



St Aidan's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122307
LEA Northumberland
Inspection number 281227
Inspection dates 12 December 2005 to 13 December 2005
Reporting inspector Mr Gordon Alston

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

Type of school	First	School address	Norham Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Ashington
Age range of pupils	3 to 9		Northumberland, NE63 0LF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01670 813308
Number on roll	182	Fax number	01670 851200
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Father Ian Jackson
Date of previous inspection	1 December 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Samantha Leslie

Age group 3 to 9	Inspection dates 12 December 2005 - 13 December 2005	Inspection number 281227
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

St Aidan's First School is a Catholic school serving an area in Ashington, near Newcastle, Northumberland. The 182 pupils in the school cover the full range of abilities. Children enter the school with skills that are slightly below those expected for their age, particularly in language and communication. Almost all pupils speak English as their first language. The number of pupils who receive free school meals is just below average, as is the proportion of pupils with learning or behavioural difficulties. The school has gained a Healthy School Award and a Sports Active Mark Award recently.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's own self-evaluation. This is a good school, greatly valued by parents, pupils and the local community. Provision in the Foundation Stage is good and children achieve well, reaching expected levels. Standards at ages seven and nine are above average in reading, writing and mathematics and at the expected level in information communication technology (ICT). Pupils make good progress and achieve well. The school is working hard at raising standards in pupils' writing and problem-solving skills. All pupils are given every opportunity to succeed, but there are insufficient opportunities to use ICT across subjects. The good quality of care, guidance and support provided by the school, the good teaching and the many enrichment activities lead to pupils' good personal development. This is reflected in their very good relationships, good attitudes and responsible behaviour. They enjoy school, and are positively encouraged to think for themselves and to have their say. Overall, leadership and management are good. The leadership of the headteacher and the deputy is effective in its relentless drive for improvement. For example, the school is exploring opportunities to develop a creative curriculum in Key Stage 1 and as a result is successfully promoting enjoyment through learning. The leadership and management of subjects are variable. Governors discharge their responsibilities well, and the school gives good value for money. It has improved markedly since the last inspection, and is well placed to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of recent initiatives aimed at improving pupils' writing and mathematical problem-solving skills.
- Further extend the use pupils make of their ICT skills across all subjects.
- Spread the successful leadership and management evidenced in literacy to all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well, many from a low starting point, particularly in language and communication. Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage and by the time they start in Year 1, most have reached the level expected for their age. Continued good progress ensures standards at ages seven and nine are above average in reading, writing and in mathematics and average in ICT. National test results in Year 2 are usually better in reading and mathematics than in writing. The school has identified this and has introduced individual writing targets that are shared with pupils making them aware of how they can improve their writing. Results in all subjects have improved in recent years.

The school sets challenging individual and group targets in English and mathematics that encourage pupils to work hard and make good progress. Targets are checked termly to ensure pupils make the progress they should

No group is significantly underachieving. The small numbers of pupils with learning or behavioural difficulties make good progress. This is because they receive good support from a conscientious, caring team of assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils enjoy coming to school, have positive attitudes to their work and are proud of their achievements. The school has comprehensive systems for promoting good attendance, although the most recent attendance figures are below average. This is largely related to holidays taken during term time. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. The school has a very caring Christian ethos in which all are valued and respected and pupils feel secure and safe. They clearly understand the difference between right and wrong and often take the initiative in helping to raise funds for those less fortunate than themselves.

Pupils have many opportunities help with the smooth running of the school and in the 'buddy' system. For example, they help to care for others. The school ensures that pupils understand about keeping safe and healthy. There are many opportunities for sport and exercise in and out of school and pupils are encouraged to eat wisely. The importance the school places on increasing skills in literacy and numeracy and on showing respect and consideration for others helps to develop skills and attitudes which will stand them in good stead in later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Because teachers and support staff know the pupils very well, they provide work that is suited to their abilities, based on thorough marking, assessment and tracking systems. The grouping of pupils in classes according to their ability and the use of specialist teaching in Years 1 and 2 are very successful in helping to raise standards. In the Foundation Stage the caring and stimulating environment encourages learning.

Teachers have high expectations and ensure that pupils learn at a brisk rate so that they work hard and make good progress. Pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities are well supported by all staff so that they also make good progress.

