

# St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Ropery Lane, Chester le Street, County Durham, DH3 3PH

**Inspection dates** 6–7 November 2012

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
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 headteacher's ambitious and very clear view of how successful the school can be is shared by all staff and the governing body. Consequently, the school is successful in its aim to constantly improve.
- Children enter school with skills and experience that are expected for their age. Well-led and managed teaching is good; some lessons are imaginative and inspiring. Teachers expect pupils to do well and that, coupled with interesting activities and excellent relationships, helps pupils to learn well.
- Adult support for pupils in lessons is effective and ensures all pupils can thrive, make good progress and achieve well. This includes pupils whose circumstances might put them at risk and those supported by pupil premium funding.
- Pupils thoroughly enjoy their school experiences in the happy, friendly and safe school atmosphere. They take great pride in their work and the achievements of the school. Their enthusiasm and keenness to work hard is reflected in their exceptionally high attendance. Pupils' exemplary behaviour is effectively supported by their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- All pupils are exceptionally well cared for and looked after, including those who are disabled. Pupils know how to recognise risk and avoid danger to stay safe.
- The good curriculum and excellent range of first-hand, interesting activities are shaped well to match the different needs and abilities of pupils.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In a very few lessons, activities do not relentlessly challenge and probe pupils' thinking and understanding enough to ensure all pupils learn rapidly so as to exceed what is expected of them.
- Occasionally opportunities are missed to encourage pupils to work things out for themselves and to practise their writing skills. Sometimes pupils are uncertain about how they can rapidly improve their work.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 13 lessons of which three were joint observations with the headteacher. In addition, the inspection team made a number of short visits to lessons and support sessions and a learning walk with the headteacher during a mathematics investigation event involving parents.
- The inspection team held discussions with pupils, parents, members of the governing body, school staff, including senior leaders and those with responsibilities such as leadership of subjects, and the local authority education development partner.
- Inspectors took account of the 35 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). The inspection team observed the school's work and examined a range of documentation including the school's own records of pupils' current progress, records from the observation of lessons and checking of pupils' work, records relating to behaviour and attendance and documents relating to safeguarding.

## Inspection team

Clive Petts, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jim Hall

Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- St Cuthbert's is a smaller than average sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding (which is provided to support the learning of pupils who are entitled to free school meals or in the care of the local authority) is much lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils whose learning needs receive the level of support known as 'school action' is well below average. Those supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is low compared with the national average.
- A much-lower-than-average proportion of pupils are from a range of minority ethnic groups with none who are at an early stage of learning to speak English as an additional language.
- The school meets the current floor standards, which set out the government's minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- The school provides a breakfast club each day.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that progress is rapid and sustained in all lessons so that all pupils are able to make consistently rapid progress by:
  - making certain that pupils' work constantly challenges their thinking and understanding
  - ensuring that pupils have a secure grasp of how they can improve
  - extending the quality and range of opportunities for pupils to practise their writing, especially the more-able boys
  - increasing pupils' confidence and skill to learn and work things out for themselves.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

is good

- When pupils reach the end of Year 6 they attain high standards in all subjects compared to the national average. This has been a consistent pattern over the last three years. Although this represents good progress and achievement, not enough pupils make rapid progress to ensure a higher proportion exceeds what is expected of them. However, the most recent Year 6 test results show that an increasing proportion of pupils are achieving the highest levels, as their progress becomes more rapid in lessons.
- Children settle very quickly and confidently in the happy Reception class atmosphere. A majority demonstrate well-developed social, speaking and listening skills. Activities are well matched to the age, ability and needs of children, making certain they make good and sometimes swift progress. Although the rate of progress slows a little in Key Stage 1, increasingly imaginative approaches ensure pupils continue to make good progress. By the end of Year 6, attainment is typically high in English and mathematics, although the writing skills of the more-able boys are not always as good as they could be. Positive action to promote an enjoyment and love of reading is raising the skills of all pupils significantly.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress and achieve well. This is because rigorous checking of progress quickly identifies any gaps or slips in the learning and development of individual pupils. Those pupils supported by pupil premium also make good progress.
- Pupils are more and more confident at using their skills to solve problems or puzzles. Despite the increasing range of imaginative and thought-provoking approaches, which encourage pupils to work things out for themselves and respond with accurate explanations, opportunities are sometimes missed for pupils to learn on their own.
- The firm focus on early reading and writing skills is augmented by stimulating activities which hold interest and promote imaginative thinking. The inspiring use of themes, such as studying life in Victorian times, brings learning to life, provoking pupils' imagination, feelings and emotions.
- Rapid progress is being made in fostering reading enjoyment and using reading to discover, envisage and question. Attainment in reading by the age of six is above the national average. Older pupils of all abilities are enthusiastic about their reading. In conversations, they are keen to describe their enjoyment when the author Adam Bushnell visited the school to work with them. Most are confidently mastering the more complex skills of discussing an appreciation of an author's style and use of themes.

