



St Agnes' Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 108390
Local Authority Gateshead
Inspection number 288085
Inspection date 11 January 2007
Reporting inspector Sheila Mawer

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Main Street
School category	Voluntary aided		Crawcrook, Ryton
Age range of pupils	4-11		Tyne and Wear, NE40 4NF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0191 4132184
Number on roll (school)	167	Fax number	0191 4132984
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Norah Dixon
		Headteacher	Mrs M Lynne Hudson
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Pupils in this smaller than average and oversubscribed school come from an area of mixed private and local authority owned housing. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average. Few pupils have free school meals. Numbers leaving and joining the school other than at the start of Reception are above average. The school does not have a nursery but has established close links with a privately run nursery, which shares the same site. The school is in receipt of many awards including Artsmark silver and Activemark. The school functions in cramped and overcrowded conditions.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Agnes provides an outstanding education for its pupils. The key to its success is the relentless focus on improving the climate for learning for all pupils and nurturing them within a challenging environment. The school's aim of providing an education where 'excellence and enjoyment flourish and is inclusive to all' is fully met. Pupils' impeccable behaviour and strong desire to learn helps the school to overcome the challenges presented by the cramped accommodation. With two new classrooms being added shortly and high standards being maintained, the school is in an excellent position to improve even further and to continue to offer outstanding value for money.

Parents and pupils are proud of the school and hold it in high regard. Their extremely positive views are entirely justified. One parent summed up the views of many when writing, 'Children are nurtured in the most kindly, disciplined and friendly environment, that any parent would want for their children. I couldn't find a better school'. Adults provide excellent role models for pupils, which result in exceptionally good relationships and responsibility for others. Parents say their children love school, which is not surprising as care and support are first rate and enable pupils to feel safe, healthy and valued.

Standards are exceptionally high by the end of Year 6 and pupils' achievement is outstanding. For several years the performance of Year 6 pupils in national tests has been within or close to the top ten percent of all schools. The unvalidated results for 2006 are very high. Because teaching is impressive, pupils often excel in their learning and make excellent progress. High expectations for all pupils are evident in the quality of pupils' work. While there are examples of good handwriting, which is practised regularly, the quality and standards are not high enough. The school's curriculum is skilfully organised to compensate for the limited accommodation and, although overall provision is good in the Reception class, the children have limited time and choice of learning activity outdoors. The school's success is due to the unrelenting drive for excellence from the headteacher, governors and staff and the outstanding contribution they make to the success of the school. There is no room for complacency.

Self-evaluation is very good although the school has been over-modest in judging some of its effectiveness. Subject leaders have had a very positive impact on pupils' attainment, especially for more able pupils, who consistently achieve at higher levels in national tests. Governors fulfil their role as critical friend very effectively.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of handwriting through the school.
- Increase the planned opportunities for children in the Foundation Stage to learn in the outdoor area.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement is outstanding and pupils reach high and sometimes exceptionally high standards by the time they leave the school. These standards have been maintained since the last inspection and challenging targets are often exceeded. All groups of pupils throughout the school make at least good and often excellent progress because of outstanding teaching and first-rate provision. When children start in Reception, their attainment is slightly below average. They are given a good start to their learning and many enter Year 1 having reached national expectations. By the end of Year 2, standards are above average. Although fewer pupils reached higher levels in writing in 2006, about half are on target to reach the higher Level 3 in 2007. This is due to better resources and a greater focus on extending writing across the curriculum. Handwriting skills are variable and require more focus to enable all pupils to use a joined script more fluently in the junior classes.

Standards continue to rise as pupils move through the school to Year 6. The school's exceptional performance stems from a strong culture of learning that is a feature of all classes. Any dips in attainment are quickly identified and rigorous action is taken to remedy any weakness. In 2005 for example, tests in mathematics in Year 6 indicated a weakness in shape and space. Improvements were made to teaching and numbers gaining the higher Level 5 in mathematics almost doubled to 60 per cent in 2006. Equally impressive are those reaching higher levels in science, with 90 per cent gaining Level 5 in 2006.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development is outstanding. The gospel values of the Catholic Church underpin all aspects of school life and ensure that every child matters. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and great strides have been made to enrich the cultural awareness of pupils since the last inspection. Pupils learn about the arts and music of the wider world, as well as focusing on different faiths, such as a visit to a Sikh Gurdwara. Attendance rates are consistently above average and pupils respond exceptionally well to the challenges they are set. They love coming to school, and praise their teachers warmly and unreservedly for the help and support they receive. Pupils contribute much to the school and wider community. School is a very happy place where pupils feel safe. Bullying is almost unheard of because of the concern they show for each other and especially those less fortunate than themselves. They have a strong understanding of healthy lifestyles and the school provides very good opportunities for exercise and keeping fit despite the cramped accommodation. Pupils develop very responsible attitudes as monitors, house captains and 'buddies'. Through membership of the school council, they develop a good awareness of democracy and willingly share their ideas, which provide a good basis for their future working lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is consistently at least good and often outstanding. It successfully promotes the rapid progress pupils make. The staff work exceptionally well together. They share expertise and are skilled practitioners. Planning is exemplary and activities are tailored to meet the pupils' widely different needs. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are very well supported and this accounts for their exceptionally good achievement by Year 6, where all reach at least nationally expected standards. Good resources, effective questioning, clear explanations and active participation from all pupils accelerate their learning. High expectations are a feature of most lessons and especially so in science in Year 6 where many pupils are confidently working at Level 5 and using advanced scientific vocabulary to explain their findings. The outstanding and trusting relationships that pupils have with the staff contribute significantly to their confidence as learners.

