

St Paul's RC Voluntary Aided Middle School

South Road, Alnwick, Northumberland, NE66 2NU

Inspection dates 15–16 October 2013

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		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- From a broadly average level at the start of Year 5, pupils progress well and achieve above-average standards by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 8.
- Gaps in the performance of different groups have narrowed significantly since the previous inspection.
- The quality of teaching is now more consistently good.
- Pupils' behaviour in and around the school, towards staff and peers, is excellent. They feel safe here.
- The school has successfully addressed the areas for improvement from the previous inspection.
- Senior leadership and management, including governors, have focused effectively on the key areas for improvement, and now have a good track record of raising standards and improving teaching.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils do not make as much progress in reading as they do in writing and mathematics.
- Pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills in English and mathematics are not always applied in real and relevant contexts across the curriculum.
- Teaching assistants working in lessons with subject teachers do not always enable the lower-ability pupils with whom they work to develop their learning because they over-control and over-direct their work.
- The pupils' ability to develop aspects of personal learning is underdeveloped due to too much teacher direction.
- There is a lack of consistency and coherence from all subject leaders in terms of them collecting, using, sharing and moderating subject performance data, particularly at the transitional points at the start of Year 5 and end of Year 8.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at short notice.
- Inspectors observed 14 part lessons, which included 10 teachers in total and some teaching assistants and other adults working in lessons. All teachers were offered and almost all accepted the feedback given by inspectors.
- The lead inspector looked at the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) prior to and during the inspection. In total, there were 31 online responses in addition to one letter from a parent; all were evidenced as part of this inspection. The collective findings from these responses were summarised with the executive headteacher, and were also briefly shared at the formal feedback meeting at the end of the inspection.
- A range of documents was read and meetings held with the executive headteacher and other senior staff, the Chair, Vice Chair and another member of the Governing Body, and an external consultant employed by the local authority to link the school with its school improvement service.
- Inspectors also spoke with a number of pupils and staff during lessons, and also observed the pupils at breaks and in their general movement around the school site.

