

St Benet's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114244
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	378821
Inspection dates	6–7 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Jayne Utting HMI

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	251
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joanne Wollaston
Headteacher	Damian Groark
Date of previous school inspection	8 February 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 22 lessons, taught by eight teachers and one higher level teaching assistant. They held meetings with teachers, members of the governing body, senior and middle leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, the School Improvement Partner and two groups of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at the school's documentation relating to pupils' progress and attainment, protecting and keeping pupils safe, the curriculum and systems for monitoring and evaluating planned actions. Inspectors looked at the work in pupils' books in English and mathematics in Years 2, 4 and 6. Inspectors also scrutinised 89 returned questionnaires from parents and carers, 110 completed by pupils and eight completed by staff.

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

- The progress pupils make in lessons especially pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Teachers' use of assessment to plan effectively to meet the learning needs of different groups of pupils.
- The effectiveness of the school's work to maintain pupils' outstanding personal development.
- The effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, in driving improvement, leading to increased expectations and sustained improvement in pupil outcomes.

Information about the school

This school is similar in size to primary schools nationally. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average, although the proportion at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below that usually found. The vast majority of pupils are from a White British heritage with few from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school has achieved a number of awards including the Healthy School award and has International School status.

Eden Garden Nursery is not administered by the school's governing body. It therefore receives a separate inspection. The report is available on the Ofsted website.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is an outstanding school which fulfils its mission statement 'to be a happy and holy place of learning and the centre of a thriving community'.

The determination and drive of senior leaders have been successful in sustaining pupils' good achievement across the school. Children enter the nursery with knowledge and skills that are typical for their age. They make good progress in each key stage and leave the school with above average attainment in English and mathematics. Some lower attaining pupils make very good progress from their starting points. The school's inclusive ethos ensures that there are no differences between the attainment and progress of different pupil groups. Particularly strong features of the school are pupils' outstanding behaviour, excellent attitudes to learning and high attendance. They enjoy coming to school, behave impeccably and have a heightened awareness of their own and others' safety. As a consequence, the school is a harmonious learning community where every child feels valued and respected and their learning flourishes as a result. Pupils are held in very high regard locally and the school itself sits at the heart of this community. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and pupils develop into considerate, well principled and caring individuals as a result. The school has a range of very effective links with schools around the world and these enhance pupils' understanding of cultural diversity. This is recognised by the school's status as an International School.

The outstanding curriculum provides pupils with a wide range of interesting and often exciting opportunities which support both their academic and personal development. It is greatly enriched by the school's involvement with the innovative 'thinking schools programme'. Techniques acquired through this approach are very well-embedded across the school and have a significant impact on pupils' ability to plan, reflect and solve problems. They apply these skills regularly as they learn in other subjects and demonstrate them both in their written and oral work. Pupils are able to think deeply about their own and others experiences, respecting the rights of others to hold different beliefs to their own.

The large majority of teaching across the school is at least good. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and plan activities that meet the needs of all pupils and engage their interest. The senior leadership team has identified correctly strengths in teaching and areas for further development. While monitoring and evaluation currently emphasise the quality of teaching, there is a recognition that, in order to drive up the quality of teaching still further, the time is right to refocus on the quality

of pupils' learning. Marking in pupils' books is focused and ensures that pupils know how well they have done and what they need to do next to improve. Where marking is most effective, pupils are provided with opportunities to respond to teachers' comments, carry out corrections and learn from their mistakes.

Safeguarding is given a high priority and systems for child protection are robust and fully meet requirements. Pupils, parents and carers regard the school as an exceptionally safe place to be. Pupils say that bullying and racism are not tolerated and during the inspection older pupils were seen to be taking their extra responsibilities to care for younger pupils very seriously. Care, guidance and support are of an exceptionally high quality.

Senior leaders have ensured that all staff have a shared vision for the work of the school. There is a commitment to continuous improvement. Monitoring is rigorous and self-evaluation accurately identifies where further improvements are required. The school's capacity for sustained improvement is good and much progress has been made since the previous inspection. Pupils' achievement remains good and all aspects of their personal development are now outstanding. Leaders have begun to recognise the need to refine the use of a wide range of information about pupil performance in order to secure outstanding teaching, further improve pupils' progress and raise attainment.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and increase pupils' rate of progress so that achievement is outstanding and in line with other pupil outcomes by:
 - focusing monitoring and evaluation activities and the analysis of pupil performance on the quality of pupils' learning in order to identify those characteristics of teaching which will further improve pupils' progress.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils clearly enjoy their learning. Since the previous inspection pupils' good achievement has been sustained and attainment remains above average. A very large majority of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress in all key stages. Above average attainment in Key Stage 1 has been maintained, with provisional results from the 2011 national tests showing an improvement from last year. There is a similar picture for attainment in Key Stage 2, with a particular improvement in standards in mathematics. The previous gap between attainment in English and mathematics has narrowed. The proportion of pupils achieving a Level 5 in both English and mathematics is significantly above average, with more-able pupils doing particularly well.

