

St Mary's Roman Catholic VA Primary School, Blackhill

Pemberton Road, Blackhill, Consett, County Durham, DH8 8JD

Inspection dates 5–6 March 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.

- From their individual starting points, pupils achieve well and make good progress. By the time they leave the school, they reach standards that are frequently above national standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teaching is consistently good and, on occasion, it is outstanding. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and use a range of strategies to ensure that pupils learn well. This is accelerating pupils' progress.
- Pupils clearly enjoy their learning and participate in lessons enthusiastically. They justifiably state that they feel safe and happy in school.
- Parents express overwhelmingly positive views about the school and its role in the community. They feel that their children are well supported to achieve well.
- Pupils' good, and sometimes exemplary, behaviour in lessons helps them to make good progress. They are well mannered, polite and considerate.
- The headteacher provides very strong and determined leadership for the school. She is supported well by senior leaders. Together with governors, they have high aspirations for the school and a clear vision for continuous improvement which is shared by all staff.
- Leaders and governors sustain a successful, relentless focus on improving teaching. This is ensuring that all pupils make equally good progress.
- The school's work in keeping pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Inspection evidence confirms that pupils are looked after extremely well at school.
- Provision in the early years Reception class is good. Good quality of teaching in early years ensures children make good progress as a result.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- While pupils' progress in writing is good, it is not as strong as in reading and mathematics. This is especially true of boys.
- Pupils do not always receive enough guidance on how to respond to teachers' marking. This limits the pace of their progress, especially in writing.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited a range of lessons. Two lesson observations were undertaken jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors listened to pupils reading and looked at samples of their work.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including the school improvement plan and records of pupils' behaviour, safety and attendance. They also looked at information on individual pupils' progress, the anonymised records of teachers' performance, and records of meetings of the governing body.
- Inspectors met with pupils, senior leaders and teachers, and spoke to a number of parents. They also spoke to four members of the governing body and representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents from the 31 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the results of the school's own survey of parental views.
- Inspectors also considered the views of 15 staff members from their written comments.

Inspection team

Alan Sergison, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Graeme Clarke

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The vast majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds and almost all speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium (additional funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority) is below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special needs is above the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- All the early years provision is full time.
- The school runs a breakfast club for pupils.
- In recent years, the school has faced a significant number of changes in staffing.
- The school has achieved, among others, Healthy School status, Basic Skills Quality Mark and the International Schools' Award.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate pupils' progress in writing, especially that of boys, so that it is more in line with progress seen in reading and mathematics by:
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to write at length and across a range of subjects
 - ensuring there are more opportunities to write based on topics that stimulate and engage all pupils, but boys in particular
 - ensuring teachers consistently implement and embed marking and feedback procedures across the school, particularly in writing, so that pupils have accurate improvement points to support their learning.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has provided inspirational leadership for the school during a period of significant turbulence in staffing. Other senior leaders, governors and all staff support the headteacher very well in the relentless drive to continuously improve the quality of teaching. This has had a positive impact on pupils' progress and achievement.
- Leaders, including governors, use data on pupils' performance well to identify key strengths and appropriate areas for improvement. They develop well-focused plans to address these areas. The school's budget supports these plans well. For example, there is a range of support initiatives to help pupils at risk of falling behind in their work. Leaders then carefully monitor the impact of these measures on raising achievement. However, the strategies leaders have put in place to improve performance of pupils in writing, especially for boys, have not had time to have full impact.
- Leaders check teachers' performance rigorously against pupils' achievement, set appropriate targets to improve progress, and then provide effective training to develop their skills and knowledge. Regular meetings with staff enable leaders to monitor progress against these targets.
- The school is committed to, and is successful in ensuring, equal opportunities for all. This is reflected in the good progress made by pupils of all abilities and backgrounds. The school is genuinely inclusive. For example, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs integrate fully into school life.
- Middle leaders make a significant contribution to school improvement. They have attended relevant training and are developing their leadership skills well. This is having a positive impact on pupils' achievement.
- The overwhelming majority of parents speak very highly of the school. One parent stated, 'The school is brilliant! I cannot fault it!' They appreciate the caring ethos of the school and its contribution to the local community. The school is heavily oversubscribed each year. Parents particularly appreciate the breakfast club the school offers and the range of additional sporting activities available for their children.
- Leaders and governors take great care in ensuring that effective arrangements for safeguarding are in place. Staff follow rigorously all the safeguarding policies. These meet all statutory requirements.
- The school uses the pupil premium effectively to support disadvantaged pupils. Funding supports one-to-one tuition, to employ a higher-level teaching assistant to work with target pupils. It also funds the employment of a trained counsellor to support pupils with emotional or behavioural problems. These initiatives have a positive impact on the progress and standards achieved by these pupils.
- Leaders allocate primary sport and physical education funding effectively. Specialist coaches lead clubs and also pass on their experience to school staff. Significant numbers of pupils eagerly take advantage of the wide range of options available. Inter-school competitions and participation in sports festivals are other features of this aspect of the school's work.
- Pupils benefit from a rich curriculum that supports well their academic progress and personal development. Exciting topic work and a range of visits and visitors to school stimulate pupils to want to learn. Older pupils benefit from a residential visit to an outdoor pursuits centre. Pupils learn about other faiths through visits to the synagogue and mosque and through celebration events such as an Indian wedding experience. There are links with a school in another social setting, as well as links with schools in other countries.
- Pupils develop their understanding of British values and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness very well. For example, they take responsibility for younger pupils and develop their understanding of democracy during the elections for school council members. They delve into Britain's history through such topics as the Victorians, and have lessons in philosophy. They learn to be tolerant and respectful and to challenge discrimination, and leave school well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The local authority provides good, light-touch support for the school. For example, recent training provided for middle leaders has been very effective and has had a positive impact.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors, some of whom are relatively new to role, have a good grasp of their roles and responsibilities. They are adept at analysing and interpreting data. This enables them to check pupils' progress and to ask appropriate questions to support and challenge leaders well.
 - Governors have specific responsibilities, and visit the school regularly to gain first-hand information. They support the headteacher to monitor teachers' performance and are well aware of the link between pay and performance. They also support the headteacher when difficult decisions have to be made. Governors share the same vision for continuous improvement as the headteacher and communicate this to all staff. They have high aspirations for their school and are proud of how highly

