

# St Godric's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Thornley

Thornley Road, Wheatley Hill, Durham DH6 3NR

## Inspection dates

13–14 March 2019

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The variability in teaching that was evident at the time of the last inspection has been eradicated. Pupils are once again making good progress in most subjects across each phase of the school.
- The acting headteacher manages her staff well. Teachers are motivated and keen to learn from one another. They are all increasingly committed to subject leadership and consequently they influence and support one another effectively.
- The standard of phonics teaching has improved. Last year, an above-average proportion of pupils attained the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check. However, some pupils in key stage 1 are not yet fluent readers because they do not immediately recognise some common words.
- Standards in reading, writing and mathematics improved to be above average last year. The trend is being sustained this year. More pupils are also on course to attain the higher standards than last year. However, some most-able pupils need to eradicate persistent errors in spelling.
- The quality of teaching is good across the school. Lessons are well planned and tailored to reflect the different starting points of pupils in the mixed-age classes.
- Pupils' accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar is too variable and teachers do not use consistent approaches to bring these to pupils' attention.
- Pupils make good progress in most subjects. However, some topics in history and geography are not covered in enough depth.
- Pupils show positive attitudes to learning and apply themselves diligently. They enjoy school. Attendance was in line with the national average last year and is improving this year.
- The school has a warm, friendly and caring ethos. Pupils feel safe because they feel included in a cohesive community. Parents feel that the school is good at recognising and responding to their children's individual needs.
- Governance is effective. Vacancies on the governing body have been filled and governors are well organised and active in their monitoring of the school's performance.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment further so that more pupils make rapid progress, by:
  - supporting less fluent readers in key stage 1 to improve their speed in recognising common words
  - developing a consistent approach to identifying and addressing errors in pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar
  - ensuring that the most able pupils eradicate spelling errors from their work.
- Improve the quality of the curriculum by deepening the learning in history and geography to match that seen in other subjects.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Following a difficult period of turbulence last year, the acting headteacher has established consistent staffing arrangements. All members of staff are firmly focused on raising expectations and ensuring that the quality of teaching is strong. The acting headteacher's careful management of personnel, regular checks on the quality of teaching and a supportive approach have fostered positive attitudes across the staff. They are well motivated and keen to improve their practice.
- Outcomes improved in 2018, following a mixed picture the previous year. The trend of improvement is continuing this year, with more pupils on course to reach the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. The weaknesses in teaching at key stage 1 that were evident at the time of the last inspection in May 2018 have been resolved. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics now compare favourably with national averages.
- The school has benefited from good support from the local authority. Appropriate training has been provided for some teachers and the school's progress has been checked through an external review. This helped to pinpoint where further work was needed.
- The staff meet regularly to review the quality of work in pupils' books. They make incisive observations and plan how to improve outcomes together. There is a strong sense of teamwork and mutual support. All teachers are becoming increasingly influential in their leadership of different subjects.
- The headteacher holds an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, plans for improvement are tightly focused on the correct priorities. Teachers across the school understand exactly what they need to focus on and so these areas of the school's work are improving.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced. A review of learning across the wider curriculum last term identified that some subjects were not being taught in enough depth and detail. Scrutiny of books shows the picture has improved this term, with some strong progress evident in subjects such as art and science. However, leaders know for themselves that progress in subjects such as history and geography is still patchy, as some topics are still being covered too superficially.
- Some topics taught within the curriculum have changed, as leaders were keen to ensure that curriculum content motivated boys and girls equally. Some more engaging texts are being used to fire pupils' imagination. For example, ideas such as writing 'howlers', the magical letters of admonishment described in Harry Potter novels, have captured the imagination of all pupils in Class Four. These changes have had a positive effect, as boys are now making as much progress as girls.
- Although the school has relatively few disadvantaged pupils, careful thought has gone into the strategy for the use of the pupil premium. Much of the funding has been used to ensure that disadvantaged pupils who have emotional barriers to learning get the help they need. The progress of disadvantaged pupils is checked frequently, and some

teachers provide extra lunchtime tuition for pupils who need it. Disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are making similar progress and attending as well as other pupils.

