

St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School, Berwick

Prince Edward Road, Tweedmouth, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland, TD15 2EX

Inspection dates 23–24 October 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Pupils' achievement, the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and the effectiveness of the school's leaders, including governors, all require further improvement to be good.
- The quality of teaching is inconsistent and this has limited the learning and progress of pupils and the extent to which they acquire and develop key concepts and skills in each of the subjects they study.
- Pupils' achievement varies across year groups, subjects and for different groups of pupils. Most pupils make no better than broadly average progress.
- The work of leaders and governors has not been effective enough over time to ensure that key aspects of the school's work such as pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching are consistently good or better in the school.
- The areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection regarding improving pupils' achievement and attendance have not wholly been resolved.

The school has the following strengths

- Children settle quickly and get off to a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes because of the good support and guidance staff provide. Recent changes to teaching, the curriculum and the outdoor area are showing signs of enabling children to make better progress than they have previously.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very well.
- Staff have created a happy, caring and inclusive school that parents value greatly.
- Behaviour and safety are good. Pupils are charming and a real credit to themselves and their parents, showing respect and consideration to each other, staff and visitors. Good procedures exist to keep them safe.
- The school is improving generally and, in particular, the strategies to improve the progress of pupils at the early stages of learning English, those with hearing impairments and those with low reading ages are having a very positive impact.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed a total of six lessons jointly with the headteacher where the focus was on either mathematics or English, covering each of the school's three classes twice, including the Early Years Foundation Stage provision. The inspector made six additional visits to classrooms to observe teaching in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- The inspector listened to pupils read and evaluated the quality of the work in a sample of pupils' books. The inspector also watched an assembly, and saw specialist staff delivering lessons to develop and improve the speaking, reading and writing skills of targeted pupils.
- Discussions were held with: the headteacher; one group of pupils; a local authority representative; four members of the governing body; teaching assistants. The inspector also discussed the school's work with: the Early Years Foundation Stage leader; a teacher of the deaf from the local authority; the special educational needs coordinator.
- The inspector took account of the 17 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), along with an analysis of the school's own parental questionnaire. The inspector also evaluated the 12 responses to the staff questionnaire and talked to five parents about their views of the school.
- The inspector examined a range of school documentation including: safeguarding and child protection arrangements; the school's action plans; records of lesson observations and checks on pupils' learning and progress; reports from the visits by the school improvement partner. The inspector also looked at records relating to behaviour and attendance.
- The inspector considered the school's arrangements for making best use of the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, those whose parents are in the armed forces and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.
- During this inspection, the inspector asked additional questions designed to ascertain the school's views 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.

Inspection team

John Young, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- At this smaller-than-average-sized first school, the majority of pupils are White British. However, the proportion of pupils originating from minority ethnic heritages is higher than average.
- The proportion of pupils believed to speak English as an additional language is higher than average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is similar to the national average.
- The proportions of pupils supported at school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational need are lower than average. Their needs range from autistic spectrum disorder to speech, language and communication needs and behaviour, emotional and social difficulties.
- All of the pupils are educated at the school and none receive alternative provision.
- The school premises are used for some family learning opportunities.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the impact of teaching on all pupils' learning so that pupils' achievements, particularly in writing and mathematics, are consistently good or better throughout the school by:
 - increasing the effectiveness with which all pupils, including the most able, those pupils for whom the pupil premium funding provides support and those who are disabled and with special educational needs learn and progress
 - ensuring all staff consistently plan and deliver high-quality learning activities and challenges that are well matched to the different needs and abilities of the pupils they teach and that staff provide pupils with the guidance they need to become confident and successful learners
 - improving pupils' calculation skills and their oracy and language skills in order to enrich their vocabulary and improve the accuracy of their speech, which would help them to better translate the ideas they articulate verbally into high-quality writing
 - ensuring pupils have enough work in their books to be able to use them as a learning resource from which they can review, reflect and reinforce their grasp of previously covered topics
 - ensuring a higher proportion of pupils reach the higher levels of attainment in all subjects.
- Improve attendance and reduce rates of persistent absence by:
 - increasing the effectiveness of the school's strategies to raise attendance, especially among those pupils who are persistently absent
 - ensuring parents are better informed about the negative impact to their children's education that frequent absence and taking extended holidays during term time can have.
- Improve the strategic influence and effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, so that the quality of education the school provides improves to at least good by the time of the next section 5 inspection by:
 - leaders decisively taking the action necessary to secure the required improvements including holding staff more rigorously to account for the quality of their work, tracking more regularly

how well pupils are progressing, reviewing school policies and procedures to ensure they continue to be fit for purpose, and increasing the efficiency of leadership

