

St Nicolas' CofE VA School, Donderry

Donderry, Torpoint, Cornwall PL11 3LF

Inspection dates

29–30 November 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	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The new head of school, who is well supported by the executive headteacher, has high expectations of pupils and teachers. This has led to significant improvement over the past year in the quality of teaching and learning.
- Leadership at all levels has been strengthened through partnership with leaders across the multi-academy trust. Teachers new to the school are well supported.
- Teaching is effective. Teachers plan purposeful and interesting work that allows pupils to make good progress. Attainment is rising across the school. This is particularly evident when pupils write imaginatively, and in mathematics.
- Teachers provide a stimulating curriculum which uses the school's extensive outdoor facilities well to engage pupils' interest in their learning. Pupils enjoy learning and are eager to make progress.
- Leaders give teachers specific guidance to improve their teaching and increase pupils' achievement. They recognise that sometimes work is not matched to the abilities of pupils and so some pupils are not sufficiently challenged in lessons.
- School leaders and staff fully implement safeguarding procedures to keep pupils safe.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well. This is because learning activities and adult support are tailored to pupils' next steps in learning.
- Reading and phonics are now taught effectively. However, pupils still need to develop their spelling and grammar skills when writing. Presentation and handwriting skills also need further improvement.
- Parents praise the work of the school. Adults provide high-quality care for pupils and ensure that they are happy and settle into school well.
- Pupils behave well as a result of teachers' high expectations. They are polite and respectful.
- Pupils who are falling behind in their work and disadvantaged pupils make good progress because they receive effective support from an early age.
- Strong leadership and good teaching in early years ensure that all children make good or better progress.
- Governors have a good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They provide strong levels of support and challenge to senior leaders, prioritising the needs of the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment further by ensuring that pupils:
 - improve their knowledge and skills to be able to spell words accurately
 - improve the quality of grammar and punctuation in writing across a range of subjects
 - improve the presentation of work in some books.
- Ensure that teaching sufficiently challenges pupils in literacy and numeracy by making sure that work planned is carefully matched to pupils' abilities, including the most able, to improve their progress further.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The new head of school is providing effective, motivating leadership. He is well supported by the executive headteacher and other leaders across the multi-academy trust. His focus on improving the quality of teaching is helping pupils to make faster rates of progress.
- Staff morale is high. New staff fully support the head of school and his vision to build on the pupils' good behaviour and raise their academic achievements. Overwhelmingly, staff are of the opinion that the school has improved since he took up his post. They are proud to work at this school.
- Leaders acknowledge the invaluable support they have received from the trust. They make good use of the wide expertise available to them, especially from the school improvement partner. Continuing professional development, as a result of performance management recommendations, clearly supports improvement across the school. As a team, the executive headteacher and the head of school have improved the school rapidly in a short period of time.
- Pupils' behaviour around the school is now good. They behave well in lessons and this has had a positive impact on their attitudes to learning and the progress that they make in lessons.
- Middle leaders demonstrate a clear understanding of what needs to be done to improve their areas of responsibility. For example, the newly appointed phonics leader has trained all staff in the teaching of phonics at the school. As a result, the quality of teaching has greatly improved for pupils in the early years and key stage 1.
- Leaders are ambitious to raise pupils' achievements further. However, strategies to fully develop pupils' spelling and grammatical skills have not yet been successful in improving basic skills. Presentation of work and pupils' handwriting are not yet good.
- The senior leaders' drive to improve attainment by setting pupils challenges is having a positive effect in raising standards in expressive writing and mathematics. However, on occasion, the level of challenge is inconsistent and not matched to the abilities of the pupils. This leads to a lack of understanding by a few pupils, which can be seen in their work.
- The curriculum provides good breadth and balance, with an interesting variety of extra-curricular activities. It is particularly effective in improving standards in imaginative writing and mathematics. Resources are used well and the outdoor spaces, including the beach, help to engage pupils and make learning more interesting and progress more rapid. Pupils also regularly take part in 'beach runs' as part of the expanding physical education curriculum. They say that they enjoy outdoor education as it is healthy and fun.
- The school uses the sport premium effectively to increase levels of participation in a wide range of sporting activities and competitions. In particular, the school is training staff in activities like 'beach tribe', 'moor tribe' and moorland leader walking training to take advantage of the school's location near to the beach and Dartmoor National Park.