### The quality of teaching

is good

- The good and sometimes inspiring and exciting teaching enables pupils to learn well. It results in high levels of enjoyment. As staff increase the challenges and demands they make of pupils, a more rapid and consistent pattern of progress and higher achievement is emerging.
- Problem-solving challenges, investigations, interesting visits and absorbing visitors develop pupils' skills in an ever widening range of active and practical ways. The pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is brought about by activities such as writing a sales pitch for an eco-friendly bike or considering the plight of young soldiers in battle.
- Progress is more rapid and sustained when:
  - teachers make it crystal clear to pupils what they are going to learn
  - staff make certain that pupils of all abilities and needs can achieve success
  - carefully planned activities and searching questioning constantly build upon pupils' earlier learning

- imaginative approaches capture and hold interest and give pupils confidence to think and learn for themselves
- accurate and helpful marking makes certain pupils know how well they have done, encourages them to assess their own work and makes it clear how to improve
- skilful classroom support constantly follows, prompts and probes pupils' thinking.
- When teaching is less challenging and the pace of learning a little more variable:
  - activities are less well matched to the abilities of individual pupils
  - the demands made of pupils do not relentlessly test and extend their thinking
  - the teacher's explanation is too long and questioning is not always searching enough
  - pupils do not get sufficient opportunities to work things out for themselves.
- The pupil premium funding has enabled the school to extend the richness and variety of first-hand learning activities. The positive working relationships with families who are increasingly involved in their children's development, such as during the mathematics investigation morning, is strengthening the school's drive for a rapid and sustained pattern of progress and high achievement.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are outstanding

- High expectations, excellent staff role models, clear boundaries for behaviour and a strong sense of belonging all combine to ensure pupils are happy and extremely safe. The breakfast club sets a highly positive tone to the start of the school day.
- Pupils get on really well with each other and show each other much kindness, politeness and consideration. The mutual respect between adults and pupils is evident in their relaxed, friendly relationships throughout the day. In conversations, parents, staff and pupils speak highly of the sensible behaviour and responsible attitudes displayed in school. Pupils understand what constitutes bullying and speak confidently of how they would resolve any worries and concerns they may have. The very rare instances of inappropriate behaviour are managed by staff swiftly and highly effectively. Inspectors saw nothing less than excellent behaviour, politeness, high levels of pupil commitment to their work and level-headed attitudes throughout the time they were in school.
- Pupils appreciate the excellent levels of care and support they receive from staff. They demonstrate an assured grasp of how to avoid risk and danger, such as coping with the potential threats when using new technology. Break and lunchtimes are well supervised with sensible and safety conscious attitudes actively promoted. Pupils really enjoy the opportunities they have playing, talking and having fun with their friends.
- Individual pupils whose needs are sometimes complex are extremely well supported. This includes the use of support agencies to provide essential specialist support. The overwhelming majority of parents value how well their children are looked after.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- Since the previous inspection, the highly effective headteacher has systematically improved all aspects of the school's provision with determination and energy. Together, senior leaders continuously build upon the school's many strengths, constantly adding to the quality and richness of pupils' learning. As a result the drive towards making certain that all pupils achieve highly and attain high standards is continuously strengthening.
- Those with responsibility for subjects are developing their expertise and skills confidently. They are increasingly reflective and self-critical. Performance management and staff training are closely linked and sharply focussed upon enriching the quality of learning in and outside the

classroom. Consequently, the school has a strong capacity to continue to improve.

- Rigorous systems are in place to check pupils' progress and development. The information is thoughtfully used to plan lessons and activities. Any gaps in pupils' learning are quickly identified and positive corrective action taken. The monitoring of lessons is frequent, thorough and accurate. Staff skills and talents are being nurtured effectively. Leaders' self-evaluation judgements are considered and accurate.
- The good and constantly improving curriculum provides a broad range of interesting experiences. This includes a residential experience for older pupils. The increasingly imaginative approaches are helping to enliven lessons, although there are times when opportunities to develop pupils' writing are missed and skills are not practised enough in all subjects.
- The wide range of stimulating activities, including visitors, visits, school clubs and cultural and sporting activities add to the richness of school life. For example, successful partnership working with a nearby inner city school, which draws pupils from an extensive range of cultures and backgrounds, provides pupils with valuable experiences of the world around them. Excellent use is made of community partnerships to extend the range of what the school has to offer, such as working with the neighbouring Durham County Cricket Club. The school engages parents really well to support their children's learning and achievement.
- Staff training is firmly linked to school improvement priorities and very good support is provided for parent volunteers and students on placement. Staff performance management is directly related to the progress made by pupils and training priorities.
- Safeguarding meets requirements with much best practice underpinning the high quality of care and support for pupils.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The shrewdly led and highly committed governing body challenges and holds the school to account in positive ways. In discussions, they demonstrate a good grasp of school strengths, areas for improvement, the quality of teaching and learning and how well the pupils are achieving, including those supported by pupil premium. They share the headteacher's high aspirations and make effective use of performance management to add to the momentum of improvement. They work successfully with the local authority, making good use of their advice and governor training programme to sharpen their evaluative skills.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	114242
<b>Local authority</b>	Durham
<b>Inspection number</b>	403231

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	193
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Brian Quigley
<b>Headteacher</b>	Clare Swales
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	30 June 2008
<b>Telephone number</b>	0191 3882305
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