



Holy Family RC Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114239
Local Authority Darlington
Inspection number 289847
Inspection dates 9–10 November 2006
Reporting inspector Gillian Salter-Smith

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Prior Street
School category	Voluntary aided		Darlington, County Durham
Age range of pupils	4–11		DL3 9EN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01325 380821
Number on roll (school)	206	Fax number	01325 356426
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr John Wainwright
		Headteacher	Mrs Marie McGuigan
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
4–11	9–10 November 2006	289847

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is average in size. It is very popular with both Catholic and non-Catholic families. Pupils come from a diverse range of social and economic backgrounds and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. A few pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and a small number are in the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average.

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. A strong ethos underpins its work and parents and pupils appreciate the caring family atmosphere. There is a strong determination among staff and governors to ensure that all pupils get every chance to succeed. Positive relationships help pupils to feel safe in school and to develop self-confidence from the very start. Consequently, pupils enjoy school, their behaviour is very good and they achieve well. Pupils develop a strong spiritual awareness through the many opportunities for prayer and reflection. They enjoy taking on responsibilities and are eager to contribute to the wider community, for example, through extensive fund raising for those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils are well prepared in how to adopt healthy lifestyles.

The quality of provision and achievement in the Foundation Stage are outstanding. Children in reception tackle the very well planned range of stimulating and challenging activities with confidence and enthusiasm and teaching is often exemplary. They make rapid progress and almost all children reach, and many exceed, the levels expected nationally by the time they enter Year 1. Pupils' achievement is good in Key Stages 1 and 2. The above average standards achieved help to prepare them well for their futures. Reading is a particular strength. Recent staffing difficulties have been resolved and the school has tackled weaker areas of pupils' progress robustly so that standards are rising. However, fewer pupils than expected gain higher levels in science. The school has correctly identified the promotion of investigative skills as a weakness.

The quality of teaching is good and there are examples of exemplary teaching where pupils enjoy exciting and demanding work and make rapid progress. Mathematics is now many pupils' favourite subject because the lessons are challenging and enjoyable. However, a few lessons in Key Stages 1 and 2 are not as successful as most because learning activities do not capture pupils' interest or challenge them enough. Pupils' work is marked regularly but their involvement in understanding how to improve is variable.

Leadership, management and governance are good. Senior managers and subject leaders know what needs to be improved because of the rigorous checks on the work of pupils and other staff. Standards are rising because teaching has improved. The school has good capacity to improve and gives good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that achievement targets set for Year 6 are met, including providing more investigative work in science to promote high attainment.
- Improve the quality of teaching by consistently providing stimulating and challenging learning activities for all pupils.
- Involve pupils more in assessing how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards are above average. Children in the reception class make good and often very good progress. They reach above average levels in all areas of learning because the teaching is frequently exemplary.

In Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils continue to make good progress and standards are above average. Key Stage 1 results have been consistently above the national average. Reading is particularly strong. Key Stage 2 national test results were significantly above average in 2004 and 2005, although achievement was variable. In 2005, few pupils gained the higher grades in writing in Key Stage 1 and in mathematics at both key stages. The latest results in 2006 show improvement in the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels. However, fewer pupils gained above average levels in science than expected and the school has correctly identified the need to promote investigative work.

Girls and boys make similar progress though standards vary from year to year. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and are well supported by experienced teaching assistants. The small number of pupils who learn English as an additional language make good progress because they receive well targeted support from staff, including specialist teachers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Pupils' spiritual development is a strength and the Year 6 visit to Holy Island is a particular highlight. The emphasis on developing spiritual awareness helps pupils to develop positive attitudes, very good relationships with staff and each other, and to care for one another. Older pupils are particularly sensitive in the way that they look after younger pupils in their role as 'buddies'. Pupils have a good understanding of the cultural diversity of the world in which they live.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance is above average. They feel safe and there is a strong sense of happiness and contentment. Pupils behave very well, and play harmoniously at playtimes. Instances of bullying are very rare and, if they do occur, are dealt with swiftly.

Through the school council, pupils have helped to improve playtime activities and have contributed their views on improvements to school lunches. Pupils enjoy raising funds for numerous charities. A well planned curriculum helps pupils to know how to adopt a healthy diet and take plenty of exercise. Pupils are well prepared for their futures, particularly in developing secure basic skills and in learning to work together.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good, and some is exemplary. Foundation Stage teaching is of a consistently high quality. Learning activities are always very well matched to pupils' differing needs and so they make rapid progress.

