

St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Barnard Castle

Birch Road, Barnard Castle, County Durham, DL12 8JR

Inspection dates 10–11 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Pupils' achievement is outstanding. All groups of pupils make progress that is significantly better than that found nationally. By the end of Year 6, attainment in English and mathematics is significantly above average.
- Teaching over time is outstanding. It provides pupils with high quality learning experiences and this ensures that they are motivated to learn.
- All adults provide excellent support and guidance for pupils and have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. However, teachers' marking does not always encourage pupils to take care with the presentation of their work.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are exemplary in lessons and around the school and this has a very positive impact on their learning. Pupils say they feel safe and are very proud of their school.
- Leadership and management are of an exceptionally high quality. A safe, stimulating and caring learning environment has been created.
- The small staff team work very closely and effectively together. Robust self-evaluation and sharply focused improvement planning ensure there has been continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement since the previous inspection.
- A very strong curriculum engages and motivates pupils making their learning highly enjoyable.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted extremely well through the school's Christian values and the wide range of opportunities woven throughout the different subjects of the rich curriculum.
- The governing body provides an excellent level of challenge and support for the school. They are fully involved in the continuous drive for improvement.
- Attendance is above average.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed eight lessons or parts of lessons, of which two were joint observations with the headteacher. Teachers' planning and a range of pupils' books were scrutinised.
- Meetings took place with the headteacher, staff, a group of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector looked at range of documentation, including the schools data on pupils' progress, and records relating to pupils' behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- The inspector took account of the 22 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). Responses from a questionnaire for staff were also considered.

Inspection team

Christine Millett, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mary's is much smaller than the average sized primary school. The overwhelming majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is below average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The school meets the current floor standards which set the government's minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Since the previous inspection there have been a number of changes in staffing including the appointment of a new headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- In this small school, numbers in each year group vary from year to year.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the presentation of pupils' work by:
 - ensuring pupils hold their pencils correctly
 - making sure marking draws pupils' attention to the importance of legible handwriting.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Most children enter the Reception Year with skills, knowledge and understanding that are typically in line with those expected for their age. Children make better than expected progress and they quickly develop a wide range of skills. By the time they enter Year 1, the large majority reach the expected level for their age. This ensures they are well prepared for the next stage in their learning.
- This good rate of progress continues throughout Key Stage 1 so that, from their starting points, the proportion of pupils exceeding expected levels of progress is greater than that found nationally.
- Pupils' progress continues to increase strongly in Key Stage 2. By the time pupils leave at the end of Year 6, both the levels they reach and the progress they make are significantly above those found nationally. Their achievement is consistently outstanding.
- As a result of the rigorous use of assessment information, alongside outstanding teaching, pupils' achievement has improved significantly year on year. By the end of Year 6, a much larger proportion of pupils are now reaching the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics than in the past. The school's data and inspection findings show that there are similar levels of improvement, in all classes, thus maintaining high standards.
- Across the school, disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and those pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, make similar levels of progress as their classmates because they are very well supported by very effective teaching assistants. As a result, they are able to access the curriculum and be fully included in all activities. Consequently, there are no significant differences in the achievement between any groups of pupils.
- Reading is encouraged and promoted strongly across the school. Pupils develop very good skills which enable them to enjoy their reading. Letters and their sounds are well taught in the Reception class. By Year 1 pupils have a good knowledge of key words and are able to apply what they have learnt to work out any new words they encounter and also to self-correct. By the end of Year 6, pupils read widely and confidently select their own books.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- The small, but extremely effective team of teachers is supported by highly skilled teaching assistants. Together they provide high quality lessons that enable all groups of pupils to reach outstanding levels of achievement.
- The quality of teaching over time is outstanding. The school's own monitoring records of teaching, carried out by senior staff, confirm this. Almost all lessons observed during the inspection were judged outstanding. Excellent teaching practice is shared amongst all staff.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve in lessons and pupils enjoy the challenges they are set. Pupils are enthusiastic and highly motivated learners.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is particularly strong and this is used to extremely good effect when questioning pupils and addressing any misunderstandings. Teachers ask probing questions and expect pupils to use appropriate vocabulary when explaining their answers. Teachers are on hand, as pupils work, to talk through any difficulties as they arise which impacts positively on learning.
- In all classes, teaching assistants provide excellent input to enable pupils to successfully learn and work in partnership with their teachers.
- Teachers plan extremely well for the mixed-age classes; this ensures learning is well matched to pupils' capabilities and prior learning. They create enjoyable and memorable lessons and make sure that pupils understand the relevance of what they are learning and how skills can be applied in real-life situations. The curriculum provides many opportunities for pupils to

successfully practise their reading, writing and mathematical skills.

