

St Paul's RC Voluntary Aided Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122372
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	380457
Inspection dates	9–10 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Andrew Johnson HMI

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	162
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pam Slater
Headteacher	Maria Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	27 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. Twelve lessons were observed including each of the 11 teachers. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, members of the governing body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at data, a range of documents and minutes of meetings. They also analysed the 88 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, the 77 from pupils and 16 from staff.

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

- The development of the school in the five years since its previous inspection.
- Why there are significant variations in the rates of progress made by different groups of pupils.
- The impact of self-evaluation and planning on outcomes for pupils.

Information about the school

St Paul's is smaller than most schools. It changed its name from Thomas Percy RC VA Middle School in 2010, when it moved to a new site which it shares with St Paul's VA RC First School. It accepts pupils of all denominations from schools in the local and surrounding areas. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. Almost all pupils come from a White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is around average although above average numbers have statements of special educational needs. The school has a specialism in science and holds Healthy School status.

The executive headteacher was the headteacher of the first school and took responsibility for the leadership of the middle school in September 2011. The school became federated with St Paul's VA RC First School from 1 November 2011 and now has a joint governing body.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

St Paul's provides a satisfactory standard of education. It has several good and outstanding features. Pupils behave extremely well and are keen to learn. They have a strong sense of the importance of helping others and a good understanding of the Christian ethos of the school. Pupils are excited and enthusiastic about the opportunities they are given and make an excellent contribution to the school and the local community.

Parents and carers are extremely supportive of the school and the vast majority are very happy with the quality of education it provides. Good pastoral care and support ensure that pupils feel happy and say that they feel extremely safe. Effective transition arrangements between schools ensure pupils get off to a flying start. Bullying is very rare, but if it does occur, it is dealt with extremely effectively. Above average attendance, allied to pupils' excellent attitudes to learning, contributes to the good development of pupils' future success.

Pupils' attainment is broadly in line with the expectations for their age when they join the school. Their performance in national tests in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6 has been broadly average for the last three years, but there is some underachievement, particularly in mathematics. By the time they reach the end of Year 8, according to teachers' assessments, levels of attainment in English and mathematics are above average. Pupils' progress in Years 5 and 6 varies significantly, but is satisfactory overall. In Years 7 and 8, pupils' progress accelerates. However, this pattern is not consistent or sustained across all subjects. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar levels of progress to their peers and make great strides in their personal and social development.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There are very positive relationships in the classroom and in most lessons, learning activities are differentiated to meet the needs of pupils of differing abilities. Where teaching is best, pupils are given opportunities to learn independently or to develop complex ideas for themselves. For example, in an English lesson, they developed a modern version of the tale of Little Red Riding Hood; in a science lesson, they discussed the technological and moral implications of stem cell research and in history, they developed an understanding of the impact of painters, such as Hieronymus Bosch, on the medieval world. However, in other lessons long and detailed teacher explanations dominate and, as a result, the pace of learning slows. On occasions, particularly in Year 6, too much time is

spent explaining assessment criteria rather than allowing pupils to practise and develop their skills and understanding.

There is a good curriculum and many popular extra-curricular activities. Guest speakers, visits and clubs contribute well to pupils' cultural development. The school's specialist designation ensures that science resources are good and this contributes to high levels of attainment.

Leaders successfully managed the transition to the new building and the process of federation with the first school. Comprehensive and accurate data on the progress of pupils are available to managers and teachers. However, some staff lack an understanding of what these data mean and analysis does not always result in action for improvement. A thorough evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement is not in place, nor is there a comprehensive improvement plan. The system used to monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning has too little impact. It focuses on identifying teaching techniques rather than their impact on the quality of learning. The new headteacher is striving to drive the school forward and has already identified many of these key areas for improvement. The new governing body provides effective support to the school. However, there are weaknesses in the systems used to hold leaders to account. Based upon its track record of raising attainment at the end of Key Stage 2, the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory and it provides satisfactory value for money.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' progress especially in Key Stage 2, by:
 - ensuring that pupils are given sufficient opportunity to learn independently and spend less time listening to lengthy explanations
 - ensuring pupils in Key Stage 2 are given more and better opportunities to practise and develop their mathematical skills.

- Build upon the improvements that have been made to leadership and management by:
 - thoroughly evaluating the strengths and areas for improvement of the school and producing a school improvement plan
 - ensuring staff have more opportunities to share good practice with each other and with teachers from outstanding schools
 - developing a lesson observation system that focuses more on improving learning rather than simply describing teaching
 - ensuring the new governing body becomes more skilled not only to support the school but also to hold leaders robustly to account.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils enjoy learning. The level at which they achieve is satisfactory. Results of tests taken in Year 6 are broadly average, but were well-below average in mathematics in 2010. Results improved in 2011 and an above average proportion attained the highest levels. According to school assessment, by the time they leave Year 8, overall attainment levels are above average. Pupils make satisfactory progress in English and mathematics given their starting points. More-able students tend to make the best progress. Pupils' development of skills, knowledge and understanding in lessons varies significantly both between and within subjects, but progress is satisfactory overall. Pupils generally make better progress in Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 2. This is so for most groups, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Pupils develop a good understanding of what it means to stay healthy and safe. They show their excellent social, moral and spiritual development in the way they support each other and in the respect they show for adults. They enjoy school and speak fondly of many subjects, particularly art, physical education and science. Attendance levels are high and pupils say that they feel extremely safe. They have a good understanding of information and communication technology, although there is scope to do more to develop their independent learning skills in some lessons.