- Support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is good. Support plans are tailored to their individual needs. Classroom assistants use these plans well to provide good ongoing support in lessons. Other pupils are very accommodating and supportive, so pupils feel fully included and integrated in the life of the school.
- Pupils describe the ethos in this small school as being like that of a family. Socially, pupils are polite, respectful and tolerant of one another. Their cultural awareness is developed well through a good art and music curriculum and through the well-developed community projects. The spiritual and moral dimension is fostered effectively through the school's Catholic ethos and emphasis on the rights of the child. As a result of these carefully planned experiences, pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.

### **Governance of the school**

- The quality of governance has improved since the previous inspection. Vacancies on the governing body have been filled and new governors have grown into their roles, following training. The governing body is more organised, having reshaped its committee structure. Governors have now aligned their monitoring roles with the priorities in the school improvement plan.
- The governors are increasingly proactive and make more regular checks on the impact of leaders' actions. At the time of this inspection, the governing body was meeting to consider the future strategic direction of the school. Uppermost in these discussions was the need to shape the next steps in securing the long-term leadership of the school.
- The governing body provides good support to the headteacher. Governors understand the school's priorities for improvement well and provide good ongoing evaluative checks on the progress being made.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Policies are up to date and in line with the most recent government guidance. Policies and procedures are well understood by staff, who are vigilant and quick to report issues if they have any concerns.
- Thorough checks are made on all adults who work in or visit the school. When pupils go on visits away from school, detailed and thorough risk assessments are completed.
- Fortunately, leaders have relatively few child protection cases to manage. If a concern is raised, they act quickly, involving families at an early stage and working in partnership with other agencies, as necessary. The members of staff who lead on safeguarding are experienced and know their community very well.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- The headteacher has addressed the variability in teaching identified in the school's previous inspection in May 2018. At that time the school was experiencing some significant disruption, with some teachers on long-term sickness absence or maternity leave. Since then, more settled arrangements have been established. The headteacher has thoughtfully moved teachers around the different classes so that their skills are being used to maximum effect.
- Teaching across the school is now more consistent and therefore pupils are making good progress across key stage 1 and key stage 2.
- Teachers plan lessons carefully. They are skilled in ensuring that they tier the level of challenge within their mixed-age classes. Typically, teachers provide work that has been adapted to challenge the most able and the less able appropriately. Pupils have been taught to work independently while the teacher works with other groups in the class.
- Teachers check pupils' understanding as the lessons progress by asking suitably probing questions. Pupils are made to think deeply and to give well-considered responses. For example, pupils in Year 2 and 3 were able to explain to the inspector why contractions are used in informal, but not formal, writing.
- The headteacher has encouraged teachers to review the quality of pupils' work by collectively looking through their books together. This constructive approach is helping teachers to learn from one another and refine their practice. For example, expectations for the quality of handwriting were found to be variable and prompt action has been taken to model the standards expected. As a result, any differences have quickly been eliminated.
- Teachers systematically assess pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The headteacher reviews assessment information with each teacher half-termly so that any pupil making slower progress is quickly identified and given extra help.
- Teachers expect pupils to apply themselves diligently. Consequently, pupils show positive attitudes and apply themselves well across the day. Warm and friendly relationships between pupils and members of staff ensure that pupils are happy to ask for help if unsure and are quick to act upon feedback.
- Teachers check pupils' work conscientiously. However, teachers do not routinely ensure identification of errors in pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar. In some books the inspector checked, keywords in titles that were spelled wrongly were not being pointed out, while in other books pupils completed spelling corrections in the margin.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils have positive attitudes and demonstrate the necessary skills to be effective

learners. They work hard and try their best, sustaining their concentration well across the day. Many pupils take advantage at home of the online learning opportunities the school facilitates.

