self-evaluation is well distributed among staff, there is not sufficient emphasis on capturing the best practice in learning and teaching by subject leaders through a range of monitoring activities, so that pupils benefit from consistently good and better teaching. This has led to inconsistencies in practice and a variation in outcomes for pupils, for example, between English and mathematics. Leadership in mathematics is satisfactory, but does not evaluate provision sufficiently to discover why progress for pupils is satisfactory rather than good.

Pupils' attainment is above average overall at the end of Year 6 and Year 8. It is significantly above average in English and broadly average in mathematics. In art, music and science pupils attain above the level expected for their age and make better than expected progress. Teaching and learning are good, and in some subjects, regularly outstanding. This occurs where teachers make accurate assessments of pupils' learning and plan lessons that will motivate and challenge them. In other lessons assessment information is not so well used. A well-planned and varied curriculum includes many opportunities for enrichment through excellent links with other schools and organisations. Excellent care, guidance and support ensure that pupils feel very safe and happy in school, and are able to learn in a secure, caring environment. Support systems ensure outstanding equality of opportunity by removing barriers to learning so that all pupils achieve equally well. Pupils' excellent behaviour and contribution to the community make a significant addition to their learning and the sense of well-being that pupils enjoy. They show an excellent understanding and acceptance of healthy lifestyles. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to their own and wider communities through school-to-school contacts, fund-raising, entertaining the local community and links with international schools. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school continues to find new ways of extending pupils' contact with the wider world to develop their understanding of diversity and their tolerance of difference. The school's promotion of community cohesion is outstanding.

The governing body challenges and supports the school effectively. It monitors the budget carefully and has ensured that value for money is outstanding. Links with parents and

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other partners are excellent and make a significant contribution to both the spirit of the school and the quality of pupils' learning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the leadership and management of mathematics so that pupils' progress and attainment match that in English by the end of Year 6 by:
 - rapidly improving the rigour and effectiveness of teachers' assessment of pupils' learning
 - ensuring that teachers use the information from assessments to plan tasks that motivate and challenge pupils
 - rapidly improving the quality of teaching so that learning is more active and investigative to enable pupils of all abilities reach their full potential.
- Review and extend the monitoring and evaluation activities of subject leaders so that:
 - they are clear about their role, the scope of their monitoring activities and how these contribute to school improvement
 - they capture good practice in teaching, assessment and planning the next steps in learning
 - they are provided with opportunities for sharing the best practice with colleagues so that pupils enjoy more consistency in their lessons.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils enjoy learning, and all that the school has to offer. They are keen to please their teachers and do well, so they work hard. When pupils work collaboratively, lessons buzz with activity. Many examples of this were seen during the inspection. In English, art and music lessons the pace of learning was increased by pupils' enthusiasm for their tasks and the way they could learn from each other. In other lessons, for example in mathematics, teachers sometimes talk for too long or the tasks they set are mundane, offering no scope for creativity or practical activity. Pupils only make satisfactory progress in such lessons and their enjoyment of learning is reduced.

Pupils' excellent behaviour makes a positive contribution to learning as well as creating a calm and welcoming atmosphere in the school. Pupils say they feel very safe and secure in school because they have been taught to assess risks for themselves and they trust teachers to look after them and deal with any concerns they may have. They adopt a healthy lifestyle; the vast majority who live in Hexham walk to school and they enjoy snacks from the fresh fruit stall run by the school council. Pupils contribute exceptionally well to their own and other communities. They are active, caring fund-raisers, who decide each year which charities they will support. The school council represents pupils' views at town council meetings, so they are well-informed about local issues. Their links with international schools further develop their sense of citizenship and enhance their understanding of different societies and cultures. They develop a very good understanding of differences between people and learn tolerance and respect for others. By the time they

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leave the school they are well-prepared for the future with excellent personal qualities and good basic skills.

Overall, pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress and achieve well. However, there are marked differences in how well they learn and make progress in different subjects. In English, pupils of all abilities make very good and often excellent progress from broadly average starting points in Year 5. By the end of Year 6 and in Year 8 their attainment is significantly above average in the subject. Progress in mathematics is more often satisfactory, especially for very able and lower attaining pupils. They do not all reach the levels of which they are capable by the end of Year 6, where attainment is average, though more do so by the end of Year 8.

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
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	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
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	1

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

How effective is the provision?

The best teaching is based on regular and thorough assessments of pupils' learning. In lessons that are good and better, teachers use assessment information well to plan a good level of challenge. Tasks are well matched to pupils' abilities and fire them with determination to do well. Several examples of outstanding teaching in English, art and music were seen where pupils sustained concentration for long periods because they were clear about what they needed to do to succeed. They were very well prepared to do their best and delighted with their efforts by the end of the lesson. Where assessment of

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learning is not based on regular, close evaluation of pupils' progress, and relies on commercial assessment systems, as in mathematics, then tasks do not take into account sufficiently the individual needs of pupils. The result is that there is not enough support for lower attaining pupils or sufficient challenge for the most able or sufficient opportunities for more active and investigative learning. Support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is good overall and excellent in English lessons where teaching assistants are well briefed and teachers are alert to individual needs. The assessment of pupils' learning ranges from exemplary practice in English to satisfactory in mathematics and the school, rightly, has improving the consistency of assessment and its use as a priority this year, especially in mathematics.

