

St Robert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School

Oldgate, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 1QF

Inspection dates 10–11 February 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The caring and determined headteacher has ensured that the school remains a good school throughout a period of staffing turbulence.
- Highly skilled governors have a thorough knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for development. Governors support the school well and provide a considerable level of challenge.
- Teachers provide insightful feedback to pupils. Pupils act on the feedback to improve their work and develop new skills.
- Children make a good start to their learning in the school's nurturing early years environment.
- Pupils in the early years and in Key Stage 1 make good progress in their acquisition of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) knowledge.
- Most pupils make good progress from their starting points. Progress is most rapid in Years 3 and 4.
- Pupils are happy in school. They serve their school community well as they carry out many roles of responsibility.
- Pupils feel very safe in school. They have a strong knowledge about how to stay safe online.
- The proportion of pupils who attend school every day has risen and is now above national figures.
- The range of subjects is broad and balanced. It is supported well by a range of exciting educational visits and visitors.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The role played by middle leaders in school improvement requires more rigour.
- The most-able pupils are not always challenged enough to reach their full potential, especially in mathematics.
- Although improving, pupils' skills in writing, including the way in which they form and join their letters, are not as good as their skills in reading and mathematics.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that all pupils, including the most able in mathematics, reach their full potential.
- Ensure that all the work of the teaching assistants matches that of the very best in the school.
- Further develop middle leadership so that areas for improvement identified by the school, such as the standards achieved by pupils in writing, are driven more rapidly.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher communicates her ambitious vision and aspirations for the pupils, staff and school in all that she does. Her evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for development is accurate and unflinchingly candid. Each area of the school was judged to be good by the headteacher and inspection activities confirmed the judgements to be correct.
- The headteacher, together with members of the governing body, has managed a period of turbulence in staffing carefully and with consideration. Leaders' close scrutiny of assessment information identified slower progress in Key Stage 1. Immediate action was taken to address the issue. Pupils' workbooks show that the identified pupils are catching up quickly.
- The leadership of special educational needs and disability is developing into a strength of the school. Parents are much more involved in setting and reviewing their children's individual targets. The coordinator reviewed the way in which the progress made by these pupils is measured, and has a much clearer understanding of the actions required to ensure that progress is maximised.
- The range of subjects is broad and balanced, and underpinned by the school's gospel values and British values of democracy, freedom, forgiveness, justice and tolerance. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education permeates every aspect of the school's work. As a result, pupils care for one another well, are able to judge right from wrong and have a strong understanding of the celebrations and festivals of faiths other than Christianity.
- Additional and extra-curricular activities are a fundamental part of school life. The school was an absolute hive of activity during the first day of the inspection. Pupils took part in an educational off-site visit to a forest setting, a group of children took part in a tennis tournament at an external venue and a Key Stage 2 class attended the local pool for their weekly swimming lesson.
- The additional primary physical education (PE) and sports premium funding is spent wisely. Leaders have measured the increase in pupils' participation rates and in pupils' skills and success in lessons.
- Quite correctly, middle leadership was identified in the school's self-evaluation of its own effectiveness as an area for development. Middle leaders are keen to develop expertise in their roles and have started to check the areas for which they have oversight. School records show that their checking of the progress made by groups of pupils, such as the most able, in lessons and in workbooks, is not yet sufficiently forensic. In addition, subject leaders check whether progress made in lessons is 'steady' or not. This 'steady' progress judgement is not ambitious enough for the pupils who attend St Robert's First School.
- There is a very detailed analysis of the way in which additional government pupil premium funding is spent. However, the impact of the additional funding is not yet measured carefully enough for the small minority of eligible pupils.
- Leaders have not acted quickly enough to improve the standard of pupils' handwriting. Very few of the older pupils use a joined script even though the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum stipulate that pupils should be taught to use the diagonal and horizontal strokes that are needed to join letters.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body is exceptionally strong in terms of the skills needed to be an effective executive board. Governors have actively sought out new governors from the local and wider community to fill any gaps identified in the governing body's annual audit of effectiveness.
 - Governors understand the intricacies of the school's current and published assessment information. They are able to explain, with clarity, the reasons why the school's published assessment information appears to suggest that the pupils are not making good progress. They understand clearly that pupils, with and without special educational needs or disability, are making good progress from their individual starting points.
 - Governors ensure that pay progression is linked to performance. Staff do not progress up the school's pay scale as a matter of course.
 - The school's website was not fully compliant at the beginning of the inspection. Items, such as the current admissions policy, were added during the two-day inspection to ensure that statutory regulations were satisfied.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff are appropriately trained and know what actions to take if they have concerns about a pupil or an adult in school. Risk assessments are completed and thorough checks are carried out before new staff are appointed. Leaders carry out regular surveys of parental and pupils' views, and act upon the responses received. Parents believe that their children are safe in school and their children agree. The headteacher has not reported the number of incidents of poor behaviour regularly to governors. Governors have therefore been unable to challenge the number and check to ensure that they are reducing.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teachers are adept at providing very focused feedback to individual pupils in lessons and in their workbooks. Pupils really value the opportunities they are given to act on their teachers' advice to improve their work. As a result, they make good progress because their learning is tightly focused on their own individual targets.
- The most powerful teaching provides interesting and exciting opportunities for the pupils. During the inspection, the Year 2 class made accelerated progress in their writing which was focused on producing a non-fiction page about nocturnal animals for inclusion in a reference book. A child, from research using an iPad in the classroom, told her classmates excitedly that a group of foxes is called a leash or a skulk. Another child told the class that foxes have whiskers on their faces and wrists and that they use the whiskers on their wrists to help them to move around in the dark because they are nocturnal animals. This was cross-curricular learning at its very best.
- The teaching of phonics is a strength of the school. A high proportion of Year 1 pupils achieve the standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1. Teaching assistants are used very effectively to deliver extra phonics sessions for those pupils identified as requiring additional help.
- Pupils of all abilities enjoy reading. They use their knowledge of phonics to read unknown and previously unseen words. Pupils appreciate their brand new library and see it as an attractive place to choose a book, settle down to read and to 'learn lots'.
- Science has a high profile in the school. Pupils enjoy practical science best and say they like drawing conclusions from investigations. Some teachers are adept at using opportunities in science to incorporate work in mathematics.
- Teaching assistants are not used effectively in all lessons. Sometimes, they are not sufficiently involved in guiding pupils' learning. As a result, they have little impact on the progress pupils make and the standards pupils reach during these sessions.
- Teachers do not always ensure that the most-able pupils are provided with work which challenges them to do their very best. In mathematics, for example, in some classes the most-able pupils complete many pages of calculations which are all correct. They are not given enough opportunities to use their skills and knowledge to solve tricky mathematical problems and carry out exciting investigations.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning. They are keen to do well and to please their teachers. Their handwriting is untidy because the school has not put sufficient emphasis on teaching the correct joins, size and orientation of letters.
- Older pupils play an important role within the caring school community. They complete an application form and go through a rigorous interview process to become buddies. They carry out their roles as sports leaders confidently. They all aspire to be servant leaders who perform work in the school for the good of all.
- The school's own parental survey, responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and discussions with parents in the school yard indicate that the overwhelming majority are happy with all aspects of the school's work. Parents know that the school keeps their children safe. Pupils are very happy to attend.