- ensuring teaching, the curriculum and the support and guidance given to pupils are consistently of a high enough quality to enable all pupils to thrive and make at least good progress from their respective starting points during their time in the school
- ensuring the impact of the local authority school improvement service gives the school more effective support, advice and guidance to help it improve its overall effectiveness to good.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The majority of pupils' achievement requires improvement to be good when set against their starting points on entry to the school. This is the case for all groups, including most-able pupils, minority ethnic pupils, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, and those who attract pupil premium funding. Whilst some individual pupils make very good progress and reach high standards, this is not yet the norm.
- School data and inspectors' observations indicate that the majority of children start school in the Reception class with skills, dispositions and attitudes that are broadly in line with those typically expected for their age. They make progress and are suitably prepared for Year 1, with almost half of them reaching a good level of development. Similarly, their performance in the end of Year 1 phonics screening test is in line with national averages. Their performance in the national tests at the end of Year 2 is also broadly in line with national age-related expectations. This is also the case at the end of Year 4 when pupils leave the school. Overall, this represents broadly average rather than good progress. Over time, fewer-than-average numbers of pupils have reached the higher levels of attainment.
- The school's latest academic tracking data shows an inconsistent picture in terms of the progress pupils currently on roll make, with evidence of fast, slow and average progress apparent. This is the case across subjects, classes and groups of pupils.
- There are inconsistencies in pupils' attainment and achievement in mathematics, particularly in relation to calculation skills, and in English, particularly in relation to the extent of pupils' vocabulary, the precision of their speech, and how well they can use these aspects to convert their ideas into high-quality pieces of writing.
- Pupils read regularly and fluently. Most pupils enjoy reading and make some effective progress, aided by the school's focus on providing books that they find thought provoking and fun.
- Pupil premium funding has helped to fund specialist learning resources and support staff to work intensively with the targeted pupils. Their work has led to some significant improvements in some pupils' reading, writing, speech and use of language and their mathematical skills.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement to be good because most pupils, including the most able, those eligible for support through the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make broadly average rather than good progress over time, particularly in writing and mathematics.
- The quality of teaching observed during the inspection varied in quality; some was good and some required improvement. Inspection evidence shows this to be typical of the variations in teaching over time. Clearly, pupils have not had the benefit of consistently good teaching over time, which is reflected in their inconsistent learning and progress.
- It is clear that staff can plan and deliver good lessons. Their challenge is to do so every day.
- Teaching was effective when pupils were motivated by interesting and progressively challenging activities that were well matched to their abilities. Pupils particularly enjoyed working in teams, practical activities and opportunities to use their imagination. Staff supported pupils' learning effectively with shrewd questioning and appropriate guidance that helped to extend and/or consolidate pupils' knowledge, understanding and confidence.
- Learning slowed when: staff set work that was either too easy or too hard; pupils were unclear about what was expected of them; pupils' obvious misconceptions went uncorrected; when planning was weak and teaching was uninspiring so that pupils' attention and motivation waned.
- The deployment of teaching assistants to support groups and individual pupils' learning was

mostly effective, although their impact was diminished when they were not suitably prepared.

- Marking and feedback are inconsistent and staff do not always outline to pupils how they could improve their work. Pupils are generally aware of their targets and how well they are progressing.
- The school's policy of pupils mainly using dry wipe boards to work on is not helping them to successfully retain and consolidate the key concepts and skills they are acquiring and developing in English and mathematics. This is because they have no visual aide-memoir, and little evidence in their books of previously covered work to which they can refer or review.
- The teaching seen in the Early Years Foundation Stage Unit was mostly effective and children made good use of the stimulating indoor and outdoor learning areas. A good mix of adult-led and child-initiated activities, together with effective support and guidance, gave children the confidence to become more confident, independent and skilled. However, records show that the impact of teaching on children's learning over time requires improvement to be good.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- There is a welcoming, inclusive and mutually supportive ethos which permeates this Catholic school and which helps to ensure that pupils, including those deemed more vulnerable, feel safe, well supported and cared for by staff who they believe really care about their well-being.
- Pupils from a wide range of cultural backgrounds told the inspector that they are happy at school and that they get along well with each other, working and playing alongside each other without issue. Relationships between pupils and staff are particularly positive in this close-knit community.
- Pupils are aware of the potential risks they might face and are vigilant. They know how to keep themselves and others safe and are confident staff would help them if they have a problem.
- Pupils usually behave well in lessons and at social times and have positive attitudes to learning. They are friendly and respectful to each other, staff and visitors. Few lose 'Golden Time' or get detention, and there have been no exclusions for many years. However, there are occasional lapses when teaching is less effective or uninspiring, and when tempers occasionally flare.
- Pupils are insistent that bullying is rare and that, when it occurs, it is dealt with decisively. This was supported by the inspector's scrutiny of the school's incident and behaviour records, which showed little or no evidence of homophobic, racist, or cyber-bullying.
- Staff manage pupils' behaviour well overall. They apply the school's rules consistently and have high expectations for pupils' conduct, ensuring pupils stick closely to the protocols that exist.
- The parents who responded to Parent View and the school's survey agree that the school ensures that pupils are well behaved and that their children feel safe and are happy. The parents to whom the inspector spoke were full of praise for the Christian ethos they feel the school develops in their children, noting their improved courtesy, consideration and selflessness.
- The school is using several strategies to improve but pupils' attendance remains stubbornly below the national average and rates of persistent absence are above average. Leaders know that they must find a solution urgently and get those pupils and parents to whom this relates to realise the negative impact regular absence can have on pupils' education. Punctuality is good.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders have not been effective enough in improving the school over time. They work hard and embrace the school's ethos and philosophy, but they must accept that promoting an inclusive, caring school community where pupils feel cherished and thrive socially, emotionally and spiritually, and striving for academic excellence, are not mutually exclusive.
- Decisive action is necessary to tackle the inconsistencies and shortcomings apparent including: holding staff more rigorously to account for the quality of their work; tracking more regularly

