

St Bede's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Sacriston

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114243
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	300621
Inspection date	2 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Christine Graham HMI

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	87
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Denise Parkin
Headteacher	Mr Harry Thomason
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2000
School address	Front Street Sacriston Durham County Durham DH7 6AB
Telephone number	0191 3710272
Fax number	00000

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Bede's Primary School is a small school serving the parish of St Bede's. Most pupils come from the village but a small minority come from further afield. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average overall but there are significant differences between cohorts. Some families suffer economic and social disadvantage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above national but this also varies significantly from year-to-year. The school has an International Schools Award and a National Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Bede's Primary School is an outstanding school because the headteacher, staff and governors do all that they can to promote the personal development and well-being of every child. This school is a learning school and everyone is a learner. The school very effectively achieves its aim of, 'encouraging pupils to become caring, competent and self-reliant people with knowledge of the world and a desire to learn more.' Pupils develop self-confidence and self-esteem and most have high expectations of themselves. They have the confidence to explain their ideas and views clearly but also to admit when they do not understand and need additional help.

Children are at the heart of the school. The headteacher and staff do all they can to ensure that all pupils benefit fully from their education. Pupils reach high standards and make very good progress given their starting points. However, they also achieve well in other ways. They are thoughtful and can express their ideas clearly because they have been encouraged to do so and they know they will be listened to. They care for each other and undertake a number of responsibilities around the school. In one class pupils act as, 'maths mates' supporting other pupils who may be having difficulty with their work. They are obviously proud to have this responsibility but also say that they learn from this as much as the child who is being helped. Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils behave well because they respect their teachers and because they want to. They are reluctant to miss a minute of their education so attendance is good and all absences are accounted for. The school council are well informed and are clear that their ideas are taken into account. They point to the effectiveness of previous councils and give the example that they now eat from real plates instead of the trays which were previously used.

Pupils achieve well in every class in the school because teaching is at least good and very often better than that. Teachers know their pupils well. They use day-to-day and longer term assessments of pupils' progress in order to plan work which accurately meets the needs of individuals. They motivate pupils by their good use of questioning, by their effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) and by the interesting activities and work they provide. Teaching assistants provide effective and well judged support, helping where necessary but also allowing pupils to develop independent skills.

The headteacher and staff constantly try to improve their practice. The staff accept that constantly trying to improve can sometimes be difficult and challenging but, by working as a team, by taking advantage of the training which is provided and with the support of the headteacher this new learning becomes a manageable and worthwhile task. This 'can do' attitude is passed on to pupils and does much to help them enjoy their learning and achieve well.

Pupils benefit from an outstanding curriculum which is significantly enriched by the many additional and extra-curricular activities. The school has very good international links. These enable pupils and staff to experience cultures very different to their own. Teachers describe very clearly how these relationships do much to breakdown the barriers between different cultures, overcome prejudice and prepare pupils for living a life outside the boundaries of the village. It is clear that pupils learn a great deal from this. The school has taught a modern foreign language for a number of years. Pupils learn French in school time and have the option of learning Italian at an after-school club. Recent links with a French speaking school mean that pupils can also practise writing in an additional language.

Pupils are taught how to keep healthy and safe and are encouraged to develop their individual abilities and talents. Pupils say that they fall out from time-to-time but that the 'friendship

stop' means that there is always someone who will play with them. When there are difficulties or disagreements they say that staff help them sort things out. Pupils are taught to respect the differences between people and to treat others with care and consideration. There are very good opportunities for pupils to play for teams or participate in sports. The recently built hall has allowed the school to extend the range and availability of clubs and extra-curricular activities.

Relationships with the local community and the parish are very good. Governors and staff make clear that they value the support that pupils receive from parishioners. There are also very good partnerships with local schools and the local extended schools partnership. Most pupils do not transfer to the local secondary school but the headteacher is delighted that this does not prevent St Bede's being included in these local partnerships. The school is involved in a great deal of charitable work and pupils can explain why they are helping in this way. Pupils know for instance that the local hospice helps people who are old or ill and who cannot be cared for by their own families.

The greater majority of parents are very supportive of the school. Many talked of the gains their children had made because of the expertise and dedication of staff. One parent said her child, who had previously been very unhappy, had been, 'totally turned around', by the staff at St Bede's. Some parents attended the school themselves as children and had fond memories of it, others who were new to the village, said they had been welcomed into the school community. Some parents felt they had been supported as much as their children.

Leadership and management are outstanding because the headteacher provides experienced and inspirational leadership. He develops his staff well and is an innovative leader who brings a wealth of good practice to the school. He knows every child and places their well-being at the heart of everything he does. He is well supported by the deputy headteacher and other staff. The quality of the school's self-evaluation is very good, if a little too modest, and accurately reflects all of judgements made during the inspection. The school provides very good value for money and has very good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- There are no significant areas for improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Given their starting points pupils achieve very well. They reach high standards in every class in the school. When they start school some can do less than others of their age. However, because of the good teaching and support they receive all children make very good progress in the Reception class. This very good progress continues, consistently, as pupils move through the school. As a result, pupils reach standards in national tests and assessments, at the end of both key stages, which are at least as good as and usually better than those attained nationally. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make at least as good progress as their peers. Most make better progress than similar pupils nationally. No pupils underachieve.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of pupils are outstanding. Most pupils enjoy their education and achieve very well. Pupils are confident and have high self-esteem. They have high but realistic expectations of themselves. This helps them to make the most of all the

opportunities the school provides. The different talents and skills of all pupils are identified and they experience real success. Relationships within the school are very good and pupils take care of each other and carry out their responsibilities sensibly with due regard for the feelings of others. Pupils are given time to reflect and for spiritual growth.