- All pupils are very aware of how to keep themselves safe online. The computer suite is peppered with posters made by the pupils which warn against the dangers of all types of modern technology. Online safety lessons are delivered in every year group at the beginning of the autumn term and revisited in lessons throughout the year too.
- Pupils are also aware of how to keep themselves safe on their many and varied educational visits. The Year 1 pupils told the inspector exactly how they kept themselves safe on their visit to the forest school because their instructor had made the rules explicit at the beginning of the visit.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The overwhelming majority of pupils attend school every day. Leaders have ensured that the proportion of pupils who attend school regularly has risen to well above average this year. This is a very creditable achievement.
- The overwhelming majority of pupils arrive on time for school every day. Pupils appreciate the need to attend. A poster made by one of the pupils, and displayed near the school's entrance, hits the nail right on the head. It states: 'Don't be late, your lessons can't wait!'
- Pupils told the inspectors that behaviour is usually good in school. They explained that boys' behaviour is sometimes poor in one class and adults have to sort the problems out. Pupils are confident that adults deal promptly with other incidences of poor behaviour in the school yard at break times.
- Pupils can explain what constitutes bullying. They understand the different forms that it can take. Pupils do not like name-calling and report that it is extremely rare.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Over time, a much larger proportion of pupils than average achieve the standard in the check of phonics knowledge in Year 1. This is a strength of the school.
- Over time, in lower Key Stage 2, pupils make good and better progress from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics.
- There is a similar picture of good progress in Key Stage 1. However, this is not supported by the school's published assessment information. The headteacher has separated the assessment information between the progress made by the pupils who have special educational needs or disability and those without. Both groups of pupils are making good progress from their starting points. The pupils who have special educational needs or disability are making smaller steps in progress but good progress nonetheless.
- The very small minority of disadvantaged pupils, those entitled to the government's additional pupil premium funding, are making good progress in mathematics and reading and less than good progress in writing.
- Quite rightly, leaders have identified progress in writing as a whole-school issue. Although the pupils reach broadly average standards at the end of Key Stage 1 and Year 4, they are not all making good or better progress from their starting points.
- The most-able pupils make good and sometimes better progress in English. They do not make as good progress in mathematics from their starting points.

