

St Aidan's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School

Norham Road, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 0LF

Inspection dates 3–4 July 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- From starting points that are typically below those expected for their age, pupils make good progress overall. By the time pupils leave at the end of Year 4 they reach standards that are in line with age-related expectations.
- Teaching is good. Teachers use a range of interesting resources to engage pupils' interests, which motivates them to learn.
- Pupils enjoy school and show positive attitudes to learning. They say they feel safe and that they are well taken care of at school.
- Relationships are strong throughout school, which is reflected in the welcoming and friendly atmosphere in which pupils are confident to tackle new areas in their learning.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and in and around school. They are well-mannered, considerate and show respect towards one another.
- Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They have enabled the school to improve outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage and end of Key Stage 1 since the previous inspection. Decisive action has been taken to improve teaching.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Assessment data are not always used well enough to ensure pupils make the maximum progress, particularly in mathematics and writing.
- Teachers sometimes miss opportunities to question pupils closely enough to check on their learning.
- When teachers mark work they do not always make clear how pupils can improve their work.
- Not all teaching results in rapid progress and higher achievement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons or parts of lessons, of which two were joint observations with the headteacher and one with the deputy headteacher.
- In addition, inspectors heard groups of children read in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.
- Meetings were held with pupils, members of the governing body, the headteacher and the school's senior staff. The lead inspector also spoke with the school improvement partner.
- Inspectors met a number of parents informally at the start of the school day. They took into account the 17 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).
- Inspectors also received and took account of 19 staff questionnaires.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents, including the school's view of its own performance and planning for improvement, the information the school keeps on pupils' current progress and achievement, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and the school's safeguarding information.

Inspection team

Irene Cochrane, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Pauline Piddington

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (funding provided by the government to support the learning of pupils who are known to be entitled to free school meals, in the care of the local authority or children from armed service families) is below average.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- 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.
- Since the previous inspection there have been a number of staff changes. In September 2011 the headteacher provided temporary, part-time support as executive headteacher of the middle school which receives most of the pupils when they leave St Aidan's. At the same time a new deputy headteacher took up post.
- The school has achieved a number of nationally recognised accreditations including the Healthy School Award and School Financial Standard.
- The school provides a breakfast club for pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement in mathematics and writing to the same level as in reading by:
 - making full use of the tracking information the school has about pupils' progress by leaders at all levels.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good or better by:
 - making greater use of questioning during lessons to check on pupils' learning
 - increasing the level of challenge and pace of learning in lessons
 - ensuring that marking and feedback during lessons provide pupils with a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve
 - ensuring the use of targets is consistently applied and their profile raised in lessons.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children join Nursery class with skills and experiences that are below what is typically expected for their age. Skills are particularly low in personal, social and emotional development, communication and language, literacy and mathematics. Children settle in well because of the strong relationships and enjoy a wide range of interesting activities. They make increasing progress in the Reception class to enter Year 1 with standards that are closer to national averages, although skills in writing remain slightly lower.
- Attainment has risen at the end of Year 2 over the past two years and was slightly above average in reading and writing, and just below in mathematics, in 2012. Attainment at the end of Year 4 is in line with age-related expectations and was just above expectations in reading and mathematics in 2012. Current school data for Year 4 pupils indicate a similar picture with even stronger outcomes in reading, showing a two-year trend of improvement. This is confirmed by lesson observations, hearing pupils read and scrutiny of work.
- Pupils supported at school action or with a statement of educational needs make good progress from their starting points as a result of the support and interventions they receive.
- In 2012 attainment for pupils who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium was in line with age-related expectations in reading and mathematics but below in writing.
- Inspection evidence shows that progress in reading is good. This is as result of a key focus on sounding out letters to help pupils read words and the introduction of a daily, structured system which links letters, reading and writing on a more rapid basis. Pupils enjoy books and are keen to show their reading skills.
- Pupils' progress has shown some variation attributed to temporary staff changes. The school has been successful in identifying pupils at risk of underachievement and accelerating progress through effective interventions and support.

The quality of teaching is good

- Pupils' positive attitudes to learning reflect the strong relationships that exist in the school. As a result, pupils are keen to take part and support each other well in paired and group work.
- Teachers make lessons interesting and plan activities that will motivate and interest pupils with a key focus on providing first-hand experiences. Opportunities are planned for pupils to share their views and discuss their learning with each other. These strategies were observed in a Year 2 mathematics lesson where pupils worked together diligently in groups to build cubes in multiples of 10, to see who could make 100 cubes in the fastest time. Pupils were highly motivated and sharply focused to carry out the task within the time allocated.
- In the best lessons teachers are enthusiastic and have high expectations, and work builds well on prior learning. Good use is made of assessment information to plan well-matched activities, and skilful questioning ensures that pupils' learning is on track and further extended.
- Most lessons benefit from effective support from teaching assistants, who know the pupils well and are actively involved in lessons. This contributes positively to their learning and effectively meets the needs of all pupils, particularly when they support small-group work.
- However, in less effective lessons the differing needs and expectations of pupils' learning are not as well addressed. As a result, pupils' progress slows because the work set is not always challenging enough to help them move on to the next level.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage children have access to a wide range of opportunities to explore and find things out for themselves. This has been further developed through outdoor learning where children enthusiastically enjoy learning through play and cooperate well with each other. Relationships are strong and parents appreciate the care and support provided for their children.