Pupils contribute well to the school community. They have responded well to the new opportunities they have been given to act as prefects and house captains. They are keen to contribute to the work of local and national charities.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
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	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

There are some good and outstanding examples, but the overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Learning is most successful when teachers engage pupils

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

quickly in interesting and challenging tasks. However, sometimes teachers' introductions to activities are too long and laborious. Pupils explained to inspectors that they usually enjoy lessons but especially so when they are actively involved in learning. They know the level of their work and their targets. Marking is done frequently. Written feedback from teachers often explains to pupils how they can improve, although again there is inconsistency in the impact this has. A range of methods are in place to assess the levels of pupils' work and in the main produce an accurate picture of progress and attainment.

The good curriculum offers a wide range of opportunities matched to the needs of all groups. A large proportion of pupils participate in a broad range of extra-curricular activities. There are well-established partnerships with local high schools that support the curriculum and ensure continuity. Pupils make excellent progress in their social, moral, cultural and spiritual development as a result of the pastoral curriculum. School assemblies are well run and promote the ethos of the school. The promotion of equality of opportunity is at the heart of the schools' work and, as a result, this creates a harmonious, caring community.

The school provides good care, guidance and support for all pupils. As a result, they behave well, feel safe and well protected. Partnerships with specialist agencies are well developed and good targeted support is provided for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school works effectively in partnership with its first and high schools to ensure the smooth transition of pupils.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
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 took up her post eight weeks before the inspection and has begun to put in place measures to improve several aspects of the school's work. For example, she has increased pupils' involvement in making a contribution to the school and is introducing a new system to interpret management data. However, it is too soon to evaluate the impact of these strategies. There is a strong team ethic among staff and they are optimistic about the future. The move to the new school was well managed and, as a result, there were no detrimental effects on pupils. An inclusive and supportive school has been established that has been particularly successful in developing pupils' personal development and well-being.

However, systems to improve the quality of teaching and raise academic achievement have insufficient impact. Extensive data are available, both from national tests and from teachers' assessments but its analysis is generally ineffective. Attainment is sometimes confused with progress. Expected levels of progress in mathematics and English, as defined in government floor targets, are sometimes judged by the school to be good or outstanding. There was no whole-school

development plan or analysis of current strengths and weaknesses available for inspectors during the inspection. The new headteacher had begun to identify areas for improvement and started to devise an action plan for improvement.

The school makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion. The establishment of a federation serving the middle and first school took place the week before the inspection. The joint governing body fulfils all its statutory duties in relation to the middle school, though it does not hold leaders sufficiently to account. It ensures that all relevant measures, in relation to the safeguarding of pupils, are in place, and that staff fully implement them. The school has satisfactory policies and procedures in place to promote equal opportunities.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

Nearly half of the parents or carers responded to the questionnaire. The very large majority said that they were happy with the education the school provided for their children. They felt that teaching and support were good and said children enjoy school and are kept safe. A small minority felt that communication could be improved and the school could do more to help them support their children's learning. A small number expressed uncertainty about the leadership of the school and a small minority felt the school could do more to deal with unacceptable behaviour.

Inspectors found that pupils' behaviour was outstanding overall and systems to deal with unacceptable behaviour were effective. The new headteacher and new governing body have plans in place to improve communication with parents and carers, but have yet to put them fully in place. There is some good teaching and learning in the school but also much variation, so overall, inspectors judged this aspect to be satisfactory.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Paul's RC 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 88 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 162 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	39	44	45	51	2	2	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	49	56	35	40	3	3	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	38	43	37	42	5	6	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	35	40	40	45	4	5	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	43	49	38	43	3	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	28	32	43	49	9	10	3	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	29	33	46	52	9	10	1	1
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)	32	36	48	55	1	1	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	36	41	41	47	6	7	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	37	42	37	42	5	6	4	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	24	27	50	57	7	8	3	3
The school is led and managed effectively	34	39	40	45	5	6	4	5
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	39	44	43	49	2	2	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.



11 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Paul's RC VA Middle School, Alnwick, NE66 2NU

Thank you for the help you gave us when we inspected your school. You were very friendly and gave us a good welcome. When we spoke to you, and looked at the questionnaires you completed, it really helped us to understand your school. I would also like to thank the many parents or carers who responded to the questionnaire. We took all your views into account and here is what we think about your school.

The highlights are your excellent behaviour and the atmosphere of care and respect in the school. You told us that you feel extremely safe in school. Your attendance is very high and you enjoy most lessons. There have been many changes recently, as you know, and this has meant the staff and governors have had to work very hard. You are now well established in the new building and have developed closer links with the first school.

During your time in the school, most of you make the expected levels of progress in comparison to pupils in other schools. You usually reach standards that are around average in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6 and above average by the time you leave. Mrs Wilson and the staff have got some good ideas about how they want to improve things and we have made the following suggestions to help them.

- Improve progress, especially in Years 5 and 6, to make sure it is consistently good across subjects, but especially in mathematics.
- Build on the work that has already been started to identify key strengths and weaknesses and put in place a clear and challenging plan of action for improvement.

We wish you all every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Johnson
Her Majesty's Inspector

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