

Inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Junior School, Birtley

School Street, Birtley, Chester le Street, County Durham DH3 2PN

Inspection dates:	24 and 25 June 2025
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Kate Swaddle. This school is part of Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Nick Hurn OBE, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Martin Gannon.

Ofsted has not previously inspected St Joseph's Catholic Junior School, Birtley under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. However, Ofsted previously judged St Joseph's Catholic Junior School, Birtley to be outstanding for overall effectiveness, before it opened as an academy. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish at this welcoming and highly inclusive school. They attend school regularly because they have kind friends to play with and know that learning is important. Pupils enjoy their lessons and take great pride in their learning.

The school has very high aspirations for pupils' achievement. Pupils work hard to rise to these aspirations. They achieve exceptionally well and leave the school very well prepared for the challenges of secondary education.

Pupils are happy and well cared for. They know there are trusted adults to whom they can go if they are worried or concerned. Relationships between staff and pupils and their families are positive and respectful. During lessons and at social times, pupils' behaviour is exemplary.

Across the school, classrooms buzz with engaging and meaningful learning. The school provides activities and visits that carefully link to pupils' learning as well as broadening their experiences beyond the local community. Pupils enjoy trips to museums, the coast and the theatre. Pupils have numerous opportunities to take part in residential visits, building confidence and resilience. A wide range of clubs, such as learning the Korean language, chess, multisport and drama, develop pupils' talents and interests extremely well.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Reading is at the centre of the school's extremely ambitious and coherent curriculum offer. A diverse range of engaging and appropriate texts are used to support the delivery of knowledge across subjects very effectively.

The enjoyment and importance of reading are promoted consistently across school. Staff are experts at delivering the phonics programme very effectively. They provide highly effective support for those pupils who need extra help. This builds pupils' confidence and helps them to become fluent, accurate readers. Throughout the school, staff model the language and vocabulary they wish pupils to develop and use. The school's work on oracy is an area of excellence. This means that pupils, as they move through the school, develop speaking and listening skills that enable them to debate, challenge and ask questions about their learning. Pupils' engagement in lessons is impressively high.

The school's broad and rich curriculum has been meticulously designed to identify the important knowledge that pupils should learn. Staff have received high levels of support and training. They deliver the curriculum very skilfully. They regularly revisit the key knowledge that is essential for pupils to know and remember. Staff are alert to any misconceptions that pupils may develop and act swiftly to address these as they arise. Over time, pupils develop a secure and deep body of knowledge.

The school has effective systems in place to swiftly identify the specific needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff expertly adapt the

curriculum. When necessary, leaders seek specialist support to further enhance their understanding of pupils' needs and the best ways to support them. As a result, pupils with SEND learn successfully alongside their peers.

The way the school promotes pupils' personal development is exceptional. By using the knowledge they learn in history and geography, pupils are guided to consider their role in modern society. There are tailored opportunities for pupils to understand diversity and individuality and to celebrate what makes everyone unique. Pupils know it is important to be caring and compassionate. For example, they learn to be charitable by raising money for good causes. Pupils develop an understanding of sustainability by growing their own vegetables in the school garden.

The school has high expectations for behaviour, underpinned by a fair and clear behaviour system. Pupils' positive attitudes and exemplary conduct mean that lessons run smoothly. Pupil attendance is high. Where needed, the school provides support to pupils and their families to help pupils attend regularly.

The trust and governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths. They provide timely support and challenge to the school about the quality of its provision. Staff speak highly of the support that they receive from leaders. They are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	148844
Local authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	10323154
Type of school	Junior
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	97
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Martin Gannon
CEO of the trust	Nick Hurn OBE
Headteacher	Kate Swaddle
Website	www.stjosephcatholicschoolsbirtley.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school runs a breakfast club on site.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- This is a Catholic primary school in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. The school received a section 48 inspection in June 2019. The school's next section 48 inspection will take place within eight school years.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school’s education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, school staff, members of the local governing body, trustees and representatives of the trust leadership team.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils’ work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils’ interests first.
- The inspectors considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.
- The inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted’s online surveys for staff and pupils and spoke to some staff about their workload and well-being.

Inspection team

Tracy Duffy, lead inspector

His Majesty’s Inspector

Sharon Common

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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