The curriculum is adapted extremely well for pupils in English and satisfactorily in mathematics. The needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are very well met so that they often exceed their targets in reading and writing. The school's specialist status in the arts makes a huge contribution to enriching pupils' enjoyment of learning, enhancing their skills and inspiring their ambitions. Pupils' high-quality art is well-displayed around the school, which, together with the frequent sounds of instrument practice and pupils' singing, reinforces the importance and value of this aspect of the school's work. Extensive enrichment programmes, which are well-supported by pupils, contribute to their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Staff know pupils and their families well. This is the foundation of the outstanding care that pupils say makes them feel safe and secure in school. Staff are quick to spot any changes in a pupils' performance or well-being and they take prompt and effective action to deal with any problems. Excellent support for pupils whose circumstances put them at risk of being vulnerable ensures they have sustained care and that their performance and well-being are meticulously monitored. Teaching assistants are well trained to provide appropriate, well-targeted interventions. They support potentially vulnerable pupils, and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to integrate them extremely well so that they learn alongside their peers and achieve as well as they do.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has effectively led improvements to provision in the arts since the previous inspection, resulting in the school being awarded Arts College status. The school has an accurate picture of its strengths and areas for improvement. This is because all staff and governors are involved in evaluating the school's work and identifying areas improvement. Staff morale is high and there is a strong commitment to improving the

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school by extending opportunities for pupils. While subject leadership is good and sometimes outstanding, some aspects of the school's work, such as teaching and the assessment of learning, are not regularly monitored to capture and share the best practice. This is the case in mathematics, where monitoring in the subject has not been rigorous enough to identify why pupils make satisfactory rather than good progress during Key Stage 2.

Governors give good support to the school. They challenge it well so it provides good safeguarding procedures that are well implemented by all staff. The equality policy is rigorously followed and regularly evaluated so that barriers to learning are removed and all pupils have an equal opportunity to learn. Discrimination, in any form, is not tolerated. Community cohesion has a high profile, with strong links locally, nationally and internationally. Involvement in the Comenius project has seen pupils making links with their counterparts in Germany, Denmark and Turkey. The specialist status also makes a significant contribution to pupils' understanding of other cultures and develops their appreciation of difference.

Parents and carers feel they have a genuine partnership with their children's teachers and are delighted with the information they get about their children's progress. Excellent links with external services and local schools provided a wealth of additional support and opportunities for pupils, especially in the arts and sport.

These are the grades for 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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers hold highly positive views of the school. Many commented on the care their children receive and how well their confidence and self-esteem is nurtured, because, 'staff care for their needs educationally, socially and spiritually.' A minority of parents and carers disagreed that the school helped them to support their children's learning and

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others questioned whether the school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour. Inspection evidence found that there are regular opportunities for parents to find out about their children' progress, and that incidents of misbehaviour or unsociable behaviour are dealt with promptly.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Middle 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 inspection team received 92 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 339 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	47	51	43	47	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	51	55	39	42	1	1	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	38	41	50	54	3	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	44	48	42	46	4	4	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	45	49	42	46	4	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	34	37	47	51	10	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	39	42	50	54	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)	49	53	34	37	2	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	40	43	46	50	4	4	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	39	42	39	42	8	9	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	35	38	44	48	6	7	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	58	63	30	33	2	2	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	55	60	28	30	6	7	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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 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 2009/10 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.



9 February 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Middle School,
Hexham, NE46 2DD**

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. You attend a good school, that has many strengths. First among these are the outstanding outcomes that you achieve. You make good progress in your learning and reach above-average standards. You develop excellent personal qualities such as tolerance and caring for others; you behave exceptionally well. We were particularly impressed with how you coped with the rainy weather and cramped space on the first day of our visit. That was a real sign of your maturity and self-control. You show a strong sense of citizenship and take responsibility for yourselves and others extremely well. You work hard in lessons and are keen to do your best. It is no surprise that your teachers and families are so proud of you. Well done!

You benefit from good and sometimes outstanding teaching, though we noted that this was more often satisfactory in your mathematics lessons. For this reason we have asked the school to give subject leaders opportunities to find out what are the most successful strategies for good learning and to share them with all staff to make your learning more consistent and enjoyable. You achieve a higher level in English than in mathematics so we have suggested some strategies to improve your learning in the subject. Many of you told us how safe and happy you feel in school. This is because staff know you very well. They provide outstanding care and support and are always on hand and ready to help with whatever difficulties you might have.

Your headteacher provides very good leadership and is ably supported by staff and governors, so your school continues to move forward at a good rate. One of the very impressive developments since the last inspection is the award of Arts College status. This has brought so many exciting and enjoyable opportunities for you. Your high-quality work in art is a pleasure to look at, while your enthusiastic singing and instrument practice are a delight to hear. It was a treat to hear the jazz band in rehearsal as we left. Well done all for creating such a vibrant place for learning!

Yours sincerely

Mrs Moira Fitzpatrick

Lead inspector

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