



St Charles' Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114260
Local Authority Durham
Inspection number 289856
Inspection dates 2–3 November 2006
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	Durham Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Spennymoor, County Durham
Age range of pupils	4–11		DL16 6SL
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01388 814285
Number on roll (school)	195	Fax number	01388 813087
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Christopher Butler
		Headteacher	Mr Patrick Naughton
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2001		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 2–3 November 2006	Inspection number 289856
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves a wide urban area where social and economic features are mostly average. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds. A small proportion of pupils is entitled to free school meals, while the percentage with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. Although the school does not have its own Nursery, nearly all children admitted to the Reception class have attended local nurseries. The school has gained a national award for information and communication technology (ICT).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Charles is a good school with outstanding provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Throughout the school, relationships are also outstanding. It gives good value for money through the significant improvements it has made since the last inspection. It has a good capacity to improve further. The headteacher has a very comprehensive understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and provides a clear focus for further improvements. He has successfully built a strong and effective team of staff and governors who, together, have had a major impact on raising the quality of provision within the school. Parents greatly appreciate all that the school does to help their children enjoy their education. They say their children 'flourish' in such a caring ethos and receive a considerable level of support and encouragement.

The effective provision in the Reception class gives the children a good start to their learning. This good achievement is built on so that by the end of Year 6 pupils succeed in reaching above average standards in English, mathematics and science. Achievement is good for all groups of pupils and sometimes exceptionally good for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities because of outstanding provision and the expertise of the special needs manager.

Teaching and learning are good. Assessment information is used well to set work at the correct level for all pupils to succeed. Excellent relationships help to boost confidence and pupils' keenness to learn. The school is beginning to set targets for pupils but there are inconsistencies in pupils' knowledge and understanding of how well they are doing. Although marking is generally good in English, it is weaker in other subjects and lacks a consistent approach throughout the school. There is a good curriculum, which provides enjoyable learning experiences for pupils. The development of the outdoor playing area into an outstanding learning environment has considerably enriched curriculum opportunities, especially for science and physical education.

Pupils' personal development is good because of the school's successful focus on meeting the needs of every individual, and as a result of the good quality of care, guidance and support. Through its strong inclusion policy, it ensures that every child adopts a healthy lifestyle and stays safe. The pupils' forum has been particularly successful in demonstrating a high level of social responsibility by helping to refurbish the cloakrooms. Significant improvements to standards in ICT since the last inspection prepare pupils well with the skills needed for their future life.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' understanding of their learning targets and involve them more in setting, assessing and knowing how well they are doing.
- Improve the quality and consistency of marking.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The pupils' achievement is good and standards are above average. The children enter the school with a range of skills that are similar to those found in most four-year olds. By the end of Reception, they make good progress and most reach the expected goals in all areas of learning. Progress continues to be good in the infant classes, enabling pupils to reach slightly above the nationally expected standards of attainment at the end of Year 2. At the last inspection, in both Reception and the infant classes, the standards were low and progress was unsatisfactory. Good teaching and effective subject leadership have ensured a significant rise in standards and the rate at which pupils make progress.

In the junior classes, pupils make good progress to reach above average standards at the end of Year 6, and this is reflected in the national tests over the last three years. More able pupils are challenged well in their learning and, in 2005, they did exceptionally well in mathematics in the national tests and were in the top 5% of schools in the country. Progress and standards in writing are not as strong as reading and this is recognised by the school as an area for development. The action taken is beginning to raise standards. Staff training and improved resources have enabled standards in ICT to rise quickly since the last inspection.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make at least good and sometimes exceptional progress and achieve very well throughout the school. One pupil in particular went from Level 1 in reading at the end of Year 2 to gain a Level 5 at the end of Year 6 in the national tests in 2005. These pupils are very well supported individually or in small groups by highly skilled staff and gain the confidence and skills to succeed well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school successfully promotes pupils' personal development. Whilst attendance is similar to national statistics, the school is using a variety of successful strategies to improve it further. The system of buddy support and opportunities to make suggestions in family groups ensure that pupils feel safe and that their views are taken into account. As a result, they enjoy coming to school, display good attitudes to learning and their behaviour, both in and out of class, is generally good. There is a calm atmosphere around the school and pupils are polite, friendly and welcoming.