- Leaders have built on the school's well-established provision by employing additional specialist coaches to further develop staff skills and to extend the range of activities provided for pupils. The pupil premium is used effectively to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make progress academically as well as supporting them emotionally. Pupils' self-confidence and resilience have increased so that they make good progress. For example, the provision of a lunchtime nurture group to support disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has increased confidence in their own abilities and in their enjoyment of school.
- The school's Christian values are threaded through the curriculum and the welcoming entrance and displays reflect this. British values are taught more discretely and displays show careful thought from pupils about things like 'Poppy day' and the school's parliament. Pupils look at life in other European countries and show a good understanding of life in other societies, as well as other religions. Added to this, additional events put on in the village by the school makes it 'an active hub in the community', as one parent commented. These activities help to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.
- Parents are extremely supportive of the school. They particularly appreciate the way that staff get to know their children, keep them safe and treat them with respect. One comment reflected the views of others: 'I would be hard pushed to find a better education for my children.' Many parents put this caring ethos down to the leadership of the inspiring new head of school.

Governance of the school

- The governors work closely with the directors and other leaders of the multi-academy trust as well as working well with the new head of school. They have been involved in his efforts to raise attainment and improve standards of behaviour. In addition, they have supported his training needs by ensuring that he completes the national professional qualification for headship as soon as possible.
- The school has been through a turbulent time over the last year, with unplanned and disruptive changes in staffing. This has had a negative impact on the day-to-day running of the school. Governors responded by quickly appointing a new head of school and other key staff. They made sure that the executive headteacher gave the school extra support and commissioned more time from the school improvement partner to work closely with the head of school to address priorities quickly and to good effect. The quality of teaching has improved and standards are now rising in subjects across the curriculum.
- Most governors have an understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses where they are directly involved in the school's work. They receive regular, detailed reports from the head of school and the executive headteacher. As a result of this, they review data to check on attainment and know where the school's priorities for improvement lie. However, less attention is given to how the school's results compare with national figures.
- Designated directors challenge and support different aspects of the school's work, including the achievement of those pupils with additional needs, disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils.
- Governors fulfil a supportive role in sustaining close links with parents, the church and

the local community to widen pupils' learning experiences. They monitor the school's budget closely and ensure that funds support improvements to teaching and learning. This includes the additional funds allocated to support disadvantaged pupils and the sport funding grant. The safeguarding director ensures that governor training is up to date and fulfils statutory duties to ensure that the school is a safe place for pupils to learn. For example, regular health and safety reports identified that a climbing frame was unsafe to use and it was repaired immediately.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that keeping pupils safe receives the highest priority and that safeguarding procedures meet the statutory requirements. A culture of vigilance prevails in the school and the head of school is extremely diligent in checking that policies are kept up to date and guidelines are adhered to. Leaders ensure that risk assessments are in place for all areas of the school. Clear, up-to-date records provide evidence of this. Leaders ensure that staff are well trained and fully informed about the latest guidance for ensuring pupils' safety and well-being in areas such as child protection and e-safety. Staff are effective role models. Pupils follow their example in the way they talk, act and treat each other. Parents agree that their children are safe and well cared for in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is good. It has improved over the past year as teachers receive more consistent guidance from leaders. At times, all pupils learn extremely well and make rapid progress. For example, pupils discussed features of creative writing to write a list of ingredients and the method used to make a potion to 'turn a child into a monkey'.
- Teachers have very high expectations of pupils' behaviour. They are committed to developing their own teaching and pupils' learning. Pupils' improved learning is evident in their responses to increased challenges in the numeracy problems posed and in the depth of their expressive writing.
- Teachers make excellent use of the school's well developed outdoor areas, including the beach, to successfully promote pupils' creative skills and scientific enquiry. Pupils say that that they learn best when they can use the outdoor spaces and love being by the sea. Parents were particularly impressed by the enthusiasm generated by a literacy lesson which started with the class searching for a dragon's egg on the beach as a stimulus to writing.
- Teachers provide useful advice to pupils on how to improve their work and they respond well to guidance given. Pupils make good progress and learn well because teachers make it clear how work can be improved.
- Teachers and well-trained teaching assistants are very skilled in providing support for disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or who are falling behind with their work. They help pupils develop their speaking, reading, writing and mathematical skills as well as giving them strategies to manage their behaviour, helping them to integrate fully in all activities.
- Progress of the most able is good. All teachers question pupils carefully and extend