- The school fosters an interest in sports and physical fitness effectively. The physical education and sports premium is used to access the local school sports partnership, which offers a range of competitions and festivals across the year in conjunction with other schools. The school council has surveyed pupils' sporting interests and leaders have used these views to shape the activities provided. Evidence gathered by leaders shows that participation rates in sport have increased over time.
- There are good opportunities for pupils at St Godric's to get involved in community projects. For example, pupils were very actively involved in remembrance events last term, as part of a study project about the First World War. Pupils made a banner to commemorate the community's mining heritage and the centenary of the end of the First World War. The 'Friends of the School' are an active group who raise funds and organise events for pupils such as Easter fun days, Mother and Father's Day celebrations and theatre visits.
- Almost all parents who responded to Parent View were praiseworthy of the caring and nurturing ethos the headteacher has fostered. One parent wrote, 'St Godric's is a fabulous school where all children are allowed to be unique individuals. The staff are approachable and can't do enough to help both parents and children.'
- Pupils feel safe and secure because there is almost no bullying and they trust the staff to deal with any concerns they have. Parents who expressed concerns about attitudes in one class last year feel swift action has been taken and the situation remedied.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils conduct themselves well and show positive attitudes to learning. The vast majority take care with the presentation of their work. In lessons, pupils are keen to participate and many want to answer the teacher's questions.
- There are few recorded incidents of poor behaviour. Last year, during a period of staff absence, some more-challenging behaviour and less positive attitudes surfaced in one class. These challenges have been dealt with effectively. Leaders acted quickly, drawing on external initiatives such as the Prince William Award to foster pupils' teamwork and respect for one another. These well-considered approaches have made a considerable difference to the way pupils in the class now relate to one another.
- There have been no exclusions for many years. Pupils who need support to manage their emotions can meet one-to-one with the school counsellor each week.
- Pupils' attendance last year was in line with the national average for primary schools. This year, to date, the overall level of attendance has improved and very few pupils miss school regularly. The relatively few disadvantaged pupils attend just as well as their peers.

## Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The prompt actions of the headteacher have addressed the variability in outcomes seen in the school in recent years. In 2018, pupils in key stage 1 and key stage 2 made broadly average progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders' ongoing efforts this year are securing further improvements and current pupils are making good progress. More pupils are now on course to attain the higher standard in reading and mathematics and to reach greater depth in writing.
- In 2017, a relatively low proportion of pupils attained the expected standard in the Year 1 national phonics screening check. Since then, phonics teaching has improved because of effective training. Last year, the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard rose markedly to be above the national average. Pupils currently in the school can use and apply their phonics knowledge to decode new words. However, some pupils in key stage 1 are yet to develop as fluent readers because they do not recognise enough words. This slows the pace of their reading and inhibits their understanding of the text.
- Following a dip in performance at the end of key stage 1 in 2017, standards of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics improved last year to match those seen nationally at the expected standard and at greater depth. The headteacher is continuing to work closely with key stage 1 staff to refine the quality of teaching further. In addition, good ongoing support from the local authority is having a positive effect. Expectations are rising. Scrutiny of the work in books indicates that pupils currently in key stage 1 are making good progress.
- Some thoughtful changes to the key stage 2 curriculum have ensured that English topics are equally appealing to boys and girls. These changes have helped to eliminate the marked difference seen in rates of progress between boys and girls in 2017, when boys made poorer progress. In 2018, rates of progress in reading and writing were similar for boys and girls and this continues to be the case. Writing topics, such as projects linked to the study of Michael Morpurgo's 'War Horse' and to the Harry Potter novels have successfully captured all pupils' imaginations and stimulated rich pieces of writing.
- Last year, the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was above the national average. However, none of the pupils in Year 6 attained the higher standard at the combined measure. This was partly because they made too many errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Some pupils, including some of the most able, continue to make mistakes with more technical aspects of writing and more diligent procedures are needed to ensure that errors are routinely identified and remedied.
- Disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are making similar progress to their peers. Teachers ensure that additional help is targeted towards this group. The quality of support for pupils with SEND is also well planned and carefully tailored to meet pupils' identified needs. As a result, these pupils are also making good progress. Parents who met with the inspector or made their views known through Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, felt the individual attention given to pupils is a strength of the school.
- The headteacher's careful monitoring of pupils' progress last term identified that pupils'

progress across the wider curriculum was more variable. Consequently, more time is now being given to developing pupils' knowledge and understanding in the foundation subjects. Subject leadership roles have been reallocated; members of staff are attending local authority courses and more in-house training is being provided. Scrutiny of pupils' workbooks found some strengths in subjects such as art and science, but the depth of learning was weaker in geography and history.