the school is regarded in the community, as demonstrated in how heavily oversubscribed it is. They manage finances well and check that the school uses well any additional funding, for example for disadvantaged pupils and for sports. Governors routinely evaluate their own performance and attend appropriate training to keep their knowledge and skills up to date.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They behave well in lessons, around the school and on the playground. Their good, and sometimes exemplary, attitudes to learning, make a strong contribution to the progress they make. They are polite and courteous to everyone in the school community. Excellent relationships between staff and pupils underpin the positive attitudes seen in the vast majority of lessons. Only when teaching is less focused does pupils' attention wane.
- Pupils concentrate and persevere with their work. They collaborate well and also work sensibly on their own. Records and discussions with pupils confirm very few cases of poor behaviour and swift and appropriate responses from staff when these happen. Pupils show respect for others and are helpful and polite to visitors, staff and to their classmates.
- Staff understand and implement consistently the school's rewards and sanctions procedures. Pupils say that the system of rewards and praise encourages them to try hard to do better. Parents are highly positive about behaviour.
- There are highly effective pastoral systems, for example in links with external agencies, and sensitive support for pupils at risk of falling behind. As a result, they can fully participate and progress as well as their peers.
- Pupils' levels of attendance are consistently average and persistent absence is comparatively low against the national figure.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils state that they feel happy and safe in school. Parents share the same view.
- Pupils are well aware of the different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying. They are adamant that cases of bullying are rare in school and are confident that any incidents would be dealt with promptly.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations and how to avoid potential hazards – for example, through visits by the community police to remind pupils about 'stranger danger' and regular reminders about road safety issues.
- Pupils clearly feel safe in school. In the words of one pupil, 'You get good education opportunities here and you go on interesting visits. It is a fun, happy place. It feels like a family.'
- Staff help pupils to be aware of the need to be cautious when using modern technology. The school has purchased a service-level agreement with a local company to support the work of keeping pupils aware of the need for e-safety. This topic is re-visited termly with all pupils. The school also offers parental awareness workshops as a feature of this agreement. Such a commitment shows the very high priority that leaders and governors place on safeguarding pupils and on alerting parents to potential threats to their children's safety.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is consistently good and ensures that all pupils make good progress in all subjects. On occasion, it is outstanding. Teachers display an enthusiasm for learning and pupils pick up on this and rise to the challenges they are set. Staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Teachers make it clear what the focus of learning will be for each lesson. They provide helpful demonstrations and share the planned outcomes so that pupils know what good work will look like. Probing questions by teachers deepen pupils' understanding, give extra support, or stretch them further. For example, in Year 5 mathematics while exploring translations, pupils first modelled the activity in a practical way. This helped them actually visualise the task, prior to working individually on it.
- Teachers use assessment well to track pupils' progress within lessons. This enables teachers to adjust their teaching to meet pupils' needs more accurately. Staff swiftly identify and support any pupils at risk of underachieving and ensure that the most able pupils are also appropriately challenged.