Inspection team

Brian Blake, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lee Owston

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Paul's RC Voluntary Aided is a middle deemed secondary school with pupils starting in Year 5 and finishing at the end of Year 8. This means the school is significantly smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school is federated and co-located on the same site as St Paul's RC Voluntary Aided First School. There is an executive headteacher and one governing body for both schools.
- The proportion of students who need extra help with their education, through school action support, is below average. The proportion of students who need more specialised support, namely, those at school action plus and those who are disabled or have a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- Students eligible for free school meals, those who have been in care for more than six months, and those whose parents are currently serving in the armed forces are eligible for additional funding called the pupil premium. The proportion of these students currently in school is lower than average.
- Almost all pupils are White British
- The school meets the current government floor standards.
- During this inspection, inspectors asked additional questions designed to ascertain the school's view of the impact and effectiveness of local authority services to support school improvement. This information will contribute to work being carried out by Ofsted to assess the use, quality and impact of those services.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching further so more is consistently good or outstanding by:
 - ensuring that pupils of all abilities are given frequent opportunities in all subjects to initiate different aspects of their learning, such as enquiry, research, refinement, adaptation and modification in work that is not always directed by the teacher or teaching assistants
 - providing pupils with written feedback that always identifies what has been done well and where further improvement is needed to make their work even better
 - planning more opportunities for the pupils to apply their English and mathematics learning in real and relevant contexts across the curriculum
 - planning more frequent opportunities for pupils to address their teachers' comments about their work.
- Raise attainment in reading across the school so that it at least matches the higher standards achieved by pupils in writing and mathematics by:
 - ensuring that reading skills are taught, developed and applied across the full curriculum
 - providing opportunities for the pupils to read for real and relevant purposes, including for personal research and enquiry.
- Improve further the leadership and management capacity of subject leaders by:
 - ensuring that there is greater consistency and coherence of roles, particularly in relation to the collection, sharing and moderation of pupil performance data, especially at key transition points at the start of Year 5 and at the end of Year 8
 - identify clearer milestones in the school development plan to aid senior leaders and governors in their assessment of the progress being made against each action in the plan.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- From a broadly average level at the start of Year 5, pupils make good progress so that by the time they reach the end of Key Stage 2, Year 6, their levels of attainment have improved to above average, with an increasingly greater number achieving the highest levels possible, especially in mathematics.
- This good rate of progress continues across Years 7 and 8, the first two years of Key Stage 3, so that the pupils continue to attain above-average standards, with an increasing number achieving the highest levels. Exceptional progress was evident in mathematics in 2013 as a result of the school's focus on this subject since the previous inspection. The pupils left the school at the end of Year 8 approximately four terms ahead of where they would typically be expected to be by this age in mathematics.
- While progress in reading is good, it is not as strong as that in writing or mathematics because there are fewer opportunities for the pupils to practise, develop and apply these reading skills for real and relevant reasons across all subjects. However, pupils enjoy reading and appreciate a range of classic and contemporary authors and works. School initiatives to increase the pupils' interest in books, including linking this to hand-held e-reading technology, have ensured that pupils are enthusiastic and regular readers.
- The gaps in the attainment between boys and girls have narrowed since the previous inspection so that there is now little difference between them, especially in writing and mathematics. Although narrowing, some gaps in reading remain because it has not been developed across the full curriculum to the same extent as writing and mathematics.
- Pupils with a disability and those with special educational needs make equally good progress as their peers because they receive specialist support interventions which accelerate their basic reading, writing and mathematical skills. The majority now reach levels of attainment typical for their age due to the quality of these interventions.
- Pupil premium funding is used well to provide additional tuition and to train teaching assistants to deliver specific programmes to help improve pupils' key literacy and numeracy skills. These initiatives are making an important difference for these pupils as they are now attaining standards typical for their age, and are quickly catching up to their peers. In 2013, there was just a difference of 0.5 in the average points score for these Year 6 pupils against the average for the whole year group.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now more consistently good. This has led to all pupils, including those in receipt of the pupil premium and those with special educational needs, making good progress and developing positive attitudes towards their learning. Parents agree with the school that the quality of teaching their child receives is good.
- Where teaching is most effective, there is very good subject knowledge and high expectations of what all pupils can achieve. Teachers ensure that lesson content meets the needs of pupils as they take careful account of their prior learning and their progress in previous lessons. This leads to work that provides just the right level of challenge and enables the pupils to deepen their understanding, increase their knowledge or improve their skills in the subject. Good, timely questioning by teachers to check what pupils have understood throughout the lesson ensures that learning is frequently adapted to support pupils of different abilities.
- In the few lessons where teaching still requires improvement, learning is too activity orientated, with insufficient challenge to make the pupils think for themselves. Some examples of this type of teaching were seen during the inspection. Teaching assistants contribute well to the good quality of teaching, particularly when they are delivering support programmes outside of the classroom. This is because they have received specific training in how these programmes should

be delivered. However the support provided by teaching assistants within lessons is more variable, particularly when working with lower-ability pupils. At times, the teaching assistant over-directs and controls the pupils' work, which limits their potential for individual decision-making in their learning.

- The teaching of reading, writing and mathematics is good. Teachers have a clear sense of what their pupils need to learn next and understand how basic skills develop from year group to year group. This progressive building of key skills has led to the year-on-year increase in the attainment and progress of all groups of pupils. However, pupils are not always given enough opportunity to use these key skills to solve real-life problems in mathematics or to write for real and relevant reasons in English.
- Marking and feedback are frequent and positive. Basic errors in calculation or incorrect spellings and use of punctuation are regularly highlighted to pupils to reinforce the importance of these key skills. Teachers' comments do not always provide more detailed, subject-specific improvement prompts about how pupils can improve their work further. This limits the pupils' opportunities to respond to the teacher's comments and refine, adapt, modify and improve on completed work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The pupils' behaviour in and out of lessons, in particular in listening to teachers, showing respect towards others, and in acting sensibly when moving around the school building is excellent.
- The part of pupils' behaviour which relates to their ability to develop and use their personal skills, such as self-initiated learning, research and enquiry are more limited because teachers have yet to embrace and encourage these qualities in all pupils. However, when given the opportunity to take individual responsibility, pupils respond very positively.
- There are very few disruptions in lessons, with teachers managing and organising the pupils very effectively. This means that little or no lesson time is lost because of challenging behaviour.
- The overall number of behavioural incidents that are formally recorded is low. There are few incidents of bullying, including those of a racial or homophobic nature.
- Overall attendance and punctuality to lessons are good.

