

St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Stanley

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 114245 |
| Local Authority | Durham |
| Inspection number | 289849 |
| Inspection date | 5 July 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Linda Murphy |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 4–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 197 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Father Joseph Park |
| Headteacher | Mrs Jill McBride |
| Date of previous school inspection | 1 October 2002 |
| School address | Front Street Stanley County Durham DH9 0NP |
| Telephone number | 01207 232624 |
| Fax number | 01207 231222 |

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|--------------------------|-------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This smaller than average school serves an urban population that has significant disadvantage. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds. Very few are from minority ethnic groups and of these a below average proportion is learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average, although in Years 2 and 3 it is much higher than in the rest of the school. There are above average and increasing numbers of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. On entry to the Reception class, children's attainment is below that expected for their age. Large scale building works to extend the accommodation were underway at the time of the inspection. The school has the Healthy Schools Award and Activemark.

Key for inspection grades

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| 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 outstanding features. It is understandably held in high regard by the parents and pupils, and many parents feel that it is 'a perfect place for a child's education'. Spiritual, moral social and cultural development is outstanding. Together with excellent care and guidance these factors underpin pupils' very mature attitudes and excellent behaviour. Pupils are resourceful, self-assured, motivated and quite remarkable for their age. Parents understandably say that their children are 'equipped with morals and principles to carry forward into later life'. Pupils are happy and confident. The achievement of external awards linked to keeping healthy and active reflect the pupils' tremendous understanding of the importance of living a healthy and safe lifestyle.

From a below average point on entry to the Reception class, children make good progress so that by the time they join Year 1 standards are average. By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils consolidate their gains and standards are average, but the most able pupils are not fully challenged to reach the very highest standards. This means that in Key Stage 2 pupils have to work extra hard to attain standards that are above average by Year 6. Their achievement is good. This comes about because of the good quality teaching and brisk learning in most years. Strengths include the way that learning objectives are made clear so pupils know what is expected of them. Pupils are involved well in assessing how well they are doing and this leads to very focused learning. It is the pace and the match of activities to pupils' needs that differentiate the good teaching and learning from that which is not quite so rapid.

The curriculum is of good quality because it is lively and based on pupils' interests. Teachers are outward looking and confident in allowing flexibility in curricular planning, so that pupils are thoroughly engaged in the activities presented. Good links between subjects add much to pupils' understanding of new concepts and the application of learning from one subject to another. All members of the school community have responded very well to working in very difficult circumstances as a result of old accommodation. Classrooms are conducive to learning and shared areas used to advantage to display pupils' work. The school makes very sure that the environment is a safe and stimulating place for the pupils. Attendance is good although a minority of families taking holidays in term time adversely affects attendance rates.

The well established leadership team makes clear that 'communication is the key to successful partnerships', and has forged very constructive links with parents and carers. Very strong links with a good number of partners and external agencies all benefit the pupils' development. This is important given the high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or learning difficulties. The senior leadership team is cohesive and forward looking and have good support from subject leaders and other staff. Governance is good and provides much help and healthy challenge to make sure the school is well placed to continue its journey of improvement. Good improvement has been made since the last inspection. The school provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Fully challenge the more able pupils by the end of Key Stage 1.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are above average by Year 6 and pupils' achievement is good. Standards have risen steadily over the past four years at Year 6 because challenging targets are set and pupils and staff work hard to ensure they are met. Pupils are confident and accomplished in their basic skills and work with care, accuracy and flair. For example, pupils' poetry is published nationally in the Little Laureates poetry book series. The children in the Reception class also achieve well and attain average standards. In language and literacy they do exceedingly well. This is because the quality of teaching is good and the curriculum just right for the very youngest pupils. By the end of Key Stage 1 standards are average. They are no higher because too few pupils are pushed to attain high levels. Too much is left to Key Stage 2 in this respect. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those learning English as an additional language do as well as their classmates and benefit from extra support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The pupils' outstanding personal development and their excellent spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development are key to the school's family atmosphere and academic success. Pupils have a great understanding of contrasting communities and culture. They are given many opportunities to explore feelings and emotions and as a result pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 make excellent mediators for other pupils. Spirituality is especially evident through the creative and performing arts. Pupils are socially and morally very responsible and gain an excellent understanding of how sustained effort has its rewards. By Year 6 pupils are exceedingly confident and well prepared for their next school. Their good basic skills prepare them well for the future. Their behaviour is exemplary. Pupils are very clear about their personal safety and how to live a healthy and fulfilling life. They take on responsibility with great maturity and sensitivity towards others. They are proud of their school and what it offers. Attendance is good and well promoted by the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Pupils are eager to learn and they say that lessons are fun. Excellent relationships abound and this means that pupils are willing to give of their best. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning so that pupils who need extra help learn at the same pace as others. The teaching makes clear what it is pupils are to learn. Pupils are becoming very competent at judging how well they are doing through skilful teacher assessment. When learning slows for those capable of attaining highly at Key Stage 1, it is because their work is not always sufficiently challenging and does not prepare them fully for the high expectations at Key Stage 2.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum at each stage is rich, active and exciting. It sparks pupils' imagination and creativity because staff mostly plan tasks that capture the interests of all pupils, including that

