

St Pius X Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Thornfield Road, The Grove, Consett, County Durham, DH8 8AX

Inspection dates 10–11 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
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.

- The dedicated headteacher drives forward continuous improvement passionately and effectively. She is ably supported by the deputy headteacher.
- Governors visit school regularly to support and monitor the work taking place. They are well informed and capably challenge senior staff in positive ways, when appropriate.
- Pupils achieve well. Senior leaders have successfully improved progress in mathematics and writing since the previous inspection.
- Teaching continues to improve and is good in all classes. Staff know their pupils very well and cater for individual needs effectively.
- The school champions support for pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs. Provision for this group of pupils is exceptional and, as a result, they make excellent progress in their learning.
- Pupils are rightly proud of their friendly school. They are most respectful to staff and visitors, kind to one another and love learning, especially when this involves discussion, challenge and investigation. Consequently, pupils' behaviour is outstanding.
- Pupils confidently explain that they are very safe and secure in school because they are cared for by teachers and they look after one another.
- Teachers plan imaginative and purposeful lessons that motivate and engage pupils in their learning. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and ensures that pupils are well equipped for life in modern Britain.
- Early years provision is good. Staff have secured good learning and progress for children in the Reception class. As a result, there have been year-on-year improvements in attainment.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The high quality and inspiring teaching that exists higher up the school is not shared widely enough.
- Leaders do not have a sharp, easily accessible system to record, track and compare the progress made by different groups of children in the early years.
- Middle leadership in the early years is in the early stages of driving forward improvements to teaching and learning.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in all classes and carried out a joint observation with the headteacher. The inspector also scrutinised pupils' work in books and undertook walks around school to observe pupils learning in their classrooms.
- The inspector spoke with pupils and held discussions with the headteacher, middle leaders, staff and governors, parents, carers and a representative from the local authority. She examined a range of documents including those related to safeguarding, the school's own evaluation of how well it is achieving, the monitoring of staff performance and records relating to pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour.
- The inspector took account of the 23 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and spoke to parents to gather their views. Letters from parents sent to the inspector during the inspection were considered as well as responses to the school's own recently undertaken survey of parents' views. Thirteen responses to the staff questionnaire were also considered.

