



Our Lady and St Thomas Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114257
LEA Durham
Inspection number 279349
Inspection dates 27 March 2006 to 28 March 2006
Reporting inspector Mrs Kathleen McArthur

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Cumberland Terrace
School category	Voluntary aided		Willington
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Crook, County Durham DL15 OPB
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01388 746336
Number on roll	99	Fax number	01388 748229
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Alison Aisbitt
Date of previous inspection	1 November 1999	Headteacher	Mrs Frances Gowland

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an additional inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small primary school that draws pupils from a wide area. When pupils start school, their attainment is broadly typical for their age. A similar number to the national average receive a free school meal. None of the pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high at about twice the national average.

In recognition of its work, the school has received a number of awards, including Healthy Schools, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Mark and the Quality Mark has been renewed. Over the past four years, the school has participated in 'Test Bed', a major national ICT project.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. It gives good value for money. The inspection confirmed the school's accurate assessment of its performance. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher is the driving force behind all initiatives for school improvement. Pupils are taught well and achieve well through the school, reaching good standards, although higher attaining pupils could do better in mathematics. Foundation Stage provision is good. Children achieve well and many exceed the expected goals at the end of Reception. However, there is no separate secure area for children to extend their learning outdoors. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well owing to the good support they receive.

Parents and pupils are highly satisfied with everything the school provides. Parents like the school's 'very caring attitude' and pupils say 'there are loads of nice people here'. Personal development and the way the school cares for pupils are outstanding, leading to very good relationships and excellent behaviour. Informative assessment systems ensure progress is monitored well and all pupils are set challenging targets. The good curriculum is enriched with an outstanding range of activities, many originating in the ICT 'Test Bed' project which has successfully helped raise attainment.

The school has successfully overcome the few minor weaknesses identified by the previous inspection. Overall, standards have risen, indicating good improvement. There is good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Strengthen the measures introduced to ensure the more able pupils in Year 6 achieve as well as they can in mathematics.
- Provide a secure area for outdoor learning to ensure children in the Foundation Stage receive their full curriculum entitlement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards are above average. Small numbers in each year group mean that standards can vary. Pupils make good progress in lessons and achieve well in relation to their capabilities because they are taught well. When children start school, attainment is broadly typical for their age. Good provision in the Foundation Stage ensures they progress well and most exceed the goals expected by the end of reception class. Pupils build well on this good start in response to teachers' high expectations, achieve well through Key Stage 1 and standards are above average.

Standards have risen over time in Key Stage 2. Pupils achieve well because they strive hard to meet challenging targets. In 2005, the school was placed in the top 5% of schools in England and results were well above national averages at the expected level (Level 4) in English and science. However, only one pupil reached the higher level in mathematics. Assessment information and pupils' books show nearly half the current

Year 6 pupils are on course to reach the higher level in mathematics as a result of additional support focusing on specific needs. Individual learning programmes and well-trained classroom assistants enable pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make very good progress. The Test Bed project has resulted in pupils becoming very skilled users of ICT and has helped raise attainment in all subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Provision for personal development is outstanding. Pupils work hard, have very caring and helpful attitudes and derive great enjoyment from all the school offers. Their behaviour is exemplary. Relationships at all levels are very strong and supportive. Pupils say 'Teachers keep you safe', and are certain any problems are dealt with fairly. They undertake responsibilities eagerly and conscientiously. Parents value the mentor system whereby older pupils look after reception children when they start school. School councillors are proud of their contribution, for example choosing new dining room equipment. Pupils understand the importance of health, and enjoy the daily 'Wake up, Shake up' session. Commitment to the 'Safer Routes to School' project encourages pupils to walk or cycle to school. Attendance has improved following rigorous efforts by the school, and is broadly average.

Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils are reflective, really appreciate the world around them and have a strong sense of right and wrong. They show great concern for the needs of others by helping a school in Tanzania. They respect different cultures and faiths, and have learned about their own cultural traditions through the local 'Community History' project. Good academic standards and regular attendance prepare them well for the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are very well planned and organised with imaginative, practical and meaningful activities. The impressive ICT facilities, used in almost every lesson, really stimulate pupils' interest and they use ICT skilfully. This has helped raise their attainment across the curriculum. Sometimes teachers miss opportunities for pupils to contribute in lessons and extend their reading and speaking skills.