Pupils know how to stay healthy. They sit with friends at lunchtime and enjoy a very pleasant social occasion. Pupils are taught how to stay safe and how to make choices and decisions.

Pupils are well prepared for their future economic well-being and for the next stage in their education. They attain high standards in the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT and are given good opportunities to understand the world of work and business. Pupils produce and sell the school newspaper and organise charitable fundraising activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

All teaching is at least good and most is better than this. As a result learning is very good. The staff look beyond the school in an effort to improve their skills and to enrich the provision made for pupils. As a result teaching incorporates all the best new ideas and initiatives but also ensures that the basic skills are well promoted. The pace of lessons is brisk and teachers use questioning well to ensure that every pupil understands and is involved. Pupils are taught how to learn and how to organise their thoughts and ideas. Lessons are carefully planned and interesting activities promote enjoyment and achievement. All work is accurately matched to the needs of individuals. Pupils know what they are expected to achieve and they are given clear guidance as to what they must do to improve. Targets are reviewed regularly and negotiated with the individual. Parents are encouraged to become involved in their child's learning and can discuss this with teachers on an informal basis or make comments in homework diaries. There are also opportunities for more formal meetings and reports. Teaching assistants provide well targeted support without taking away independence or drawing attention to the needs of individuals. Lessons have a clear sense of purpose and all pupils are interested and well motivated. Many pupils said that lessons were always as good as they were on the day of the inspection; one added helpfully that they did, of course, learn different things from day-to-day.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. Pupils are involved in a wide range of sports, there are theatre visits and visits to places of interest which make learning come alive. Personal, social and health education are taught as part of the school day and, incidentally, as and when the need arises. All pupils are fully included in the life of the school and the curriculum is organised to ensure that this is promoted. Individual class timetables are reviewed regularly to take account of the needs of pupils and of plans made to improve the school. Pupils are taught in mixed-age classes. While the organisation of this varies from year-to-year, because of fluctuating pupil numbers, all pupils are thoughtfully placed and receive an appropriate curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support given to pupils are outstanding and are the very positive foundations on which this school is built. Pupils are very well cared for and are given very good support. Much of the support given to pupils is unobtrusive but where greater intervention is needed the support given is accurately targeted and designed to promote achievement and increase confidence. Staff are undertaking additional training to help them support those pupils coping with loss. Pupils receive very good spiritual, moral, social and academic guidance. They are taught to be thoughtful and evaluative individuals. All risk assessments and arrangements to keep pupils safe are in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. Staff and governors are unanimous that it is his energy and enthusiasm for teaching and learning which makes St Bede's so successful. The headteacher believes that it is the staff who add value to the school. Both views are accurate. The headteacher nurtures staff and pupils. He helps both groups develop by providing excellent opportunities to learn but also ensures that support is available so that challenges are met and outcomes are successful. The headteacher is well supported by the deputy headteacher and by the staff, who undertake a number of leadership roles.

The school has received many awards and certificates and has a history of sustained success but it is not complacent. There is a rigorous system of self-evaluation linked to clear and robust improvement planning. Pupils are set targets and these are regularly monitored and reviewed. Teachers are given regular and detailed feedback about the quality of their work and how they might improve it further. Most staff monitor the work of colleagues and are monitored themselves. The headteacher, governors and staff are honest and professionally evaluative. They do not suggest that they have the perfect school and are clear that there is a great deal they still want to achieve. The staff team are small but they share a common desire that pupils will have the best education possible. As a result, they are able to achieve a great deal more than should be possible with so few people.

Governors have a very good understanding of the school and support all the actions which are taken to bring about improvement. They value the work of the headteacher and staff and acknowledge that they have an easier job than most because the staff are self-critical and aware. However, they do not simply accept the plans which are made by the school. Staff are questioned about new initiatives and are asked to explain how they will benefit pupils. Governors are involved in school self-evaluation and are kept well informed by the headteacher, staff and the 'special interest' governors who are linked to individual subjects.

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Annex A

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	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.

Annex A**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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

3 May 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of St Bede's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Sacriston, DH7 6AB

Thank you very much for being so friendly and helpful when I came to visit your school. I very much enjoyed meeting you all.

I looked around the school very carefully; I visited your classrooms and looked at your work. I also talked to you and to some of your parents. Many of your parents told me that your school is very good and that it takes care of you very well. They are right. I am delighted to tell you that your school is an outstanding school, this means that you receive a very good education. Your teachers work very hard and they make sure that lessons are interesting and enjoyable. They mark your work carefully and tell you how to improve. However, the most important thing about your school is that Mr Thomason and the staff know each of you very well. They know what you are good at and when you need a little more help and they do all that they can to make sure that you enjoy your education and achieve as much as you can.

The staff like to learn new things too and because of that your school is a very interesting place. You get lots of opportunities to learn about the world and the needs of others. This extra learning will help you a great deal as you grow up. Although you have links with schools which are far away you are also very much part of the parish and your local community. This too is very important because it helps you to be well looked after and supported. At the end of an inspection I usually tell a school what they have to improve. I have not done this with your school because the staff are already trying to improve things every single day. It was a great pleasure to visit St Bede's. It was a day which I will remember for a long time.

Best wishes

Mrs C E Graham

Her Majesty's Inspector