their knowledge and deepen their understanding. This was particularly evident in a literacy lesson in key stage 1, where pupils were able to show that they understood, and could use, a wide range of adjectives orally. A very few, however, were not able to complete the very challenging written task.

- Reading is now taught well and the new consistent approach to teaching phonics ensures that pupils are more fluent readers. Most-able pupils read a wide range of books confidently, although in Year 2 they still need support when decoding unknown words. The least able readers identified early are very well supported by adults, who give them extra help in school. Pupils are developing a love of books and many say that they use the local library to find more books that interest them.
- Writing is taught effectively and imaginative ideas capture pupils' enthusiasm and ability to write imaginatively. While there are comprehensive plans in place to improve spelling, punctuation and grammar skills, teaching is not fully effective in ensuring that pupils have security in using these skills. Leaders have responded by carefully monitoring pupils' progress in writing skills.
- Effective teaching of mathematics is based on teachers' secure knowledge and understanding of skills taught. Pupils are enthusiastic to learn and enjoy solving problems set, thinking carefully about how they do it.
- On occasion, the learning of a small minority of pupils, including the most able, slows because the level of challenge is not matched carefully enough to their abilities. The pace of the work is either too slow or the level of challenge is so high that pupils do not understand what they have to do. When this happens, teachers are quick to reshape tasks so that pupils better understand new concepts.
- All teachers set high expectations and pupils present their work in mathematics neatly, using the squares in books to keep tidy. In writing, the presentation of work is not as good. Teachers give feedback about the new ideas learnt in lessons but this does not often address spelling, grammar or handwriting errors. This results in many of these errors continuing throughout pupils' books.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Effective relationships make the school a welcoming and happy place to learn. Parents are delighted with their children's attitudes to learning and with how welcoming the staff are.
- From an early age, pupils clearly show that they want to please their teachers and learn effectively. Pupils work well together and willingly share ideas.
- On occasion, a very few pupils need guidance from adults to stay focused on their learning and find it difficult to work on their own when this support is not in place.
- Pupils are proud to take on additional roles and responsibilities, such as being a play leader or playing with the youngest pupils in the school at lunchtime. They carry out their duties diligently. Pupils are particularly pleased to be chosen for the school's parliament, including those in the Reception class.