Assessment information is used effectively to identify pupils who need extra support and to plan appropriate additional activities for them. This enables those pupils to make accelerated progress, and raises their self-esteem and confidence. The cumulative impact of effective daily sessions around 'super sentences' and the

recently introduced 'read/write inc' where pupils learn 'the sounds that letters make,' is having a marked impact on pupils' reading and writing skills.

Pupils report that they can rely on the support of adults or buddies if difficulties arise. Throughout the school they learn how to manage risk in a safe, supportive environment and develop an excellent understanding of what constitutes an unsafe situation. Pupils talk with confidence about how to stay fit and healthy. They have a keen awareness of the dangers of smoking, drugs and alcohol. Pupils and staff in Years 4 and 5, for example were filmed for Teachers TV participating in a lesson to promote healthy eating. Older pupils eagerly take on a plethora of additional roles and responsibilities within the school, including acting as playground leaders, eco-warriors and buddies. The school council takes an active role in deciding on fundraising ideas and areas of the school that need some refurbishment. A group of older pupils produce a school newspaper and recently conducted a survey during 'switch off' week to identify those classrooms where lights are routinely left on.

Pupils in Year 6 took part in an innovative 'apprentice' style event where groups worked together to produce art work to support a production of Macbeth, pitching their ticket and programme designs to a team of judges which included a graphic designer. Such activities, combined with the excellent skills acquired through their 'thinking work', ensure that they leave school with very well honed skills that will support them as they move on to secondary school.

Pupils demonstrate an excellent perspective on the world around them and are equipped with the skills to think deeply about a range of subjects. In a Year 6 lesson, for example, pupils reflected on the differences between their Christmas experience and those of the children they had supported through the 'shoebox appeal'. The depth of empathy, reflection and understanding displayed by pupils was outstanding as was their ability to listen to and respect the differing views of their peers.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	2
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	
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	1
Taking into account:	1
Pupils' attendance ¹	
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹The 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 quality of teaching is good overall, with a small proportion that is outstanding. In all lessons, work is planned well to meet the needs and abilities of the pupils and, as a result, they are actively involved in activities which both stimulate and engage them in learning. The pace of lessons is usually brisk. On rare occasions, the pace can slow, particularly when pupils spend too much time listening to adults speaking. Relationships with adults are very good and these, combined with impeccable behaviour, provide a secure platform for effective learning. Teaching assistants are very well deployed and provide good quality support for pupils, particularly those requiring additional help to make progress.

Very effective links are established between different curriculum areas which enhance pupils' knowledge and gives them a purpose and context for their learning. The recent introduction of a range of daily sessions focusing on key aspects of reading and writing has brought about noticeable improvements in the quality of their writing across the curriculum. An excellent and varied range of extra-curricular opportunities is welcomed and enjoyed by a large majority of pupils. Classrooms and corridors are literacy and numeracy rich environments which promote basic skills extremely well.

Extremely well targeted support for pupils enables them all to make the best of the opportunities available. The school can point to striking examples where pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable have been very well supported, enabling them to engage fully in school life and learning. Productive partnerships with relevant external agencies ensure that the close involvement with individual families and pupils is effective. The care and support provided by the school are commendable, and are reflected in parents' and carers' positive comments in the returned questionnaires.

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	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders, staff, governors, pupils, parents and carers share a pride in the school and a commitment to continuous improvement. Senior leaders know the school's strengths. They carry out a rigorous programme of monitoring and evaluation and identify accurately what the school needs to do next to improve further. Effective tracking procedures allow staff to monitor the progress of individuals and all groups of pupils and to intervene quickly if any pupil is at risk of underachieving or having particular difficulties in their learning. They make a significant contribution to the school's very effective promotion of equal opportunities.

Members of the governing body are knowledgeable about the school and the quality of its work and provide an appropriate balance of challenge and support. They have a good understanding of the impact of specific school improvement strategies on outcomes for pupils.

