

St Matthew's Catholic Primary School

Highfield Lane, Prudhoe, Northumberland, NE42 6EY

Inspection dates

13–14 January 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- All groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with a special educational need or disability, achieve well from their different starting points to reach above-average standards by the time they leave the school.
- Teaching is good. Pupils respond to teachers' high expectations and apply themselves diligently to their work.
- Pupils behave well both in and out of the classroom. They play well together in the playground and are keen to take responsibilities to help others in the school. Buddies and playground helpers contribute towards pupils feeling safe and secure in school. They say inappropriate behaviour and bullying incidents are rare and adults deal with them swiftly.
- Achievement in the early years is good. Children are supported sensitively to become keen, independent learners.
- The headteacher astutely deploys responsibilities to staff and enables them to develop through well-planned training. This, allied with effective management of teachers' performance, has resulted in teaching and achievement continuing to improve.
- All school leaders including governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Their plans are well thought through and carefully checked and ensure that improvements continue.
- The curriculum supports pupils' social and emotional development extremely well and this, supplemented with memorable visits, contributes to their enjoyment of school life and their feelings of safety and security.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The progress made in writing by pupils in the early years and Key Stage 1 is not as swift as in other subjects and their spelling is not as accurate as it could be.
- Marking does not always help pupils to understand the next steps they need to take to improve their work.
- The teaching of letters and sounds (phonics) in the early years and Key Stage 1 requires improvement. Teaching is not always accurate and work is sometimes too easy or too difficult.
- School leaders have not taken any recent formal steps to consult all parents about their views. Parents have not been well informed about all the changes that are taking place in the school.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in eight lessons, one of which was observed jointly with the headteacher. The inspector also made a visit to see a small group of pupils working with a teaching assistant out of the classroom. The inspector listened to pupils in Year 2 read. Additionally, the inspector made visits to the Nursery and the after-school club.
- The inspector held two meetings with different groups of pupils to seek their views and talked informally with pupils at breaks and lunchtimes.
- The inspector held discussions with members of the governing body, senior leaders, middle leaders and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector observed the school at work and looked at a range of documentation including the school's improvement plan, pupils' records of achievement, documents relating to the checks made on the quality of teaching, attendance and safeguarding.
- The inspector scrutinised pupils' work in books.
- The 30 responses to the online questionnaire Parent View were taken into account as well as the views of 19 parents who were spoken to informally during the inspection.
- Eleven staff submitted their views via a questionnaire and the inspector took these into account.