Inspection team

Anne Humble, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- A large majority of the pupils are of White British backgrounds. A few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs has been well above the national average for the past three years and is currently three times higher than found nationally.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those who are eligible for support through the pupil premium funding, is broadly in line with the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding the school receives to support those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- All children in the early years attend the Reception class full-time.
- The proportion of pupils who join the school at other than the usual times is lower than the national average.
- The school has appointed two new staff to the team since the previous inspection. This represents half the teaching staff in this very small school. A new middle leader has recently been appointed to lead the early years team.
- 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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teaching is of the highest standard and hence further improve pupils' achievement to be outstanding by:
 - allowing all staff to observe and learn from the inspiring teaching that exists in upper Key Stage 2
 - ensuring that the levels of challenge provided for the most-able pupils and children in the early years are consistently sustained.
- Further improve school leadership by:
 - streamlining the tracking and reporting of progress made by groups of children in the early years
 - continuing to develop the skills of middle leadership in the early years.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The dedicated headteacher and deputy headteacher are highly ambitious for this friendly and harmonious school. They have strengthened leadership with recent appointments and this has boosted the quality of teaching. A passion for equal opportunities drives the school's success. All staff are committed to providing the highest levels of opportunity for each individual, tailored specifically to their unique needs.
- Discrimination in any form is not accepted by staff and pupils quickly follow their superb example and learn how to care for and look after others, regardless of difference. As a result, the school is highly successful in fostering good relations.
- The headteacher regularly checks the quality of teaching by observing lessons and evaluating pupils' work. She often teaches in different classes, accumulating a secure knowledge of each pupil as an individual. This insight assists her in reaching accurate judgements about how well the school is performing. Data tracking helps staff to evaluate pupils' progress over time; it is used effectively to adapt provision and increase achievement for groups in Key Stages 1 and 2. In the early years, this is not as well established and tracking the progress of groups of children is not yet as thorough as in other year groups.
- Middle leadership is effective helping to drive improvements in particular subjects and key stages. A newly-recruited middle leader in the early years is starting to develop her role in driving forward improvements in teaching and learning in that phase of learning.
- Staff performance is diligently managed in a supportive manner. Staff welcome the advice and training provided. Opportunities are sometimes missed to share the skills and talents of teachers within school more widely, such as observing the highly effective impact of teaching in upper Key Stage 2.
- The curriculum is good, with many opportunities for visits off site to engage and excite learning. For example, a recent visit to Newcastle Keep brought lessons alive for pupils researching castles. Many visitors enrich learning. Pupils develop skills while working alongside sculptors, poets and drummers. They have opportunities to question expert visitors in a broad range of areas from road safety to reptiles.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are frequently promoted, fully preparing pupils for an active life in modern Britain. Pupils learn about celebrating differences in their religious education lessons where they find out about Judaism, Hinduism and Islam. Workshops help them learn how to support visually impaired pupils in and around school. In addition, pupils have designed a three-dimensional sculpture with a metal worker to physically represent their understanding of the school's mission statement which celebrates forgiveness and open-mindedness among other British values.
- Positive links with parents and the community have a very strong impact, providing families with skills to support their children's learning at home, as evidenced in the recent 'Family Learning Den Making' session. Descriptions by parents state that the school is 'a hidden gem' and 'every time you go in, you can see how friendly, dedicated and happy the staff are and how content the children are too'.
- Primary school sport funding is used effectively to promote health and exercise. Experienced coaches demonstrate high quality sports teaching for staff to observe. This expertise develops the staff members' teaching skills while simultaneously providing first-rate instruction to pupils. Successful use of sports funding has increased participation rates as pupils now enjoy a wider range of sports during and after school.
- Pupil premium funding has enabled disadvantaged pupils to catch up with their peers; well-targeted extra help and support, particularly in writing and mathematics, lifts their learning and promotes improvement. Leaders have improved teaching for the most-able pupils by encouraging staff to raise their expectations and more pupils are now reaching higher levels in assessments.
- Safeguarding meets requirements and child protection is managed carefully. Stringent procedures ensure that pupils are cared for and protected. Support for vulnerable pupils is exceptional. An example of this is seen in the provision of weekly mental health services for pupils in need of this help.
- The local authority has a detailed view of the school's performance. The link advisor works closely and effectively with senior leaders, verifying and validating judgements with regular observations and scrutiny of work.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is effective. Governors are committed and bring different perspectives to drive leadership of the school. Regular visits and checks ensure they have a clear grasp of the school's achievements. Governors have a good understanding of how to use both national performance data and the school's own records to compare the school to others. They routinely update their training and hold staff to account for the progress of pupils. Governors are aware of the quality of teaching in the school. Methodical systems to manage staff performance ensure that pay progression is not automatic but

closely linked to pupils' achievement. In this, governors show their awareness of the need to reward good teaching,

- Governors base their financial decisions upon thorough research. The impact of spending is reviewed against pupils' outcomes which leads to ongoing improvements, as seen with the primary school sports and the pupil premium funding. Governors have a clear and accurate view of what is needed to improve the school further.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils are highly inspired by the exciting ways that teachers present learning opportunities. They relish the chance to puzzle through challenges or explore and investigate in depth. Pupils work conscientiously and take a pride in the presentation of their work. This makes a very strong contribution to their speedy progress.
- In all classes, pupils are extremely polite and show great respect for teachers, support staff and visitors alike. During lessons and at leisure times, pupils learn and play together cooperatively, keen to help each other and genuinely kind and supportive of their peers.
- Most parents agree the school ensures pupils behave well and that their children feel happy at school. Pupils confirm this, stating that incidents of misbehaviour are very rare around school but are promptly dealt with by staff if they do occur.
- Conduct around the school at break and lunchtimes is impeccable. This begins from the very start of the day as pupils enter school calmly. Older pupils provide excellent role models for those who are younger, acting as helpers and buddies to assist them when required.
- Regular opportunities encourage pupils to reflect and share their opinions. This was especially effective in a science lesson where pupils discussed their different knowledge about animal categorisation, giving reasons and facts to back up their assumptions before researching to find out which of their ideas were correct.
- Frequent opportunities for spiritual reflection have a significant impact on pupils' mature attitudes.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- Staff are very safety-conscious and ensure pupils understand how to keep themselves safe in many different situations. Many interesting visitors come to the school to teach about safety. For instance, pupils recall learning from anti-bullying workshops and cycling safety lessons. They know that bullying can take different forms, such as racist name calling or cyber bullying, but explain that this is uncommon at their school. A large majority of parents agree that bullying is dealt with effectively. Pupils explain that if bullying should ever happen, they trust staff to deal with matters swiftly.
- E-safety has high importance, with displays and frequent reminders about safe internet use. Leaders keep detailed records of the very few incidents of misconduct. Staff response is seen to be fair, thorough and thoughtful, with time allocated to develop friendships and support pupils' emotions.
- Governors actively take the initiative to improve safety around school, for example by challenging leaders to further increase security and traffic safety in the car park. They ensure policies are up to date and that all staff are well trained in safeguarding.
- Celebrations and rewards for good attendance have reduced absence even further. Outside agencies work with staff to promote better attendance with pupils, supporting vulnerable families in particular.