Good relationships, good humour, praise and rewards develop pupils' self-confidence and enjoyment of learning. Pupils especially appreciate lessons with stimulating practical tasks, team and partner work and opportunities for them to work things out for themselves, such as in mathematics lessons.

Teachers plan lessons well, using accurate assessment to set high expectations and match activities to different needs. They ensure that there are clear steps in learning, that explanations are clear and that questioning encourages pupils to think more deeply. Pupils find that their learning targets for literacy and numeracy help to spur them on and to understand what they need to do to improve. Pupils' written work is marked regularly and pupils often benefit from encouragement and useful guidance on how to improve. This, though, is not a consistent picture. On the few occasions when teaching is satisfactory rather than good, learning activities do not always capture pupils' interest or challenge them sufficiently.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's good curriculum meets all pupils' needs. The recent introduction of 'booster' classes helps to ensure that pupils of differing ability make good progress. Many activities in different lessons help pupils to understand how to develop healthy lifestyles and keep themselves safe. Basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology are taught well in different subjects. The school has recognised that there are insufficient opportunities for investigative work in science. The curriculum for the youngest children meets their needs very well through very well planned play and guided activities.

An extensive range of extra clubs are well attended and older pupils particularly enjoy the sporting activities. This good provision is about to be extended to younger pupils. Visits to museums and local historic sites bring excitement to learning and support pupils' personal development well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. All aspects of health and safety and risk assessment are robust and there are good procedures in place for child protection. Staff have been checked for their suitability for working with children and up to date records are kept.

Parents and pupils are highly appreciative of the 'family atmosphere' in the school. Teachers and other staff know each pupil's individual needs and are quick to recognise when they need support. Pupils feel valued members of the community and have the confidence to become independent learners from an early age.

The school works well in partnership with a range of local agencies to provide good quality support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those who are learning English as an additional language.

Pupils' progress is closely monitored and likely underachievement is spotted quickly and support is put in place. Pupils find the learning targets set for them in literacy and numeracy very helpful and they are ready to take a more active part in evaluating more of their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, senior staff and subject leaders and the governing body provide good leadership and management. Staff work well as a team. They are successful in their determination to provide a supportive Catholic environment in which all pupils are well cared for, supported and make good progress. The common aim of raising standards and improving teaching and learning, based on effective self-evaluation activities, is leading to rising standards. The right priorities for action and professional development are identified as a result of rigorous checks on the school's performance carried out by senior and subject leaders. However, leaders of foundation subjects do not monitor standards closely. Following a period of some instability in staffing that is now resolved, standards are rising, especially in mathematics and writing at the higher levels.

Governors provide good support for the headteacher and senior leaders. They are well informed by school leaders of the school's strengths and key areas for development. Finances are well managed and the school provides good value for money. Since the last inspection, standards have risen and issues identified have been tackled and improved. The school is well placed to improve further.

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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

Holy Family RC Primary School

Prior Street

Darlington

County Durham

DL3 9EN

11 November 2006

Dear Pupils

We enjoyed visiting your school, talking to so many of you and seeing you hard at work in lessons. It is important that you know what we shall be reporting to your parents and to the government.

Holy Family is a good school. It is like one big family where the staff know every one of you very well. This really helps you to feel safe and happy in school and enjoy yourselves. The school helps you to develop into sensitive, caring young people. It was good to see how often you take part in thoughtful prayer and how well the older pupils looked after the younger ones at playtimes. You are well taught and teachers and other staff help you to make good progress in your work. Children in Reception get an especially good start.

We have asked the school to make sure that more of you reach the higher levels set for you in the school's targets. The new 'booster' classes are already helping many of you to do this. We agree with you and your school that you need to carry out more scientific investigations. Many of you told us how much you enjoy challenging lessons in mathematics when you work in pairs and teams and find things out for yourselves. We think it would be good for more of your lessons to be as exciting and demanding as these.

Many of you find your learning targets in literacy and numeracy helpful in understanding what to do to improve. We have asked your teachers to find more ways of helping you to understand what needs to be done to get better. You can help by taking notice of teachers' comments on your work and making sure that you make corrections and improvements.

I do hope that you carry on enjoying your time at school and continue to achieve well. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Salter-Smith

(Lead inspector)