- All staff ensure that the policies and procedures for keeping pupils safe in school are implemented consistently and effectively.
- Pupils are positive that they feel safe in school. They know an adult would listen to them and swiftly help them if they had any worries. Parents who completed the online survey and who spoke to the inspector agree that their children are secure and very happy in school. Many said that their children loved 'coming to school and could not wait to get there in the morning'.
- Pupils say there is very little poor behaviour or bullying, and school records support this view. They say that any unkindness is sorted out promptly and effectively by adults and that the 'unkind' pupils stay in the nurture room at lunchtime to reflect on their actions.
- Pupils receive good training in keeping themselves safe, both in and out of school and online. They understand, and can explain, the rules that keep them safe in the playground.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well during the school day, including at break and lunchtimes. As they move around the school, most pupils are orderly, calm and polite. It is unusual for lessons to be interrupted by incidents of disruptive behaviour, reflecting teachers' high expectations.
- Pupils maintain good levels of concentration when working, either on their own or in small groups or pairs. Both in lessons and out in the playground, pupils talk sensibly about their ideas and listen to each other respectfully.
- Pupils are keen to learn, and most respond well to the increasing levels of challenge presented to them in their work. In one key stage 2 class, pupils proudly shared one new thing they had learned in literacy with other pupils before going out to play at the end of the lesson.
- Attendance and punctuality have improved over the past year and current attendance is above national rates. This clearly shows pupils' enjoyment of school. Leaders work effectively with the independent attendance officer to promote regular attendance and discourage any unnecessary absence.
- Pupils generally work well in class. Occasionally, however, adult support is needed for pupils to concentrate on tasks and complete work. When adults are not supporting them, some pupils lose concentration and confidence, resulting in unfinished work.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Over the past year, pupils in key stage 2 have made faster progress and attainment has risen with the impetus of the new head of school. Standards are moving back towards the previous level before the dip in results in 2016. Pupils are now on track to achieve the standards expected of them, ready for the next stage of their education. Key stage 1 pupils continue to achieve well and are ready for key stage 2. They make good progress from their starting points.

- A scrutiny of the work of current pupils so far this term indicates that most pupils are working at or beyond expected levels for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. This is clear evidence, particularly in key stage 2, of strong improvement as an outcome of good and better teaching.
- Disadvantaged pupils make swift progress. Staff are very aware of the need to boost the attainment of this very small group of pupils in the school so that they make good progress. Work in books and teachers' assessment of learning suggest that their progress is as expected or better than expected. Leaders have identified this group's needs and staff have been deployed to help them. The most able disadvantaged pupils are now being challenged more effectively.
- In Year 2 in 2016, pupils made good progress in each subject. An above-average proportion achieved the expected standard or better in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. This is because they receive additional support and teaching that is precisely tailored to extend their skills and understanding.
- Most of the time, the most able pupils make good or better progress because teachers question them closely to deepen their understanding while challenging thinking skills. Occasionally, the level of challenge is too complex and not aligned to pupils' understanding so they are not able to complete the tasks correctly. At other times, this group is not sufficiently challenged.
- In the past two years, the numbers of pupils achieving the expected standard in phonics in Year 1 have declined and the proportion is lower than found nationally. This has been swiftly addressed by high-quality training for all staff so that phonics is now taught well, with a high level of challenge. Current pupils achieve expected levels for their age.
- Pupils are interested in mathematics and enjoy solving the problems teachers set. Sometimes the problems are either too difficult or too easy for a few of the most able, leaving them waiting for the next task. As a result, progress slows for this group of pupils.
- Pupils' reading skills are in line with national expectations and they read with expression and obvious enjoyment. Nonetheless, some most-able Year 2 pupils, who read to the inspector during the inspection, still needed a high level of support when decoding unknown words. The most-able pupils in Year 6 read challenging texts with good expression and pace, with comprehension skills developing well.
- Pupils make good progress across the curriculum, including religious education and geography. Pupils in Year 5 and 6 extended their scientific knowledge by carrying out experiments outside to understand the relationship between mass and weight by measuring the dropping speeds of different balls.
- Pupils' ability to use grammar and punctuation correctly is less well developed. Handwriting and the presentation of pupils' work in literacy books are not yet good. Pupils' ability to spell words is currently receiving increased emphasis in all classes, but also remains an aspect of pupils' writing that is still not good enough. Improved standards are apparent in pupils' well-developed expressive writing skills

