



St Michael's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Esh Laude

Inspection Report

Better
education
and care

Unique Reference Number 114252
Local Authority Durham
Inspection number 289852
Inspection dates 7–8 March 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	Esh Village
School category	Voluntary aided		Durham, County Durham
Age range of pupils	4–11		DH7 9QY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0191 3731205
Number on roll (school)	168	Fax number	0191 3739821
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Dr Nigel Calaghan
		Headteacher	Sister Anna Ryan
Date of previous school inspection	1 September 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Over half the pupils in this small and oversubscribed village school live locally and the rest travel from further away because of the school's popularity. The wide catchment area represents a cross-section of socio-economic backgrounds. Below average numbers take free school meals. An above average number of pupils have learning difficulties and disabilities but there are no pupils with a statement of special needs. Nearly all pupils are from White British families and almost all have English as their first language. Children start in Reception with knowledge and skills that are broadly average. The majority of them have attended a state nursery or playgroup. The school holds the Artsmark Silver award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This outstandingly successful school fully meets the aims of its challenging mission statement by being a 'creative and thinking school' and giving each pupil a 'unique educational experience'. Since the last inspection, standards have consistently remained high or very high by the end of Year 6. All pupils make at least good and often outstanding progress and their achievement is excellent in relation to their starting point. The school's excellent evaluation of itself accurately highlights its considerable strengths and crucially recognises the importance of its rigorous monitoring and evaluation in maintaining high standards. Its sustained success is clearly appreciated by almost all parents and admirably summed up by one when writing, 'My children are greatly inspired by the teaching and have developed a real love for learning.' The school gives excellent value for money and its proven track record is a clear indication of its outstanding capacity for continued improvement.

The inspirational leadership of the headteacher and expertise of the advanced skills teacher are key factors in the school's success. They have the highest possible aspirations for the school and are passionate about learning. They have skilfully built a strong team of very effective staff and governors, who are totally committed to high achievement and strive for excellence in all they do.

Teaching is outstanding because staff know exactly how to help pupils develop thinking skills and reach their full potential in their learning. Teachers relish opportunities for sharing expertise and improving their performance. They are particularly successful in promoting an enjoyment for school that makes pupils want to learn. The high quality curriculum is considerably enriched in creative, cultural and sporting activities through very good partnerships with a variety of establishments in this country and abroad.

In their outstanding personal development, children are given an excellent start in Reception. Children are given an excellent start in their outstanding personal development in the Reception class. They continue to love school and behave extremely well. They live healthy and safe lives and many pupils make a really valuable contribution to school life as buddies and councillors. The school's successful focus on developing pupils as confident, caring and independent pupils prepares them extremely well for their life long learning. The quality of care and support for pupils is another of the school's many excellent features appreciated by all. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are robust and effective. Progress is monitored well and individual targets are set, but pupils do not participate enough in the setting of their academic targets. Marking is excellent in English, but there is scope for this high quality practice to be extended to mathematics and science.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give pupils more responsibility in sharing the setting of their targets with their teachers in English, mathematics and science.
- Extend the excellent marking in English to mathematics and science.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve as well as they can and standards are very high by the time they leave the school. Nearly all pupils, regardless of gender, learning difficulties and disabilities or ethnicity make at least good and often excellent progress. Children in Reception are very well prepared for the next stage of their learning. By the time they enter Year 1, most have achieved the goals set for them and about a quarter surpass them. At the end of Year 2, standards are above average and progress is good.

Progress accelerates rapidly in the junior classes and standards in most year groups are high. In 2006, the school met its challenging targets for Year 6. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities reached at least the expected level (Level 4), because of the very effective support they receive. Teaching is particularly successful in challenging more able pupils to attain the higher level (Level 5) and in helping those with special talents to excel in their learning and broaden their experiences. The school's exceptional performance stems from a strong and sustained culture of successful learning, which is focused on developing the thinking skills and confidence of each individual pupil and matching work accordingly. Reliable school data indicates that pupils in the current Year 6 are on course to reach very high standards and meet their challenging targets. They also achieve above average standards in many other subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the gospel values of the Catholic Church underpin all aspects of school life. Behaviour is exemplary and while bullying rarely happens, pupils are consulted over anti-bullying procedures and school 'buddies' help everyone to get on well together. Pupils are helpful and extremely well mannered. They learn through debate the value of persuasion rather than force. Attendance rates are consistently above average and illustrate pupils' positive attitudes and pride in their school. Particularly noteworthy is their excellent social development. For example, the work of the school council gives pupils first hand experiences of democracy, in how they are elected and manage their own budget. Relationships are excellent. Pupils have a genuine respect for each other and have gained a strong cultural awareness of the wider world. This is achieved through close links with schools and visitors from other countries, a good focus on worldwide learning and the successful integration of pupils from other countries into the school. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their education. They have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and know how to keep safe. Above all, they are highly creative thinkers and confident speakers and have first rate levels of competence in the basic skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