The school has excellent systems for assessing and checking progress. Any slowing of progress is quickly identified and there is a rapid response. Throughout the school, pupils' knowledge of how to improve their work is considerably enhanced by rigorous marking, although the marking of mathematics is less helpful for pupils in knowing how well they are doing.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding curriculum provides pupils with an excellent range of learning opportunities and helps to keep them highly motivated and making excellent progress. Basic skills are taught exceptionally well and exemplary planning ensures that there are many opportunities to extend English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum. The rich variety of visits and visitors adds great value to pupils' achievements and their personal development. The curriculum is particularly effective in providing French lessons for all pupils and instrumental tuition for those with a special talent in music.

Children in the Reception class experience an appropriate range of activities designed to develop all the areas of learning for the Foundation Stage. However, the indoor accommodation is small and lacks space for a wider range of practical activities. The outdoor area is underused in giving children an increased choice of learning activities. A strong feature of the curriculum is the wealth of clubs outside the school day that are run by staff or professional coaches. Pupils thrive on many opportunities to take part in sporting tournaments with other schools and to perform at musical festivals and concerts.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides excellent care, guidance and support for its pupils, which results in them achieving extremely well, both academically and personally. The school takes the health, safety and protection of pupils very seriously and ensures that robust measures are in place and assiduously followed by staff. The school has recently gained its sixth Healthy Schools award, confirming the strong emphasis placed on healthy living. The academic and personal guidance provided for pupils is outstanding. Personal development is carefully monitored so that pupils' individual needs are consistently met through an open, caring and encouraging atmosphere, which is central to the school's ethos. A key strength of the school is the way that pupils help to set and review their own targets, knowing precisely what they need to do to improve their work. Rigorous tracking and monitoring of the progress made by pupils ensures those pupils who are underachieving and those with learning difficulties and disabilities are quickly identified and effectively supported.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

At the forefront of the school's success is the outstanding leadership of the headteacher whose vision and commitment has enabled the school to maintain and strengthen its first-rate provision. Although there were no issues from the last inspection, the school has consistently pursued further improvements in many areas including stronger cultural development, the enhanced role of governors and keeping parents better informed.

Throughout the school, there is a strong sense of teamwork and an exceptionally good commitment to continuous improvement, shown by teachers at all levels. The school development plan accurately identifies the key areas for improvement and involves the whole staff. Collectively they have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. There are excellent processes for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating initiatives and their impact on pupils' learning. Governors are very effective, well informed and share a clear determination to maintain the high standards of provision. They have been particularly influential in bringing about much needed improvements to the accommodation.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

The school council

St Agnes' Catholic Primary School

Main Street

Crawcrook

Ryton

Tyne and Wear

NE40 4NF

12 January 2007

Dear Pupils

Thank you for welcoming me so warmly to your school and for being so eager to tell me about your work. I enjoyed my visit very much indeed and think that St Agnes' Primary is an outstanding school. There are so many things about your school that I like very much and help to make it so special for you all.

Here are some of the highlights:

- The wonderful headteacher, staff and governors who are all helping you to make excellent progress in your learning and to reach high standards.
- The brilliant teaching that means that you learn in a high quality way.
- The fantastic range of visits, visitors and clubs that all help to make your learning such fun.
- Your excellent behaviour and the way you take a real pride in your school and always try to do your best work.
- Relationships with each other and with adults are first rate so you always have someone to turn to.

I hope that you will all continue to work as hard as you do now and carry on helping all the adults to make sure your school continues to thrive. In particular, I would like you all to try very hard to improve your handwriting and if you are in the junior classes to remember to use a joined script. I have asked the school if those of you who are in the Reception class can have more opportunities to use the outdoor area for some of your activities, as there isn't a lot of space in the classroom for you to spread out.

Thank you again and best wishes for the future to all of you.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Mawer

Lead inspector