Inspection team

Susan Waugh, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage and most speak English as their home language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is below average. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, overall, is above average.
- The school provides for children in the early years through its Nursery and a mixed Reception/Year 1 class. The school also runs a daily after-school club.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- Half of the teaching staff have been appointed in the last year.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the ways writing is taught in the early years and Key Stage 1 by:
 - ensuring the teaching of letters and sounds (phonics) matches pupils' varying skills and abilities
 - ensuring that all staff receive training so that they teach phonics accurately
 - ensuring pupils phonics skills are transferred into their writing so that their spellings are more accurate
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to write as much as they are capable.
- Improve the quality of marking so that pupils understand the next steps they need to take to extend their work.
- Ensure that communication with parents improves so that their views are regularly gathered to inform school developments, and they are well informed about changes taking place in school.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- All staff are committed to working with the headteacher to do the best they can for all pupils in the school, no matter what their capabilities. Staff and governors are united in their desire to ensure equality of opportunity for all pupils. Their success is demonstrated in the good progress made by all groups of pupils and the way pupils with disabilities are enabled to participate fully in school life. The desire to ensure all pupils succeed is evident in the positive atmosphere within the school, which pupils respond to with good behaviour and a willingness to learn.
- The headteacher has a good grasp of the strengths and areas for development, particularly with regard to enhancing leadership skills. Consequently, the training that staff have received has enabled them to have a good impact on their areas of responsibility. Middle leaders, such as the leader for special educational needs, ensure that pupils' progress is regularly checked and support is put in place when they are in danger of falling behind.
- School leaders, including governors, do not tolerate underperformance and the procedures they have in place only rewards those who ensure pupils make good or better progress. These procedures have only recently been introduced and school leaders recognise that more needs to be done to ensure that all teaching is of the very highest quality.
- As a result of making regular checks, school leaders have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This means that plans for improvement are carefully targeted to address any relative shortcomings. For example, pupils who struggle to communicate well are now supported to make better progress.
- Accurate tracking of pupils' performance has resulted in timely action being taken to provide support for pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding. This has enabled them to achieve as well as other pupils.
- The curriculum effectively supports pupils to make good progress, particularly in reading and mathematics. The curriculum is, as yet, not as effective in developing younger pupils' writing skills. Provision to develop pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good and includes visits such as that to the theatre. Equally, pupils are well prepared to play a full part in life in modern Britain through opportunities to develop their teamwork, consider those less fortunate than themselves and participate in events which help them understand about democracy.
- The school uses sports funding well to increase the numbers of pupils participating in sporting activities and to widen the range of sports and games on offer. Pupils now take part in a number of competitive events and are appreciative of this.
- The school has a range of methods to keep in touch with parents regularly and to keep them informed about their children's progress. However, school leaders have not taken any recent formal steps to consult all parents about their views or to keep them well informed about all of the changes taking place in the school. Consequently, school leaders were surprised that a minority of parents have a negative view about most aspects of the school's work and they are not entirely clear about the reasons for this.
- The school meets current safeguarding requirements.
- The local authority offers light-touch support to this good school and recognises the skills of the early years leader, whom they engage to support other settings.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a clear view of how they will continue to support and develop the school to improve in the future. They are adept at checking current developments. Their good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses, including in teaching and pupils' achievement data, means that they offer effective challenge to the headteacher and other school leaders to maintain the pace of improvement.
 - Governors are keen to ensure that they get value for money in all aspects of the school's work. They monitor finances carefully, including the impact of the funding for those eligible for the pupil premium. They have successfully allocated funds to ensure that all groups of pupils make equally good progress and that the money is targeted to overcome any barriers to learning a pupil might have.
 - Governors are closely involved in ensuring that staff are appropriately held to account for the progress pupils make and have effectively supported the introduction of new, more rigorous systems in the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils and staff form very good, trusting relationships and consequently pupils respect staff and want to achieve well. In lessons they settle quickly, attend carefully and tackle their work diligently. They work well together and cooperate effectively when asked to do so. Any lack of attention is quickly addressed by staff and learning progresses without delay.
- Behaviour in the playground is also good. Pupils say that minor disagreements are usually sorted without an adult but that an adult is always available if needed. They say that there are rare occasions when behaviour is not good but that this is always quickly addressed.
- A few pupils struggle to manage their own behaviour. The school has taken appropriate measures to deal with such instances, although a minority of parents feel that this has not been the case.
- Attendance is above average and pupils arrive at school punctually. Very few pupils have a high level of absence because of the work of the school to prevent it.
- The after-school club provides a safe and calm place for children at the end of the day. Staff ensure that pupils' interests are catered for and pupils appreciate the range of activities on offer as well as the opportunity to be with friends and relax.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. As well as having trusted adults to talk to, the school ensures that there is effective support for pupils who have experienced difficulties such as bereavement and separation. This timely support adds to pupils' sense of safety and security.
- Pupils say that name-calling and bullying are rare and swiftly dealt with. Pupils who are new to the school say that it is easy to make friends and that they are made welcome. School records indicate that incidents are infrequent and dealt with appropriately. A majority of parents agree, although a minority do not.
- Older pupils enjoy the status of being a playground helper or buddy and take the responsibility seriously. These roles help younger pupils to settle into school and feel safe.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe both in school and in the home. They understand the dangers of using the internet and of social networking sites but are equally clear about what they need to do to stay safe when using technology.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good because adults generally have high expectations of pupils and they are expected to do their best. Pupils respond well as a result of the good relationships they have with adults. Despite some recent staffing changes, school records and pupils' workbooks indicate that good teaching has been maintained over time.
- The most able pupils are challenged to achieve highly and teachers offer work, often with complex and demanding vocabulary, which stretches their capabilities.
- Teaching assistants offer good support to the pupils they are working with, whether in class or in a group outside the class. They are well briefed by teachers and know the pupils well. They offer encouragement and guidance so pupils, including those with disabilities and special educational needs, achieve well in manageable steps.
- Teachers' assessments of what pupils know and can do are accurate and closely matched to pupils' learning needs, especially in relation to their communication, reading, writing and mathematical skills. Pupils' knowledge and skills are developed logically step by step to support their understanding.
- A minority of parents say they are dissatisfied with the homework the school provides. However, all pupils receive regular homework to help develop the spelling and mathematical skills which have been learned at school. They are also given tasks which encourage them to research the different topics they are studying and this contributes to the good progress they make.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly and they are clear about what they have done well and achieved. However, they are given limited guidance about what they could do next to improve their work and build on what they have already learned.
- The teaching of phonics to younger children requires improvement because the work provided does not meet pupils' varying skills and abilities. Some staff do not have good subject knowledge so teach pupils incorrectly. Consequently, pupils' phonics skills are not secure and they are given too few opportunities to use these skills in their writing. As a result, pupils' spelling skills are weaker than they should be.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Standards reached at the end of Year 6 are consistently above average in all subjects. While standards have declined overall at the end of Year 2 to be in line with the national average, pupils have still made good progress overall from their different starting points between Year 1 and Year 6. School data and inspection evidence indicate that standards are now rising by the end of Year 2 and that above-average standards are being maintained at the end of Year 6.
- Pupils acquire reading skills quickly and learn to read with confidence and expression. They show an interest and enjoyment in reading; for example, younger pupils are able to cite their favourite author or preference for books about a particular subject. Older pupils appreciate being able to read appropriate stories from home whether they are books or e-books. This choice enhances their enjoyment.
- Pupils' mathematical skills are well developed. By the end of Year 6, they are reaching standards about a year ahead of what is typical for their age.
- Pupils' writing skills are currently less well developed than their skills in other subjects. Pupils currently in Key Stage 1 do not always have secure phonics skills to spell correctly and sometimes they are capable of writing more than they are asked to do. By the end of Year 6, writing skills are better developed and pupils reach above-average standards in that subject.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disabilities are effectively supported to make good progress from their different starting points. Their individual needs are identified quickly; support is put in place and checked frequently to ensure it is having the desired impact on their progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those eligible for the pupil premium funding also make good progress. Any barriers that make learning more difficult for them are similarly identified, and frequently checked support is put in place to overcome them. Disadvantaged pupils reach standards in line with or above those of other pupils nationally by the end of Year 6.
- The most able pupils achieve well because they are challenged effectively to achieve as much as they are capable. By the end of Year 6, a bigger proportion reach higher standards than nationally.