of the boys. The curricular planning for English and mathematics is more detailed than that in other subjects and easily integrates into a cross-curricular approach. As a result pupils have plentiful opportunities to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in subjects such as science and history. Transition between the Reception class and Year 1 is noteworthy because the practical curriculum is built upon well in Year 1. Weekly enrichment held at the local sports centre ensures that older pupils receive a good diet of physical education and plentiful opportunities to learn new sports. This compensates very well for the school's limited facilities for outdoor work especially as the new building works progress. The enrichment of the curriculum, through a variety of clubs, out-of-school visits and visitors, is good.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Parents agree that pupils are given excellent guidance and praise the 'patience and dedication' of all staff. Pastoral care is outstanding and this benefits pupils' personal development and confidence enormously. The school works well with many outside agencies to support children's development. Arrangements for safeguarding ensure the health and safety of pupils are paramount and pupils have a very healthy and safe environment in which to learn. The pupils' progress is regularly tracked and the information is used by class teachers to set mostly challenging targets for the pupils to achieve each half term. At Key Stage 1 the targets take insufficient account of the higher levels of the National Curriculum. Excellent monitoring of pupils' progress towards their targets is through weekly conferences between the teacher and pupil. The pupils really value the help they get at these meetings and look forward to them with relish. They enjoy the challenging homework that helps them move forward.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The outstanding leadership of the headteacher is successfully leading the school to raise standards and to meet its mission statement to 'foster pupils' personal growth in an atmosphere of trust and openness'. The school underestimates its success in pupils' personal development and care because it always wants to improve even further. The supportive leadership team and good management systems are central to the school's work. Since the last inspection a restructuring of the senior team has become embedded, and monitoring and self-evaluation are now integral to daily school life. This has a good impact on the achievement of most groups of pupils. Governors take their roles very seriously and are always striving for school improvement. Leaders are making sure that pupils' education does not suffer during the building works.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| 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 | 2 |
| 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

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| 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

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|---|---|
| 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 | 2 |

The quality of provision

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|---|---|
| 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? | 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

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| 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

6 July 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Stanley, County Durham, DH9 0NP

Thank you for talking to me and being so helpful when I visited your school. I found that St Joseph's is a good school with some excellent aspects. The outstanding things are that all the adults care a great deal about you and want you to succeed. Your behaviour is excellent and you have brilliant attitudes to your work and play.

Your headteacher leads the school very well and everyone makes a good contribution. For example, staff make sure you have really interesting and exciting things to do with lots of visits and visitors to enliven your days. This extends to the many and varied well attended clubs.

Teachers are doing a good job and this helps you learn new things quickly. Your parents are very pleased about this. Children in the Reception classes get off to a flying start and by Year 6 you reach good standards in your work and you are very well prepared for your next school. Although you all do well, your headteacher and I know that by the end of Key Stage 1 those of you who are capable of learning very quickly could reach higher standards.

You can help by always doing your best. Good luck in your new school.

Yours sincerely

Mrs L Murphy

Lead inspector