Very good relationships help to develop confidence and self-esteem. Pupils have many opportunities to work independently and collaboratively. For example, in Year 2 pupils worked well together successfully identifying words with particular letter combinations. Teachers have good subject knowledge that helps them to set challenging tasks in order to extend learning. They manage pupils well and insist on high standards resulting in good behaviour and pupils taking pride in their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Inspectors support the school's judgement that the curriculum is good. The school has developed an innovative approach to planning so that subjects are linked together, giving greater relevance and enjoyment to learning. The time allocated to the teaching of subjects has been reorganised in Years 1 and 2, giving longer continuous spans of time. This is helping to raise standards. The use of ICT is satisfactory in literacy lessons but the technology is only just beginning to be used in other subjects.

Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is good. Individual education plans are clear and manageable and adults provide good support so that these pupils make good progress. The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport. The curriculum is further enriched by the wide range of visitors to school and visits out of school and by the weeks the school sets aside to focus on such subjects as art, music and physical education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This aspect is a very positive feature, although inspectors judged it to be good not outstanding. Staff know the pupils well and are fully committed to their welfare. Although learners' academic progress is carefully monitored and tracked especially in English and mathematics, the monitoring of pupils' personal development is less organised and formal.

Adults are positive role models and foster very good relationships so that there is no bullying or racism. Pupils with specific needs are provided for well because there is an acceptance that every child matters and learns in different ways. The progress of all children is reviewed regularly and the school works closely with external agencies and with parents and carers. Thorough procedures smooth children's start in the Nursery class so they settle quickly. The good links with the local middle school also ease pupils' transition to the next stage of their education.

Secure child protection and health and safety arrangements are effective. Pupils feel safe and know they have someone to go to if they are worried. The school also successfully helps pupils understand the importance of good health. In discussion, pupils displayed a very good understanding of the need to take regular exercise and the effect it can have on the body.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good and the school has a good capacity to improve. The headteacher and deputy share a strong belief that all pupils should enjoy learning and do well both academically and in their personal development. This is the driving force in providing a school that meets the needs of its community well, where pupils make good progress on all fronts. The school has a dedicated, caring team of staff.

However, the management of subjects is variable. The leadership of literacy is particularly strong and is having a positive impact on raising standards.

The school successfully evaluates its own performance. For example, it has identified the need to improve provision for ICT and is carrying out clear and detailed action plans. All issues from the last inspection have been dealt with well. The school conscientiously seeks the views of parents and pupils about school improvement and takes account of their views in planning. The good use of all resources and the pupils' good achievement secure good value for money.

The governance of the school is good. Governors are becoming involved in improvement planning, they meet their statutory duties well and clearly know what the school is achieving. They are regular visitors, getting to know pupils and staff and good use is made of their skills. For example, the chair leads assemblies.

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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?	2	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?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	4	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	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?	2	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	2	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

St Aidan's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School

Norham Road

Ashington

Northumberland

NE63 0LF

14 December 2005

Dear Pupils

I want to thank you all so much for making our visit to you a very enjoyable one. We came to see how well your school is performing and you had a very important part in this, just as much as your teachers had.

You did not let the school down in any way, in fact your good behaviour and relationships with one another is a credit to you all and helped us to judge just how well you and your school are doing.

Well, what did we think after these two days? I know your teachers were worried with Ofsted coming but hopefully our report will help them feel all the hard work they do is worthwhile. I always ask pupils their views of the school and one boy said, 'at St Aidan's everyone cares about everyone'. He was right; your school is a very caring school. Your headteacher and deputy lead your school very well and care about all of you in everything they do. The school makes learning interesting and enjoyable, makes you work hard and as a result you are learning lots in lessons. They also do plenty of things to excite you with the visits you go on and lots of visitors to school. We were pleased with how hard you worked but equally important was how well everyone got on and we saw lots of pupils who had responsibilities who did them very well. We were also very pleased to see all the clubs you have and how you are encouraged to take regular exercise.

I'm sure your teachers always say 'this is good but you could make it even better if you...'. Well, this is what we are telling your school. The teachers could make it even better if they try to get all of you to write and solve mathematical problems even better, and give you all more chance to use computers to help you learn in all the subjects you do. We also felt that all teachers need to develop the subject they are responsible for as well as they do in literacy.

Finally, we would like to thank you again. If you and your teachers continue to work as hard as when we were in school I am sure your school will continue to do well.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Alston

Lead inspector