The early years provision is good

- Children settle quickly into nursery because of the very good relationships adults develop with them and their families. They quickly learn rules and routines, behave well, and develop the skills to be independent, guided by sensitive adults. Effective, thoughtful prompting by adults helps children learn by exploring the world around them, such as the ice which had formed in puddles.
- Adults act as effective role models, sharing an enthusiasm for learning and supporting children to work and play with each other cooperatively. Children are safe in the setting.
- Classrooms are organised to support children to develop their reading skills. Children are encouraged to read clearly labelled resources so they can select what they want independently. Daily routines such as counting and recording how many children and adults are present reinforce mathematical skills.
- Children achieve well in the early years. Adults check children's learning and development frequently and find out about what stimulates and interests them. This information is used to make learning interesting and fun. Consequently, an above-average proportion of children reached the standard expected of them by the end of Reception class in 2013 and 2014.
- The teaching of phonics does not always match children's varying skills and abilities and they do not have enough opportunity to use these skills when they are writing. Expectations of what children are capable of when they are writing are not always high enough so their progress slows.
- The effective and dynamic early years leader has recently taken responsibility for leading the Reception class as well as the Nursery. She is extremely passionate about wanting the best for all children and for developing the staff team. She has a very clear idea of what needs to be done to improve and what is already done well, exemplifying good leadership and management.

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	122313
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	449642

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	148
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Patricia Hodgson
Headteacher	Bernadette Pye
Date of previous school inspection	6 July 2010
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