The leadership and management are good

- The school places a high emphasis on its stated core values and beliefs. This gives a very clear view to all parents, carers and pupils that there are high expectations for future improvements, not only in attainment and progress but in all-round personal development.
- The school development plan provides a shared focus for governors and staff of the improvements that are needed to raise standards further through improved teaching. This plan has been used by the executive headteacher to ensure that there is consistency and coherence of actions across the school, particularly in relation to the development of key skills in literacy and numeracy. Governors and staff are, therefore, very positive that the school is taking necessary actions to raise standards and improve the overall quality of teaching. However, there is a lack of clarity about the time intervals (milestones) within the plan to ensure that these coincide more accurately with the timing of the pre-planned governing body meetings held each term. Without this alignment, the governors may not be in possession of the most up-to-date information about the progress being made across each action in the plan, which means their ability to hold the school to account will be weaker.
- The combination of the school's development plan and the additional analyses and information provided by an external consultant means that senior leaders and governors know what the school needs to do to improve further. This is further evidenced by the school's self-evaluation, which was very close to the eventual inspection findings.
- Although the school has successfully addressed all the recommendations from the previous

inspection, some have had a more significant impact than others. For example, the school has very successfully improved pupils' mathematical skills and raised standards at the end of Key Stage 2. Almost all aspects of leadership and management have also improved. However, although the school has successfully developed the role of middle leaders, especially in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, there is still some work to do in developing a greater consistency of practice from all subject leaders in the school. This applies, in particular, to the collection of pupils' performance data, and its use in targeting future improvements within the subject, and in sharing this information more openly with all pupils. Also, there is not yet a consistent approach to moderating performance data across the full subject range at the key transition entry and leaving points in Years 5 and 8 respectively.

- The local authority has supported the school in a way that is helpful to staff and governors. The school has benefitted from the external support of an educational consultant, commissioned by the local authority to link with the school. Visits by this officer have been regular and well-focused on key improvement areas from the previous inspection and the performance of pupils from the most recently published school data. The work of this officer has challenged senior staff and governors and helped them, collectively and individually, to develop their capacity for making future improvements. However, the executive headteacher and governors are not sure that they would have received this support unless they had subscribed to a service level agreement with the local authority.
- The curriculum of the school offers pupils a broad range of learning experiences, and is enhanced through extra-curricular provision, links with partner schools and its range of charitable events which give an emphasis to the pupils' broader spiritual, moral and social development. Thus, the curriculum is helping to emphasise the broader social and cultural aspects of its stated value system.
- The Parent View results show that the overwhelming majority of parents and carers who responded are very positive about the school's provision for their children.
- Although safeguarding arrangements meet statutory regulations, the single central register had some missing information that was quickly corrected after the start of the inspection.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The role of governors has progressed well since the previous inspection, with their delegation into two main sub-groups, strategy and resources, helping to ensure that all aspects of the school's provision are overseen by a focused sub-group or individual governor. This means there is clarity and certainty about their need to hold the school to account. All meetings are well focused and relevant to both school-improvement matters and the broader issues which the school encounters. Governors have an adequate overview of performance data, primarily from the Ofsted dashboard, and from school and local authority generated data. Governors act on issues identified by the executive headteacher, external consultant or themselves. For example, there have been several visits recently resulting from a known issue with reading within the school. Staff are positive about increasing links with governors and say that they find such visits helpful and supportive. Governors and senior staff are aware of the difference that the pupil premium is making to help these pupils achieve much more closely to their peers. The governors have a good understanding of how well teachers are doing in school in terms of pupils' progress. This helps the governors to assess teachers' performance against the pay they receive. The school is currently in receipt of additional funding, £5,187, to support physical education and sport in school. Although this funding has only recently been received, the school has already targeted some of its spending towards the use of coaches from the local area to provide specialist coaching sessions after school.

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	122372
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	425701

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	161
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pam Slater
Headteacher	Maria Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	9 November 2011
Telephone number	01665 602650
Fax number	01665 606297
Email address	admin@stpaulsrcvamiddle.northumberland.sch.uk

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