- Although work is marked regularly, not all teachers provide pupils with the opportunity to refer back to past work and make corrections or respond to comments.
- Pupils' individual targets are based on the level they are working towards but they are not always clear what that means. Additionally, opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own work are inconsistent.
- Teachers increasingly provide a range of opportunities for pupils to practise their skills in writing in a range of subjects, particularly so in religious education. Similar opportunities are less well developed in mathematics.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils have good attitudes to learning. They say that learning is really fun and like the interesting activities the teachers plan. They appreciate the help they receive from teachers and other adults in school.
- The school provides a strongly caring community where pupils are encouraged to be active learners and take good care of each other.
- Behaviour is good in and around school. Pupils say there is no bullying in school because 'teachers do not allow it'. Any incidents are dealt with swiftly and the reward of privileged free-choice 'Golden Time' in Year 3 and Year 4 helps considerably towards pupils managing their behaviour effectively. It is only in the less stimulating lessons that pupils' attention wanes a little.
- Parents express positive views that their children are well cared for and happy at school. Pupils feel safe and say they know what to do if there is an incident of any kind. They know adults can be asked for help and are aware of safe practices, for example when using the internet.
- Pupils readily take on responsibility and show respect towards one another. A particular strength is the way in which older pupils take responsibility for younger ones, for example being a buddy at break times. This is also reflected during lessons, when pupils are highly supportive of each other and keen to share in their learning, showing patience and tolerance.
- Attendance is average overall and improved in 2012 as a result of initiatives undertaken by the school to encourage pupils to attend.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher work very well together to bring about school improvement. They have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas of weakness. They have successfully taken decisive action to improve the quality of teaching through a period of significant staff changes. Since the previous inspection standards have improved at the end of Key Stage 1 and outdoor provision has developed in the Early Years Foundation Stage. In addition, reading has further strengthened by the time pupils leave Year 4.
- Senior leaders have improved systems for checking the progress of all groups of pupils. As a result, this is an inclusive school where all pupils get on well together. Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination is at the heart of all the school does to improve outcomes for pupils.
- An effective tracking system is in place that enables leaders to quickly identify any potential underachievement and provide additional support and intervention when required. However, it is not yet fully utilised by all leaders and staff to make sure pupils make increased progress in all subjects. Leaders are now focusing upon improving the use of assessment systems to address gaps and extend learning in mathematics and writing.
- The introduction of pupil targets based on expected levels of achievement has had a positive impact on ensuring a consistent approach for all staff to utilise. Although this has resulted in improving outcomes generally, it is not yet fully embedded across the school by all staff and pupils are not always secure about their next steps of achievement.

- Leaders have improved teaching through regular lesson observations and detailed feedback on development points. The advice and mentoring given to newly qualified teachers has been valued. Performance management targets are sharply focused upon pupils' progress and achievement.
 - Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is reflected in all aspects of the school's work. The curriculum offers a wide range of interesting activities which pupils enjoy, particularly the educational visits and exciting science lessons. There is a key emphasis on promoting basic skills.
 - The school engages positively with other schools and outside agencies. Partnership work with the middle school where the headteacher works has enabled effective links to support the teaching and learning of music for pupils in Years 3 and 4.
 - The local authority has provided brokered support for the school from an external consultant. Successful advice on how to improve outdoor provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has additionally been provided.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and areas for development. Governors are aware of the way in which pupil premium funding has been spent and have taken decisive action about the budget and how to deploy staff. They are very clear about links between staff performance, pupils' progress and movement up the salary scale and are fully supportive in the drive to improve teaching and raise achievement. The governing body has gone through some changes in its composition recently with a number of new appointments. Effective use is made of the differing skills of governors. They ensure that the school fulfils its statutory requirements for safeguarding.
 - The governing body has robust procedures for monitoring the effectiveness of the executive headteacher role. Governors have been instrumental in making new appointments. They are fully aware of the needs of pupils and their families and provide effective support to increase pupils' achievement.
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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	122307
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	412671

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	3-9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	232
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Julie Burns
Headteacher	Samantha Leslie
Date of previous school inspection	14 October 2008
Telephone number	01670 813308
Fax number	01670 851200
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