

St Paul's RC Voluntary Aided First School

South Road, Alnwick, Northumberland, NE66 2NU

Inspection dates 17–18 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The school meets its aim to 'provide an environment where pupils are excited, challenged, safe and happy'.
- Children arrive in Nursery with skills and abilities that are below what is typical for their age. Good progress across the school ensures that by the time pupils leave in Year 4, the standard of their work is at least average and an above average proportion are reaching the higher levels, particularly in mathematics.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make equally good progress because they receive additional support from highly skilled staff.
- Teaching is consistently good across the school. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They plan interesting activities to ensure all pupils do well and ask carefully chosen questions to check that new learning has been correctly understood.
- The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding. They are happy, caring and extremely considerate of each other and their teachers. Pupils enjoy coming to school, take an active part in school life and have exceptional attitudes to learning. They behave impeccably both within lessons and when around the school.
- Leaders at all levels are dedicated to making the school the best it can be. Improvements since the previous inspection have been quick and effective. A focus on improving the quality of teaching has led to year-on-year increases in what all groups of pupils achieve.
- Governors, alongside the headteacher, have ensured that the federation with a local middle school has been effectively managed so that joint activity between schools is quickly leading to further improvements.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not yet outstanding overall. Pupils do not get enough opportunity to discuss their ideas or make improvements to their marked work.
- The progress pupils make in their reading, while good, is not as strong as that in writing or mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed 15 lessons or part lessons delivered by seven different teachers. Two were jointly observed with the headteacher. In addition, the headteacher accompanied the inspector on a number of short visits to guided reading and phonics (linking letters and sounds) sessions.
- Meetings were held with a group of pupils, three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, senior and middle leaders and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector took account of the 14 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) that were submitted during the course of the inspection. He also spoke to groups of parents at the beginning of the school day and took account of feedback from the 11 staff questionnaires.
- The inspector observed the school's work and examined a range of documentation including the school's own records of pupils' learning and progress, monitoring and evaluation documents, records relating to the performance management of staff and those relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Lee Owston, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Paul's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School is smaller than the average-sized school. The number of pupils on roll is increasing each year.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is lower than the national average.
- Fewer pupils than found nationally are supported through school action although the proportion of pupils supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above the national average.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A few pupils from Eastern European heritage are at the early stages of learning English.
- The school holds many awards. These include enhanced Healthy School status and the Activemark, for its work in physical education.
- A private provider operates after-school care and a playgroup on the school site. This was not part of this inspection but a report on its quality can be found on the Ofsted website. Half of the teaching staff are new to the school since the previous inspection. This includes the deputy headteacher who took up post in the summer of 2012.
- The school formed a formal link with a neighbouring middle school in October 2011. They now share a new school site. Both schools are led by an executive headteacher, who was formerly the headteacher of the first school, and have a joint governing body. The middle school was not inspected at the same time. Its most recent inspection report can be found on the Ofsted website.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding by:
 - adapting lessons in response to pupils' comments, questions and ideas so that even greater progress occurs
 - providing more frequent opportunities for pupils to share and extend their ideas through discussion with their classmates
 - ensuring that marking consistently shows pupils where improvements could be made and they are given greater opportunity to follow-up their teacher's comments.
- Improve the progress pupils make in their reading by using information about where they are in learning their letters and sounds (phonics) to ensure teaching always meets the individual pupils' exact needs.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils achieve well in their time at school. They enjoy their learning, work hard for their teachers and take obvious pride in the presentation of their work. Parents are accurate in their view that pupils make good progress.
- Children arrive in the Nursery with skills and abilities that are below what is expected for their age, particularly in their speech, language and communication. Through good quality teaching and caring relationships, children make good progress across the Early Years Foundation Stage so that their levels of confidence and independence increase and they develop an interest in learning. Children are now reaching above average expectations by the time they leave the Reception class.
- By the end of Year 2, pupils' skills and abilities in reading, writing and mathematics are average, representing good progress from their starting points. Year-on-year improvements in the standards of pupils' work have led to more pupils working at the higher levels. School results in 2012 show that achievements in mathematics are particularly strong with pupils working approximately two terms ahead of all pupils nationally in this subject.
- Good progress continues across Years 3 and 4 so that most pupils reach the level expected of them. Through greater understanding of their own learning and their individual next steps, a significant proportion of pupils are now making better than expected progress. This has led to more pupils reaching standards of work that are above average by the time they leave the school.
- Disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and the few pupils who are at the early stages of learning English make equally good progress to other learners. This is because their progress is carefully checked so that additional support can be provided to help them catch up. Pupil premium funding is used well to provide one-to-one support and specialist training for staff. Pupils supported in this way also make good progress and develop in their confidence and self-esteem so that their regular classwork also improves.
- Staff have a good level of subject knowledge in teaching the skills of reading and deliver daily lessons in linking sounds and letters (phonics). On occasions, some teachers do not always use their knowledge of what each child needs to learn next to enable their teaching to fully meet individual needs. In these instances, pupils do not always make as much progress in their reading as they do in their writing or mathematics.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is consistently good across the school and allows pupils to make good progress and develop positive attitudes to their learning. Parents overwhelmingly agree that the quality of teaching their children receive is good.
- Pupils make good progress and achieve well across the school because teaching is typically characterised by:
 - accurate assessments of what pupils can do so that activities provide just the right amount of challenge to move their learning forward, including for the more-able
 - clear explanations of new learning including the use of everyday examples to make topics relevant to pupils
 - frequent questioning of pupils to find out if they have fully understood the learning within the lesson
 - high-quality support from teaching assistants to enable all learners to take part in the lesson and offer their own ideas
 - strong relationships between teachers and pupils and exemplary attitudes to learning.
- Teaching is not yet outstanding because pupils need more regular opportunities to discuss their ideas with classmates so that they can share, develop and extend their thinking. Teachers also need to become more skilled at listening to the responses generated through discussion so that they can change the content of the lesson to meet the immediate needs of pupils. In this way,