how well pupils are progressing; reviewing school policies and procedures to ensure they continue to be fit for purpose, and increasing the efficiency of leadership so that the school's overall effectiveness is at least good by the time of the next section 5 inspection.

- The management of teaching is not sharp enough and does not ensure variations in teaching are eliminated quickly.
- The school has gained teaching and leadership training and advice, curriculum support and assessment guidance from its link with the Benet Biscop Catholic Partnership.
- Parents value the school greatly. The school liaises well with parents via regular newsletters, its website, and by inviting them into school for events such as plays, liturgies, open days and consultation evenings. All of those who responded to Parent View would recommend the school.
- The curriculum has recently been modified and is now generally well matched to pupils' needs and interests. Over time, it has not had the impact leaders had hoped for.
- Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is promoted well through the curriculum, assemblies, visits, events and visitors they experience. Pupils raise funds for charity, display a strong moral code and have good social skills. Pupils lead worship, sing, dance, draw and paint, and helped design the prayer garden and a mural to celebrate the cultural diversity of the school.
- The new primary school sport funding is being well used to provide high-quality physical education lessons, a series of competitions and sports festivals, expert coaching and training for school staff to help them improve pupils' performance and encourage them to live healthy lifestyles.
- The pupil premium has been spent on raising the achievement of the targeted pupils, additional curriculum opportunities such as music therapy and one-to-one mentoring. This has been only partly successful and gaps remain between this group of pupils' academic performance and those of other pupils in the school.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and procedures for child protection, site security, staff recruitment and risk assessment are thorough. Designated staff are suitably trained.
- Leaders of the Early Years Foundation Stage have ensured that children have had suitable teaching, a varied curriculum and sufficient support to prepare them for Year 1.
- The local authority has a relatively light touch relationship with the school that revolves around target setting and the review of the school's performance, interspersed with occasional visits by an assigned school improvement partner. This arrangement has helped the local authority to develop an understanding of the context in which the school works and pupils' performance. The local authority has focused on brokering school-to-school support rather than direct involvement in helping to drive the school's improvement, although consultants have helped the school to moderate its performance data in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 in the past. Scrutiny of the school improvement partner's reports from the last visit in March 2013 highlighted that teaching required improvement and some issues regarding pupils' progress in mathematics and writing, but no specific actions were proposed. In the final analysis, the local authority strategy for helping to improve this school has not resulted in any discernible improvement over time.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are supportive of the school and its philosophy. They carry out their duties diligently and ensure that statutory requirements are met. However, they have not exerted sufficient influence to ensure that the quality of education pupils receive is good or better.
 - Governors became over-reliant on the departed Chair of the Governing Body to keep them informed about educational matters at the school. A more discerning and critical approach is now needed to evaluate the information they get from school leaders about the curriculum, teaching and pupils' progress, so that they are clearer about how well the school is performing and can hold leaders to account more confidently.
 - Governors are knowledgeable about the impact of pupil premium funding and links between performance management and staff salary progression. The management of financial

resources is suitable.

- In light of the major changes to the membership of the governing body recently, and the fact that its impact is not yet good, an external review of governance would be beneficial to help determine how governors might exert a more effective influence on the school's further improvement.

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	122309
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	425847

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	89
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Phillips
Headteacher	Bernie Fisher
Date of previous school inspection	6 December 2011
Telephone number	01289 307785
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