The quality of teaching is good

- Work in pupils' books and school records show that teaching is good over time. Consistently good teaching across all subjects results in good achievement for all groups of pupils.
- Tasks are carefully matched to pupils' needs and abilities so that they make brisk progress or practise the specific skills that are needed to secure a solid grasp of concepts. This was seen in a mixed-aged mathematics class, where pupils practised quick recall of analogue clock times in a game situation. The teacher had prepared different challenge cards for each group to suit their age and levels of understanding.
- Leaders have encouraged teachers to provide activities that inspire and interest pupils by making them

purposeful and relevant. This has been particularly helpful in ensuring that the teaching of writing enables pupils to make good progress in this subject. An example of this was observed in a Year 5 class where pupils were writing stories to make into books for the Reception children. With a real audience in mind for their work, pupils were keen to create exciting stories and understood the need to write lively texts.

- In mathematics, teachers have addressed issues raised by the previous inspection through offering many opportunities to explore and investigate number in interesting ways. Pupils in each class solve problems, work out puzzles and apply their skills to real-life questions involving mathematics.
- The teaching of mathematics is now good. During the inspection, pupils in Year 1 tackled investigations to sort numbers in to a Carroll Diagram. This task was made more difficult with the addition of 'red-herrings' and numbers that would not fit the patterns studied. By puzzling through these difficulties, pupils were challenged even further and their achievement improved. They could then explain their thinking and reasoning with confidence and were highly enthused throughout the session.
- Sensitive and patient support staff work closely with pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs. They intervene at opportune moments to reshape tasks or support pupils by asking questions that will lead them to success in their learning.
- In some classes, such as upper Key Stage 2, the quantity and quality of pupils' work reveals more rapid progress than elsewhere because the impact of teaching over time is excellent.
- Teaching has been adapted to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and those who are more able. In classes where this is most effective, additional staff are employed to work alongside teachers in delivering targeted support to meet individual needs. In a literacy lesson where this kind of additional support was used, pupils received very high quality, one-to-one help with editing so that skills and writing techniques were swiftly improved.
- The progress of most-able pupils in Key Stage 1 and children in the early years is not quite as rapid when they are not challenged to the highest degree.
- Good teaching of reading results in pupils making good progress. They enjoy reading sessions where they are taught new skills. They have suggested some of the new books and authors for the school library. Pupils use phonics effectively to tackle unknown words. They are inspired to take up reading as a hobby with the school's 'extreme reading challenge', where they take photographs of themselves and other family members reading books in unusual places.
- Staff have responded to parents' suggestions to improve homework. They now provide more regular open-ended and imaginative tasks for pupils to complete at home, as well as opportunities for basic skills to be practised.
- All work is marked carefully and regularly by staff. Pupils receive specific comments about how well they have achieved and are given pointers to improve their work in the future. In some classes, pupils are given time at the start of lessons to carry out corrections. In other classes, pupils write their corrections or a response to their teachers' marking in a different colour pen so that teachers can spot them easily. Younger pupils are given a personalised prompt at the beginning of each new writing task that gives them clear instructions about what to remember when writing their new piece of work.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Each year group of pupils is very small compared to other schools and the proportion of pupils who have special educational needs is much higher than in most schools. This means that comparisons with national averages of attainment and progress do not always give a true picture of the school's performance. A wide range of evidence was considered during the inspection to gain a clear view of pupils' progress and learning over time.
- Although a good proportion of pupils are ready to start learning in Year 1 because of good support for their emotional and social development in the early years, many start Year 1 with skills below average in reading, literacy and mathematics. School tracking shows that most pupils make good progress from their different starting points during Key Stage 1. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs begin to catch up very quickly.
- In 2014, progress and attainment in all subjects improved for pupils in Year 2. Similar good progress was seen in the current Key Stage 1 books and a greater proportion of pupils are working at the higher levels this year in all subjects assessed.
- In 2014, more pupils than nationally achieved the required standards in the Year 1 national check on phonics (teaching reading by learning the sounds that groups of letters make when spoken). This reflects the school's commitment to teaching phonics well.