teaching will enable pupils to make more rapid and sustained progress.

- Marking of pupils' work is frequent and regularly identifies what pupils have done well. A few teachers do not routinely identify for pupils what they need to do next to make even better progress. Even in the best examples of marking, pupils are not always given enough opportunity to read their teacher's comments and make changes to their work. This prevents even greater progress in learning.
- Where teaching takes account of pupils' interests and allows them to think about their own opinions, pupils' spiritual development is promoted exceptionally well. This was seen in a Year 1 literacy lesson where pupils were writing poetry about their favourite things and directed to think carefully about the reasons for their choices.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils are caring, exceptionally courteous and treat others, whether friends or adults, as they themselves would wish to be treated. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the quality of care their children receive so that they are happy, safe and free from bullying. This allows pupils to focus fully on their learning and make at least good progress.
- Parents and pupils believe that bullying is rare and that, should it ever occur, it would be dealt with quickly. Pupils understand the nature of bullying, including that related to different forms of prejudice, and are extremely knowledgeable about the dangers and risks they may encounter, including how to keep safe when using the internet.
- Teachers are skilled at managing pupils' behaviour. Older pupils are encouraged to act as role models for those lower down the school, regularly contributing to assemblies that remind pupils of expected behaviours. As such, pupils contribute to the management of their own behaviour so that incidents of poor behaviour are rare.
- The school's electronic reward system, instantly visible within all lessons, motivates pupils to keep their high standards of behaviour. This behaviour management system, consistently used by all staff, including lunchtime assistants, also rewards hard work, good manners, helpfulness and teamwork. In this way, the school's systems for promoting outstanding behaviour and safety also contribute to the highly effective promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral and social development.
- Pupils are rarely late and attend school regularly because, as one pupil commented during inspection, 'we get to do interesting things and it's like having one big family to help you if you're stuck'. The school's efforts to improve attendance have been successful so that attendance is now average and improving.

The leadership and management are good

- The dedicated headteacher is focused on making the school the best it can be. Staff have high expectations of themselves and their pupils. All leaders effectively turn these expectations into actions that are improving the quality of teaching so that pupils achieve well.
- School systems to check on the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make are effective. This has supported accurate self-evaluation and the identification of priorities for further work. As such, the school has made significant improvements since the time of its last inspection. Attainment has risen at every key stage, progress has quickened and the quality of teaching has become more consistent. The school has good capacity for further improvement.
- Leadership of teaching is strong. Teachers' performance is well managed and is closely linked to staff training. Senior leaders check on the quality of teaching to support staff in finding ways of making their work even better. Staff address any areas for improvement quickly and this has led to consistently good teaching across the school. Leaders know that by continuing to provide this support, more outstanding teaching can be developed.
- The school's curriculum has strengths in the range of visits pupils make to places outside of school. Recent trips to Alnwick Gardens and an outdoor and adventurous activities centre have

enthused pupils and developed their learning well. The essential skills of reading, writing, communication and mathematics are included in all aspects of the school's work and pupils are being given more opportunities to use them for real reasons and in a range of different subjects. The school's promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding because it is included in all aspects of the school's work.

- Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated and there is no significant variation in the achievement of different groups of pupils. Such a welcoming and supportive environment allows all pupils to develop into confident, well-rounded individuals. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements with much best practice adopted in the high quality care provided.
- The school works collaboratively with the local authority who provides appropriate support for this good and improving school.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors possess a wide range of expertise and experience which has enabled the school to form a hard federation with a local middle school quickly and smoothly, to the mutual benefit of both schools.
 - The governing body has an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses based on a detailed understanding of the school's results and an appreciation of the quality of teaching.
 - It provides strong levels of support and challenge to enable continued improvement.
 - Governors are regularly updated on how the school is using targeted money such as pupil premium funding to improve the achievement of pupils who may not otherwise make as much progress.
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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	122305
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	406084

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	134
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pam Slater
Headteacher	Maria Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	19 October 2010
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