## Early years provision

**Good**

- Children enter Reception with widely varying starting points. Leaders are quick to assess each child and carefully tailor the teaching and learning opportunities to help children take their next steps. Effective leadership has ensured that the team of adults who work with the children have the skills to interact effectively with them. Good direction, supplemented by good planning, ensures that the team of adults continually extends children's understanding of reading, writing and numbers. Consequently, children make good progress. In recent years, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the year has been broadly average.
- As children spend part of their day learning alongside pupils in Year 1, they quickly learn to follow good routines and benefit from the good role models the older children provide. Teachers provide a well-considered balance of child-initiated learning and adult-led sessions. These sessions ensure that children quickly learn the sounds letters make and how to write letters and numbers correctly. Well planned adult-led sessions draw upon a wide variety of resources to help children extend their understanding.
- By the end of the Reception Year, children have a good grasp of the sounds letters make and show a keen interest in books. Most can write in sentences and use phonetically plausible spellings. They can apply these skills to their own ideas, such as writing letters to 'mummy' and addressing the envelope. The careful nurturing of skills ensures that most children are ready for an increasingly adult-led approach to learning in Year 1.
- Children play with imagination and curiosity because the activities prepared for them stimulate their interest effectively. For example, a group of children took interest in pictures of castles and worked together on a large drawing, taking care to add towers, castellations, windows and a portcullis. The adults working with the children encouraged them to make a working model of a drawbridge, to extend their understanding further. This activity required the children to thread string through holes in card and to tie knots, which helped to develop their fine motor skills. They went on to label the different parts of the castle on their drawing, using their grasp of phonics to spell new words correctly.
- Children behave well. They display a good level of concentration and can sustain their interest in topics. They play pleasantly with one another, sharing equipment and taking turns. They are polite to one another and to members of staff.
- The deputy headteacher, who leads the school's early years provision, has fostered good links with local nurseries. Children who attend one local nursery visit the school once a week to use the school's good outdoor facilities. This helps to prepare these children for transition to the Reception class. The needs of children who join the



Reception Year are therefore known before they arrive. The deputy headteacher also fosters a strong partnership with parents. There are regular 'stay and play' days which are popular with parents and workshops for parents on how to support their children's reading and number skills.

- Leaders are knowledgeable about the early years safeguarding and welfare requirements. They ensure that these expectations are fully met.

## School details

Unique reference number	114277
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10055207

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 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	85
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stephen Carter
Headteacher	Julie Hill
Telephone number	01429 820333
Website	<a href="http://atschool.eduweb.co.uk/thornleyrc.durham/">http://atschool.eduweb.co.uk/thornleyrc.durham/</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:thornleystgodric@durhamlearning.net">thornleystgodric@durhamlearning.net</a>
Date of previous inspection	14 May 2018

## Information about this school

- St Godric's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is smaller than average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is below the national average. An average proportion of pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school has a Catholic religious character. The most recent section 48 inspection of the school took place in June 2016.
- The school is federated with another local school.
- The headteacher has led the school in an acting capacity since September 2017, when

the substantive headteacher began a secondment.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, five governors, including the chair of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a group of teachers.
- The inspector also met with a group of pupils and spoke to others more informally at social times.
- The inspector listened to some pupils read and discussed their interest in books with them.
- The inspector visited lessons in each of the school's four classes. Many observations were undertaken jointly with the headteacher. During lesson visits the inspector talked to pupils about their learning and sampled a range of pupils' workbooks.
- The inspector reviewed the quality of support plans for pupils with SEND and checked how well their plans were being implemented during lessons.
- The inspector scrutinised a sample of pupils' books from across the full age range in subjects, including English, mathematics, science, history, geography and art. The sample of books included pupils who entered the school with different starting points, some of whom were disadvantaged pupils.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, policies and assessment information. The inspector also looked at records of attendance and behaviour and safeguarding information.
- The inspector took account of the 40 responses to Ofsted's parent questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, the inspector took account of the 10 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 33 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

## Inspection team

Chris Smith, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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