In response to at least good and often outstanding teaching, pupils build very effectively on their learning. In the Reception class, the stimulating and well planned teaching provides an excellent balance of adult led tasks and structured play activities. Throughout school, very skilled teaching is typified by high expectations and challenging questions to help pupils to think carefully, consider the opinions of others and extend their speaking and listening skills. Teachers plan thoroughly, making good use of the school's rigorous assessment information to make sure that work is at the right level for everyone. Relationships are exemplary, which helps everyone to work hard. Pupils say they really appreciate the way teachers make lessons fun and are always there to help them. The regular use of interactive whiteboards, games and practical activities makes learning highly engaging and effective. Pupils benefit greatly in their progress by exchanging ideas with partners and receiving sharply focused group and individual support when they need it. The quality of marking in English is exceptionally helpful for pupils in knowing how well they are doing and how to improve their work, but there is less guidance in mathematics and science.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding because it offers a wealth of learning opportunities and fully meets the needs of all pupils. Basic skills are taught exceptionally well, with many opportunities for pupils to practice their literacy, numeracy and information and communication (ICT) skills across the curriculum. Although space is at a premium in some classrooms, the school is extremely creative in its use of the accommodation. It also fully utilises opportunities to enrich learning and personal development through visits, visitors and partnerships with other providers. For example, Key Stage 2 pupils benefit from two residential visits including skiing and a curriculum based visit focusing on geography and science. Regular contact is made with schools in Japan, Spain and Germany through pen pal links. In any one week, at least twelve after school and lunchtime clubs are held and attendance at these clubs is high. Clubs include different sports and foreign languages, as well as philosophy for children and parents. Weekly philosophy lessons play a crucial part in extending the creative and enquiry skills of pupils. For those with an interest in music, seven different instrumental classes are held in school and all pupils learn the recorder. Themed events, such as an annual 'European Day', result in classes making a presentation to the whole school, their parents and the parish and preparing food typical of their chosen country.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides excellent pastoral care for its pupils and this is a considerable strength. All staff are committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all pupils and procedures to ensure their safety, protection and well-being are rigorously carried out; including training to keep staff up to date with current requirements. The effective partnership with other providers has enabled the staff to offer high standards of care and support to those with learning difficulties and disabilities. The quality of academic and personal guidance is good. While pupils help to set their own targets for personal development, few of them share in the setting of academic targets.

However, they do review their own targets, share them with their parents and know precisely what they need to do to improve. The school has been successful in extending its services to parents and helping them to support their children's learning at home, by providing Family Learning Initiatives in literacy, numeracy and art.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The charismatic headteacher is the driving force behind the school's excellent provision and is a significant factor in the consistently high standards and outstanding achievement. She provides very clear educational direction and spiritual guidance and has successfully created a climate of strong teamwork, where everyone is totally united in making sure that the school never stops improving. The successful partnership between the headteacher and the advanced skills teacher, together with their vision and commitment, has enabled the school to go from strength to strength. Leadership roles have been devolved effectively to a skilled team who respond very positively to the headteacher's confidence in them to carry forward improvements successfully. Staff training is viewed as an integral part of this improvement. The very few issues from the last inspection have been addressed successfully. The school improvement plan in particular is a much improved document in helping key staff to monitor and evaluate the impact of planned improvements on pupils' learning. The views of parents, pupils, staff and governors are sought in drawing up the plan. Governors are extremely well informed about school developments and provide high levels of commitment, support and challenge.

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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	1
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	2
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

St Michael's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Esh Laude

Esh Village

Durham

County Durham

DH7 9QY

9 March 2007

Dear Pupils

Thank you for making me so welcome when I came to inspect your school recently. Everyone I met was really polite, friendly and helpful. I enjoyed my day with you very much indeed. I agree with the school and your parents that you go to an outstanding school and I am pleased you are all so happy to be there.

Here are the things that are best about your school.

- You make at least good and often excellent progress, and the standards you reach in Year 6 are much higher than in most other schools.
- The headteacher and all of the staff are doing a really excellent job in providing you with a wonderful school in which to enjoy your learning.
- Most of the teaching is excellent and I particularly enjoyed your philosophy lessons. These really help you to think hard and express your opinions and will help you especially as you get older.
- You all get on so well together and receive first rate care and support from all adults, so you always have someone to turn to for help.
- There is a fantastic range of exciting activities provided for you, during and after school.

To make things even better, this is what I have asked your school to do now.

- Involve you more in helping to set your targets in English, mathematics and science.
- Give you more information in the marking of your work in mathematics and science, so you will know how well you are doing.

I know you will all continue to work as hard as you do now so that you will soon be helping to set new targets with your teachers and St Michael's can become an even better school.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Mawer

Lead Inspector