- Regular and detailed marking provides pupils with guidance how they can improve their work. Pupils are given the opportunity to respond to teachers' comments and participate in self- and peer-assessment. However, marking does not always draw pupils' attention to the presentation of their work or reinforce the need for work to be legible. A small number of pupils do not hold their pencils correctly which makes it difficult for them to write neatly.
- The intention of the lesson is always clear. Consequently, pupils know what their success in a lesson is being measured against. This helps them understand the progress they are making towards achieving their learning targets.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage benefit from outstanding teaching and a well-organised curriculum. Skilled teaching, by all staff, ensures learning flows between the indoor and outdoor areas; consequently, children develop their basic skills very well.
- Teaching provides many opportunities to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through the use of small group work, the content of lessons and the positive working environment created.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The school is a very peaceful, caring community. Pupils of different ages play and work very happily together and are proud of their school. The oldest pupils act as excellent role models for the younger ones.
- Pupils of all ages are equally keen to take on responsibilities, such as manning the tuck shop at break times or acting as playtime buddies. These positions have to be applied for and appointments made on the strength of the application. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children help to keep their classroom and outdoor area tidy by making sure things are put away or picked up.
- Pupils display extremely positive attitudes to their learning. They say that they enjoy all their lessons. They work cooperatively and collaboratively on tasks set. This degree of collaboration fosters the high levels of self-confidence pupils demonstrate in their learning.
- Behaviour in and around school is excellent. Pupils confirmed that the exemplary behaviour seen during the inspection was typical of behaviour over time. Well-established routines and a genuine understanding of the reasons for rules ensure movement in and out of classrooms to the playground, assembly or dining hall is well organised and orderly.
- Pupils exhibit sensible attitudes and show that they are capable of managing their own behaviour. The principles behind UNICEF's 'Rights and Responsibilities' have been embraced by all and underpin much of what happens in school.
- Pupils are kind and considerate with each other and extremely polite and respectful towards adults. Good manners are exhibited in everything they do.
- Pupils have an excellent understanding of bullying in its different forms. They are very clear about the difference between falling out with a friend and actual bullying, and are confident that staff will respond quickly to any problems should they occur. They know how to keep themselves safe because this taught as part of the curriculum. E-safety, Stranger Danger and other aspects of safety are also taught.
- School staff work diligently to promote and celebrate good attendance, with the result that levels are above average.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher provides the school with a clear vision and has created a strong team spirit among staff; all of whom say they are proud to be members of staff at the school.
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- Responsibility for subject leadership is shared equally amongst the small team, and all staff work very closely together to monitor the success of their teaching and the progress being made by pupils. Close collaboration, including opportunities to teach alongside each other, enables staff to share expertise, planning and resources in order to secure continuous improvement.
 - Self-evaluation is rigorous and accurate and feeds into the school improvement plan. Priorities are based upon agreed areas for development and are monitored regularly and in detail by the governing body and staff. This highly effective process means there is always a sharp focus on specific areas for development in order to continually move the school forward.
 - The school promotes equality of opportunity exceptionally well. It uses a detailed tracking system that helps staff see clearly how well pupils are progressing. This means any potential underachievement is quickly recognised and swiftly addressed.
 - The exciting and innovative curriculum provides an engaging and challenging base for learning. It also presents excellent opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through, for example, residential visits locally and in France, visits to local churches and other places of worship, and the retreat attended by pupils in Year 5 and 6 at the start of each new school year. An exciting range of enrichment activities is in place and enjoyed by all.
 - Parents have many opportunities to be involved in the life of the school through curriculum information evenings or story time for dads and granddads. Newsletters and a very attractive and informative website keep parents up to date with events.
 - The local authority provides light touch support for this outstanding school.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body shows a deep, informed knowledge of the school's performance and draws upon its expertise to help drive improvement. It provides outstanding support and challenge and rigorously holds the school to account.
 - There is a constant emphasis on improvement through the monitoring of performance and provision for staff development. Performance management is robust and closely aligned to school improvement planning.
 - Governors ensure that statutory requirements for the safeguarding of pupils are rigorously met.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	114261
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	403234

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	86
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Victoria Lowe
Headteacher	Jane Weatherall
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2007
Telephone number	01833 637029
Fax number	01833 695845
Email address	barnardcastlestmary@durhamlearning.net

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