Early years provision

Good

- The new leader of the early years stage provides strong leadership and ensures good teaching. She has significantly overhauled all areas of early years over the last year. Improvements to the curriculum, the physical environment, the organisation of teaching and the good use of adults all contribute well to this very effective area of the school's work. As a result, the children make good progress in all areas of learning.
- The children who reached the expected standard by the end of Reception in 2016, including those who are disadvantaged or supported by additional funding, was above the national average. This is because teachers plan carefully so that children's skills are developed well, from their starting points, across all areas of learning. Children's progress throughout the early years is good and they are well prepared for Year 1.
- Parents are very appreciative of the time and care taken by staff to help them settle into school routines. One parent said she could not have been better supported by the school who 'tailor made' an induction process for children who did not want to come to school. Communication was excellent and the teacher found time to discuss her concerns, showing sensitivity to her child's needs.
- With strong support from the teaching assistant, the leader thoroughly and accurately evaluates children's skills on entry by comprehensively assessing day-to-day activities within the classroom. This wide range of activities is carefully planned to develop children's skills, knowledge and understanding in every aspect of the early years curriculum.
- Most children enter the school with knowledge and skills which are typical for their age. They make rapid progress across all areas of early years learning as staff develop their speaking and listening skills and set clear expectations that children understand. For example, during the inspection, a 'Santa's workshop' had been newly set up. The teacher explained clearly how 'presents' needed to be wrapped and the teaching assistant then discussed ways of doing this with the children. Children then used their understanding of shape, space and measure to carefully wrap the presents.
- All adults ensure that statutory welfare requirements are fully met and that risk assessments for the setting are in place. Children show that they can move in an orderly manner from one activity to another, and play safely both inside and outside the classroom. They show high levels of engagement and concentration.
- Teaching is effective. Adults model good behaviour and children behave well, learn to share and show respect each other's ideas. For example, with the help of a teaching assistant, children shared and took turns being reindeer, elves and nativity characters, trying out new Christmas costumes. Meanwhile the teacher supported other children to take photographs of each other so they could make passport documents in the post office role play area.
- The teaching of phonics, writing and reading is stimulating and effective, although sometimes the assessment of these skills is not quite in place all the time. There is a high level of challenge for the most able children who learn higher-level phonic skills with the pupils in Year 1. Mathematical skills are taught through practical activities and problems are set around the classroom for children to 'solve'. Teachers question children carefully on their understanding of number during these activities.

- Staff check the children’s progress carefully and keep very detailed records of their developing skills. These skills are clearly linked to the stages of development in early years and show progress in all areas of learning over time.
- While some parents and carers contribute examples of learning at home to support these assessments of learning, this is not consistent and is an area that leaders want to develop. Parents are invited in to school at the end of each week to share in their child’s learning.

School details

Unique reference number	140342
Local authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	10019939

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Sponsor academy
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	99
Appropriate authority	The board of directors
Chair	Matthew Bloomfield
Head of school	Jake Imrie
Principal	Julie Simpson
Telephone number	01503 250565
Website	www.st-nicolas.cornwall.sch.uk
Email address	jsimpson@barnabasmat.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- St Nicolas' CofE VA School is smaller than the average-sized primary school and is part of the St Barnabas Multi Academy Trust. The work of the trust is overseen by a local board of directors. The trust is responsible for six primary schools in the local area of Cornwall.
- The school joined the trust and became an academy in December 2013.
- The current head of school took up his post in May 2016. He has responsibility for the daily running of the school and is supported by an executive headteacher, who oversees the school's work.

- A newly qualified teacher joined the staff of the school at the beginning of this academic year.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well below average.
- Children experience early years provision from the age of three in a combined Nursery and Reception class. The other pupils in the school are taught in three mixed-age classes.
- The school did not meet the government's current floor targets in 2016, which are the minimum expectations of pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection took place over two days. The inspector observed seven lessons or parts of lessons and saw the work of four teachers. The inspector was accompanied by the head of school during many of these visits to lessons.
- Meetings were held with governors and school leaders and discussions were held with pupils throughout the inspection. The inspector also conducted a telephone conversation with the school improvement partner from the trust, who supports the school.
- The inspector took account of the 28 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) as well as consulting informally with parents at the end of the school day.
- The inspector observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents, including the school's improvement plans. She examined information on current pupils' progress, minutes of the governing body meetings, safeguarding procedures, risk assessments, performance management documents and the plans for the use of sports premium and the pupil premium grant.
- The inspector listened to pupils read, talked to them in classrooms and evaluated samples of their work.

Inspection team

Julie Jane, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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