The school knows its community well. Staff have worked hard and successfully to gain the confidence and respect of parents and carers. They are extremely well informed about their pupils' progress and current attainment levels and about how they can best support their learning outside school through the provision of extended family learning opportunities. Newsletters, home school contact books, home visits and 'learning journals' ensure smooth communication between parents, carers and school and help to maintain high attendance. One parental comment reflected that 'The school is there as much to support me as the pupils'.

The school has very productive links with a range of partners in the local community including other schools, the police and some local businesses. Resulting activities, including the provision of an allotment and residential trips, have made a significant contribution to pupils' good achievement and outstanding personal development. The school promotes community cohesion effectively through the curriculum and through its international links. The school recognises the need to ensure that pupils are able to engage with others from different backgrounds closer to home and plans to establish links with an inner city multi ethnic school. The school provides outstanding value for money.

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	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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

All children thrive in this stimulating and exciting indoor and outdoor environment, particularly in relation to their personal development and well-being. They become active, independent learners because they feel secure and are encouraged to manage risk in a safe and supportive environment. For example, they are given the opportunity to climb trees and swing from tyres safely because they are aware of the rules and boundaries and understand how to keep themselves safe. The introduction of thinking skills work at this early age equips the children with essential communication and problem-solving skills which will support their work through

school. Consequently, by the time they leave Reception they have made good progress in their learning, the majority exceeding the expectations for their age.

Staff are extremely well supported, motivated and inspired by the highly experienced and skilled Early Years Foundation Stage coordinators. Rigorous assessment through detailed observations ensures that activities are well planned to meet the individual needs of children as well as ensuring any children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are quickly identified and supported. Staff are aware that they need to develop monitoring systems further in order to track pupils' progress more accurately to ensure achievement is outstanding and in line with other outcomes. Adults have a very good understanding of children's individual talents and interests. They use this information exceptionally well to provide an exciting and challenging curriculum, laying a firm foundation on which to instil a love of learning which children carry with them throughout their time at school.

Excellent parental relationships are established through effective induction, which includes home visits and opportunities to work alongside children in lessons.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation stage	2
Taking into account:	1
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	
The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Eighty three parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire. The overwhelming majority are highly supportive of the school's work and the outcomes achieved by pupils. A very small minority expressed some concerns about behaviour. Inspection findings confirm that pupils' behaviour is outstanding and well managed by staff. This is fully reported upon in the relevant section of the report. The safety of pupils in relation to the entrance to the school car park was also raised in a small minority of responses. Again, inspection findings confirm that the school takes its responsibility in relation to safeguarding pupils seriously and has taken all reasonable precautions to ensure the safety of pupils around the car park entrance.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Benet's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary 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 89 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 251 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	64	72	25	28	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	70	79	18	20	0	0	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	52	58	34	38	2	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	63	71	23	26	2	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	63	71	23	26	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	54	61	31	35	2	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	51	57	34	38	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)	55	62	26	29	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	59	66	26	29	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	47	53	35	39	2	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	47	53	33	37	3	3	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	61	69	22	25	1	1	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	66	74	19	21	0	0	0	0

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.



8 December 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Benet's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School,
Chester le Street DH2 1QX**

I would like to begin by thanking you all for the very warm welcome we received when we visited your school. We are particularly grateful to those of you who gave up your time to speak to us in lessons, in meetings and around the school.

We agree with you that St Benet's is an outstanding school! We were particularly impressed with your excellent behaviour, attendance and knowledge and understanding of how to keep yourselves safe in a range of situations. During our visit you were enthusiastically taking part in everything the school has to offer from editing the newspaper to the many extra-curricular clubs on offer. You are making an excellent contribution to your local community and we were impressed with the links you have made with schools all over the world.

Your headteacher, governors and all staff in your school are working together really well to improve the education that you receive and are being successful. We consider that the care, guidance and support that you receive are outstanding. This is reflected by your views as you tell us you feel safe and supported at school and have faith in the staff to help you if you should need them. You are also making your school a great place to be through your kindness, consideration and respect for one another.

We found that your teachers plan exciting lessons for you and check carefully how well you are all doing which is helping to make sure you all make good progress in your learning. We would like your teachers to look at how much you learn in lessons and how they can improve this even further so that you make even better progress.

We know that you are rightly very proud of your school and that you will help your teachers by continuing with your excellent attitudes and attendance. Please accept the best wishes of the inspection team and good luck to you all in the future.

Yours sincerely

Jayne Utting
Her Majesty's Inspector

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