Early years provision

is good

- Children in the early years make good progress from their individual starting points. Very carefully tailored provision is made for the children who have special educational needs or disability in the Reception class.
- The children in the Reception class love attending school. Some skip into school in the mornings.
- The teacher marks children's work in mathematics and writing in accordance with the whole-school marking policy. Children are given a chance to respond and improve their work. There is a highly developed system for each child to spend individual time with an adult so that they completely understand how to make their work perfect. The children make good progress as a result and they love the one-to-one time with the adults in the setting.

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- There is very effective provision for music in the setting. A peripatetic music teacher visits weekly. During the inspection, the children showed an absolute joy in learning when the whole class played 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star' on their own glockenspiels. Twenty-four four- and five-year-olds playing a tuned percussion instrument and singing along – a little awe and wonder to end the school day.
- The school's assessment systems show that the children are making good progress in all areas of learning. However, some activities which are provided for the children to access independently are not at all challenging and lack appeal. This is hampering stronger progress in the setting.
- The teaching of phonics is a strength in the early years because all pupils acquire basic phonics knowledge and skills. However, the most-able children are capable of doing much more and more quickly.

School details

Unique reference number	122312
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10001152

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	143
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Shepherd
Headteacher	Vivien Cunningham
Telephone number	01670 512031
Website	www.st-roberts.northumberland.sch.uk
Email address	admin@st-roberts.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	22–23 March 2011

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those eligible for support through the pupil premium funding, is significantly below average. Pupil premium funding is additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, for pupils who are looked after by the local authority and for the children of service families.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- Children in the early years attend full-time provision in the Reception class.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited nine part-lessons, seven of which were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, and four governors, including the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body. The inspector also spoke to a representative from Northumberland local authority and the deputy director of education from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.
- The inspector spoke formally to a group of pupils on the first day of the inspection and informally to pupils in lessons and at various times during both days. The inspector took account of the school's own survey of pupils' views.
- Questionnaire returns submitted by 18 members of staff were taken into consideration.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of pupils' workbooks and information about pupils' current progress in lessons. The inspector also reviewed a number of documents including the school improvement plan, attendance records, information relating to the work the school does to keep pupils safe, headteacher's reports to governors and minutes of meetings of the governing body.
- The inspector took account of the views of 15 parents from the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, together with a survey of parental views provided by the school.
- Pupils from Years 1, 2 and 3 read to the inspector.

Inspection team

Belita Scott, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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