- Pupils use their phonics skills well in their reading because staff teach phonics (letters and the sounds they make) effectively. The positive outcomes achieved by the pupils in the phonics screening test confirm this. The school is building on this success with plans well in hand to review the way it delivers the teaching of phonics to ensure that it meets the needs of individual pupils even more accurately.
- Pupils use their reading skills to research exciting topics through which they learn about different subjects. Pupils enjoy learning from studying a wide range of topics including the Romans, the Ancient Greeks and the Victorians. Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to use their writing skills consistently across these subjects, however. For example, they do not use often enough the punctuation, grammar and wider vocabulary they have learned in writing longer pieces of work.
- Daily practice of number work and a focus on mental work and learning of times tables, ensure that pupils develop well their mathematical skills. Pupils then enjoy applying these skills and knowledge in problem-solving situations.
- Teachers' marking and feedback on pupils' work usually provide very useful prompts for improvement. Pupils often have time to respond to this feedback to consolidate their learning. They also have very helpful opportunities to undertake peer marking which assists them in reflecting on their own learning. These systems are not consistently fully embedded across the school or in a range of subjects, however.
- Teaching assistants are highly skilled and committed to their roles. They work closely with teachers to provide accurately targeted support to ensure that all groups of pupils make equally good progress. For example, in a Year 4 English lesson, pupils were challenged well to explore character and plot in the story *Room on the Broom*. All the adults offered focused support to pupils. As a result, one group of pupils enthusiastically used puppet characters to create a scene from the story, while other pupils were engaged in different well-targeted activities. These sustained their interest so that they too made equally good progress.
- Homework makes a positive contribution to pupils' achievement. Activities include encouraging reading at home with parents, re-enforcing basic skills taught in class and undertaking research around class topics.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- The achievement of pupils is good. Observations of the quality of teaching, talking to pupils about their learning and looking at work in their books confirm the school's own view that pupils make consistently good progress in all subjects.
- In the 2014 Year 1 check on skills in phonics (letters and the sounds they make), pupils' results were above those seen nationally. This confirms the successful high priority given to the development of these skills by the school.
- Pupils continue to make good gains in their learning across Key Stage 1 and standards over time are strong. At the end of Year 2 in 2014, the standards achieved by pupils in all subjects reflected their good progress from their individual starting points. Evidence that the school holds, as well as inspection evidence, confirms standards are currently on track to be above those seen nationally in 2015.
- This good progress continues across Key Stage 2, so that by the time pupils leave the school in Year 6, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are consistently above national standards. However, performance in writing, especially that of boys, is not quite as strong as it is in the other two subjects.
- Good provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs ensures their progress is at least in line with their peers' and attainment is broadly in line with that of similar pupils nationally. Staff accurately identify needs and ensure these pupils receive the support they require to achieve well.
- Disadvantaged pupils also make good progress as the result of the support they receive. In the 2014 end-of-Year-6 tests, results indicate that disadvantaged pupils performed at least in line with similar pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. However, data suggest that attainment of disadvantaged pupils compared to their peers in school was around three terms behind in mathematics, two terms behind in reading and a term behind in writing. Information the school holds on the progress of these pupils across the school confirms that their current progress is good and attainment is above average. The gap in performance between them and their peers is closing.
- Reading standards at the end of Year 6 are high. Pupils say that they enjoy reading and the vast majority read with expression, understanding and fluency. Reading is frequently supported well by parents at home. Pupils' enjoyment of reading was clearly highlighted in the very high levels of participation in dressing up for the recent 'World Book Day'.
- Achievement in writing is good, but it is not as strong as in reading and mathematics, especially for boys. This is because pupils do not write often enough at length or in subjects other than English. The school is addressing this by broadening the range of topics designed to appeal to boys and by developing such

stimulating initiatives as the Forest School project. School leaders acknowledge, however, that these initiatives are not fully embedded. They are sustaining this impetus with a specific focus on improving boys' writing.

The early years provision

is good

- When children enter the early years, their levels of skill and knowledge are often below typical starting points, particularly in communication and literacy. Children make good progress and, by the end of the Reception Year, their skills are broadly average. They are well prepared to start Year 1.
- Adults provide a calm and stimulating environment in which children feel very secure and ready for learning. Children behave very well and are happy to play and make new friends. They enjoy working, both indoors and out of doors, on their own and with adults. They soon learn to take turns and to listen to one another. Staff focus clearly on promoting oral skills to help prepare pupils for reading and writing, and on developing children's knowledge of numbers.
- Teaching is good. Adults assess children accurately when they start and quickly identify the skills they need to learn. There is an excited buzz of activity as children choose or are directed to activities that are well planned to support their development, through talk, discussion and play. Children concentrate well when measuring and recording the length of objects using small plastic cubes. They are highly motivated and talk excitedly while exploring the world around them, for example by checking and recording which objects would float and which would sink in a trough of water.
- The school works very effectively with parents so that children feel safe. Staff keep high-quality records of children's progress, including photographs of key moments. The records provide evaluative, comprehensive and easily accessible assessment information for staff and quality records for parents.
- High-quality resources both indoors and out of doors contribute significantly to children's progress across all areas of learning.
- Leadership of the early years is good. Senior leaders are aware, however, that the recent improvements in provision have not had sufficient time to have a full impact on standards. As a result, early years provision is not outstanding.

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	114248
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	449746

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Chirnside
Headteacher	Joan Lacey
Date of previous school inspection	9 February 2010
Telephone number	01207 502657
Fax number	01207 503237
Email address	blackhillstmary@durhamlearning.net

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