- By the end of Year 6 in 2014, pupils' attainment was about half a term behind others nationally in reading and mathematics. In writing, pupils' attainment was a term behind others nationally. There were only 12 pupils in this cohort, more than half of whom had individual additional needs. The school's own data shows that for this cohort of pupils, their attainment represented good progress from their different starting points.
- Attainment at the end of Year 6 had risen in 2014 compared to the previous year, showing the impact of improved teaching strategies that were introduced by the leadership team. Attainment at the end of Year 6 continues to rise. Evidence from pupils' work and from school records reveal even more rapid progress and higher attainment for the current pupils in Year 6. All have made at least good progress from their starting points.
- The most-able pupils are provided with a good level of challenge in lessons. Evidence from work shows that there are improved rates of progress for the most-able pupils who are currently in Year 6, especially in writing and mathematics, following a relentless focus on these subjects by leaders. They are currently working at higher levels this year. Occasionally, progress is a little less rapid when the most-able pupils are not given a high degree of challenge.
- By the end of Key Stage 2, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make excellent progress. This is the result of targeted support to remove barriers to learning and to address any gaps in their skills or knowledge while working alongside their peers at tasks designed to meet their very specific needs.
- The school uses the pupil premium funding effectively and the attainment of disadvantaged pupils is improving year on year. In 2014, there was a very small proportion of disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 and it is not possible to make a reliable comparison with the attainment and progress of other pupils in school or nationally. School data shows that progress is good for disadvantaged pupils. Staff are committed to provide equal opportunities for all pupils.

The early years provision

is good

- Children start their Reception Year with a wide range of skills and abilities. Some children have particular difficulties in communication and language, physical skills, reading and writing and a high proportion of children have special educational needs. Whatever the starting points, happy, friendly staff put children at their ease so that they quickly become confident in their classroom and beyond.
- All children make good progress and are catching up quickly with their learning because of good leadership, teaching and provision. As a result, achievement at the end of Reception has continued to rise for the past three years and children are increasingly well prepared for the beginning of Year 1. In some activities, progress for the most able dips occasionally because they are not challenged to the highest of levels.
- In recent years, boys have started in the Reception class with skills below those of the girls. School leaders identified this gap and altered provision so that it is now more interesting for boys. More opportunities for writing and mark-making outdoors entice boys to write within their play, such as providing 'utility' writing belts and writing tool boxes. Boys' progress this year has been more rapid than previously seen.
- The progress made by other groups of children is not yet tracked fully effectively in the early years. While leaders track the progress of individual children, they do not have a quick and easily accessible record of how well different groups achieve in Reception. The early years leader is very new to this post but is already providing good support to the wider team and has good plans to improve provision further.
- Improving children's skills in literacy has high priority owing to the lower starting points in this area of learning. Children have frequent opportunities to work with staff and on their own to practise their phonic skills and writing abilities. One group used chalks and modelling dough outside to strengthen their fingers and hone their letter formation while another group worked closely with their teacher to plan an interesting story about a character they had previously invented and described.
- Disabled children and those who have special educational needs make particularly good progress because of the effective individualised support they receive. This was seen during the inspection when a teaching assistant followed the children's interests, very carefully observing their fascinations with drumming and using this to help them design and build an outdoor drum kit from wood, sticks and stones. They quickly began creating rhythms once the design was completed.
- Detailed learning journeys track each child's individual progress, with regular written observations and photographs of children's activities. Senior leaders have helped staff to develop these to add more detailed comments about the next steps for learning.

- Children behave extremely well, especially when working together in the larger class group where they show very good listening skills and answer questions respectfully. They cooperate well outdoors at their self-chosen tasks, such as sharing their storybooks with others or negotiating space while riding their wheeled toys.
- Links with parents are strong as they are invited into the classroom to find out about the work undertaken. Dedicated consultation evenings fully answer any parental questions. Vigilant staff show children care and concern and parents are impressed that older pupils look after them on the yard, in the classroom or in the school hall. Behaviour and safety are a strength of the Reception class, as they are elsewhere in the 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	114249
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	461887

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	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	97
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Louise Renwick
Headteacher	Joanne Cruise
Date of previous school inspection	26 March 2012
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