There is a good programme in place for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. The 'safe haven garden' is an excellent feature and gives pupils the chance to meet up with others socially and spiritually in a calm environment of high quality. Its enduring good condition demonstrates pupils' care and consideration for the facilities provided for them. Through a pupils' forum they elect their representatives who help organise fund raising events to support charities and improvements to their environment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. All teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and good planning ensures that lessons meet the needs of all groups of learners and especially pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who receive excellent support. Pupils are very well motivated through the way that teachers make learning interesting and provide good levels of challenge. A literacy lesson on writing instructions in Year 6 inspired high levels of concentration from more able pupils, when they were given the task of devising a game for the Reception class. The teaching in the Reception class is particularly effective because all staff have a good understanding of how young children learn and provide a good balance of teacher led tasks and opportunities for the children to explore and make choices.

Teachers make good use of assessment in planning lessons and monitoring the progress that pupils are making. Marking of books is at least satisfactory. Although it is better in English than other subjects, it is not always used well enough to help pupils to know how well they are doing.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and well matched to the needs of the pupils. The headteacher and staff share a determination to raise the profile of subjects such as history, physical education and geography. For example, pupils throughout the school and their parents have recently been involved in a major topic on the Romans. This included a very rich and diverse range of activities, visits and visitors. The curriculum timings have been adjusted to increase the amount of sport activities available to pupils in order to promote health, fitness and enjoyment as well as improved standards in physical education.

There is a good range of activities for children in the Reception class that are appropriate to their needs and especially relating to imaginative play. Good provision exists to prepare for children arriving into the Reception class and for those leaving school for the next stage of their education. Community links are used effectively for pupils to benefit from sporting and musical activities at other venues. The curriculum is enhanced by a good range of clubs and activities, although they are mainly available only to pupils in the junior classes.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support throughout the school are good. For example, through a recently introduced programme of social and emotional learning, pupils record their changing feelings and emotions and adults are able to respond to their needs. Teaching

assistants and the contributions of parents are strengths both in the classroom and around the school. Pupils feel safe and secure knowing there is always someone to help and encourage them.

Child protection procedures are robust and several adults have received appropriate training. There are excellent links with outside agencies that extend and enrich the provision and support for all pupils. There is a named adult who effectively coordinates all risk assessments relating to planned activities in school and during visits.

Pupils' academic progress is carefully tracked, enabling teachers to bring in extra support or provide additional challenge. Although learning targets are being set, pupils are not involved enough in setting and reviewing their own progress. This means they are not always clear how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good and driven by the very effective leadership of the headteacher. He has established a strong focus of consultation and involvement with staff, governors, pupils and parents, who all contribute to the good progress made by pupils. The promotion of equal opportunities within the school is very good. All pupils regardless of ability are fully included in the life of the school. This is greatly appreciated by parents who have children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who speak highly of the support that their children receive.

The school has made excellent progress since the last inspection and, as a result, has created a strong ethos for learning. Successful initiatives such as raising standards, greater challenge for more able pupils, better teaching and the improved role of subject leaders and governors have all contributed to school improvement. Procedures are robust in ensuring that pupils are safe at school.

The school development plan is effective and based on wide consultation, which accurately identifies the key areas for improvement. There is continuous monitoring, reviewing and evaluation of initiatives and their impact on learning, although progress has been slower in addressing inconsistencies in marking and target setting.

Governors are fully involved in the school and, as a result, provide effective support and challenge for continual improvement. For example, through their links with subject leaders they have a good understanding of the school's curriculum and how it helps pupils learn effectively. Governors are kept in touch with pupils' views and their personal development. They appreciate the regular feedback provided by the pupils' forum which highlights issues identified in questionnaires, such as how to reduce bullying.

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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?	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

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	3
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

The Pupils' Forum

St Charles' Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Durham Road

Spennymoor

County Durham

DL16 6SL

3 November 2006

Dear Pupils

Thank you for welcoming us so warmly to your school. We really enjoyed talking to you at the pupils' forum, in your classes and around the school. We very much appreciated all the help you gave us with our work. You have every reason to feel proud about yourselves and your school. We are delighted to tell you that St Charles is a good school and has some outstanding features.

Here are the things we think are best about your school.

- The excellent relationships you have with each other and the staff.
- The good progress you are all making because you work hard.
- The good teaching you receive, which makes your learning so enjoyable.
- The wonderful outdoor areas around the school that provide you with so many opportunities for fun and learning.
- The high standard of support that you all receive and especially for those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Here are the things that we think could be better.

- Helping you to be involved in setting your learning targets so you will know how well you are doing.
- Improving the way your teachers mark your books so that you will understand more about what you need to do to improve.

You can help too to get better at knowing how well you are doing by always reading what your teachers write in your books and by working very hard to reach your targets so that you can help to set new and more challenging ones.

Good luck in the future!

Yours sincerely

Sheila MawerGeoffrey Watson

Lead Inspector Additional Inspector