Very informative assessment systems provide an accurate picture of pupils' performance. Regular monitoring of progress gives teachers a good understanding of what their pupils need to do next. Individual targets challenge pupils of all abilities, although higher level mathematics targets were missed last year. Pupils know their targets and, by sharing them with parents, the school has successfully built a supportive learning partnership. Pupils' books show that work is marked thoroughly, with comments to help them improve, but older pupils often spell common words incorrectly. Pupils with

learning difficulties and/or disabilities follow specialised individual programmes that meet their needs well. Good support from well-informed teaching assistants ensures they make very good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced and meets all statutory requirements. Very good planning and the use of ICT make learning practical and enjoyable. Consequently, pupils achieve well. Effective literacy, numeracy and ICT programmes have led to good standards overall, although more able pupils could be challenged further in mathematics. Basic skills are used well across the curriculum, for example, to record data from the digital thermometer or, in science, write imaginary accounts of a moon walk. The ICT 'Test Bed' project has had a big impact, enriching learning in all subjects. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are fully involved in all activities. The Foundation Stage does not yet have a separate, secure outdoor area to extend the curriculum outside.

An outstanding range of enrichment activities include very well supported clubs, activities and partnerships with schools, locally and internationally. All pupils learn French, and have an opportunity for a visit abroad. Pupils are responsible members of the school and wider community, support the 'Safer Routes to School' initiative, sell fruit and raise funds for charities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school takes very good care of all pupils. The quality of care provided for their health, safety and protection, and the quality of guidance for their progress are outstanding. All procedures, including child protection, are securely in place. Staff know pupils and their families very well. Very effective personal development programmes result in excellent behaviour and caring, considerate attitudes. Very good relationships contribute strongly to pupils' good progress. Pupils show respect for adults and towards each other, and trust the staff, knowing they will sort out difficulties by 'talking it through'. Older pupils value their roles as mentors for newly admitted reception children.

Excellent assessment systems provide a clear picture of progress. The guidance given to pupils about how to improve their work and meet their challenging targets is very clear and encourages them to aim high. The school works well with parents and all outside agencies, forming strong, supportive partnerships for all pupils. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well supported and guided.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good overall. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. Her strong vision and 'can do' approach have successfully raised attainment while constantly seeking to ensure that all pupils achieve their full potential within the school's inclusive ethos. Her partnership with staff, governors, parents and the parish has created a vibrant learning community in a welcoming, secure environment where pupils achieve well, both personally and academically. The able assistant headteacher and staff team provide effective support. The school's good reputation for ICT draws many visitors. Equality of opportunity is promoted excellently. Strong links with all outside agencies and parents ensure the needs of all pupils, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are fully met.

Governance is good. Governors are supportive yet challenging and their contributions are knowledgeable, owing to their good links with subject leaders and training. Rigorous school self-evaluation provides an honest appraisal of performance and developmental needs. Improvement planning is firmly directed to raising standards. Staff performance management targets and shrewd financial management are firmly linked to areas identified for development. The capacity for further improvement is good.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

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Our Lady and St Thomas

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29 March 2006

Dear Children

Thank you all for making my visit so enjoyable and interesting when I came to inspect your school. It was good to meet you and everyone helped me find out lots of good things about your school.

Here are some of the things I found:

your headteacher is outstanding and has created a good school for you by working with the staff, the governors, the parish and your parents

you really enjoy school and everything you do, especially ICT, learning languages and all the clubs

you work hard to meet your targets, your behaviour is excellent, you all get on well, and everyone cares for and helps each other

you know how to stay healthy, feel very safe at school and take your responsibilities very seriously.

I have asked the staff to make your school even better by:

making sure you all do as well as you can in all your work, especially mathematics

providing a secure space where the reception children can learn outdoors.

Thank you again for all your help. I hope you will continue to work hard and enjoy your time at school.

Yours sincerely

Kathleen McArthur

Lead inspector