

St Hild's Church of England Voluntary Aided School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133293
Local Authority	Hartlepool
Inspection number	301970
Inspection dates	11–12 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Margaret Farrow HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	879
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Walter Hibbert
Headteacher	Mr Andrew Bayston
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2003
School address	King Oswy Drive West View Hartlepool TS24 9PB
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St Hild's Church of England Voluntary Aided School is smaller in size than the average secondary school, but has a rising school population. It is situated in an area of Hartlepool with a significant degree of social and economic disadvantage. A considerably higher than average proportion of students are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students deemed to have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above the average, whilst the percentage of those with statements of special educational need is similar to most schools. Nearly all students come from White British backgrounds.

The school holds Investors in People status and the Healthy Schools Award. It moved into new premises in September 2004 and achieved Engineering specialist school status at the same time. A purpose built engineering unit opened in March 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Hild's provides its students with a satisfactory education. It is improving and has a number of strengths. The school places great emphasis on creating a strong Christian, caring ethos. This provides the bedrock of all it does and supports the good spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development and well-being of students. This is a school 'on the move'. The strategies being put in place are making a significant difference to the confidence, aspirations and achievement of students. The school knows there is still more to do to translate its good plans and the systems it has developed into positive outcomes for all students. It is also aware that the good practice in some departments needs to be shared with others.

The headteacher provides very clear strategic direction for the school. Staff and governors share this vision. The school aims to widen the horizons and raise the aspirations and achievement of all students and it is beginning to be successful in this endeavour. Standards are improving. Although they remain below average, the gap between the school's performance and that of other schools is narrowing, particularly at Year 9, where this has been a particular school priority. Students now make good progress from the time they enter school to the end of Year 9. Standards are still too low at GCSE, particularly in science. However, all students, including vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, now make satisfactory progress, given their starting points, by the time they leave at 16.

This is an inclusive school. It provides a broad and rich curriculum to match students' needs and interests, raise their expectations and increasingly prepare them for their future lives. Excellent partnerships, for example with Durham University, the Connexions service, the Education Action Zone and the business community are enabling students to access a wide range of options to support their future working lives. The school's engineering status is widening opportunities even further. As a result, a high proportion of students leave at 16 and either continue their education, or enter employment or training. The headteacher has a passionate belief that students at St Hild's should have many opportunities to broaden their horizons and experience learning and enjoyment at home and abroad. Residential, overseas visits and out of school activities are numerous and exciting. Many students access, and are appreciative of, the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities available. These enhance the curriculum as well as build students' confidence, self-esteem and enjoyment.

Outstanding partnerships and good relationships with other organisations are strengths of the school. These extend to outside agencies, such as the local diocese, local schools, voluntary services and health professionals. A significant number of partner agencies work with the school to support vulnerable students and those at risk of exclusion. Successful efforts have been made to build the trust and involvement of parents in the life of the school and in their children's learning. This work continues. The 'extended schools' programme, parental questionnaires, regular newsletters and parent consultations support effective communication between home and school. A family befriending service that helps families in most need is highly regarded. Parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about the quality of care and education provided by the school and particularly the leadership of the headteacher. A small minority consider the behaviour of students to be an area of concern. However the behaviour of most students in classes and around the school is good. There have been very few permanent exclusions this year and the number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen significantly in recent years. The majority of students enjoy school and attend regularly.

This represents a significant improvement since the last inspection. Home-school liaison workers effectively support reluctant students with their attendance.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. A number of good lessons were observed. However, teaching and learning are not consistently good enough in every subject to ensure that all students realise their full potential, particularly those of middle ability. Additionally, in some lessons, not enough is expected of students and they are not sufficiently involved. Lesson planning and the process of setting targets have improved in some subjects. In these subjects, students' individual needs are better met. Strategies to check on students' progress, including the regular scrutiny of their work, have been introduced. In effective subject departments, students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. The school is collecting data and information on students' progress to plan for their next steps. Some of this is used well. However, this good practice is not yet fully in place across the school. Furthermore, inconsistencies in monitoring the quality of lessons means that subject managers are not always aware of the true picture on the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects.

The school has successfully identified areas for development through self-evaluation and the good use of external review. Five subject departments have been reviewed; improvement plans have been rapidly drawn up and implemented. The school has invested heavily in professional development opportunities for staff and introduced self-help strategies such as coaching, 'buddying' and subject and leadership training. Teachers value these opportunities. Staff and governors are fully involved in the school's self-evaluation and school improvement planning processes. As a result, all staff and governors know the school's strengths and areas for development. The capacity for further improvement is good because the school knows exactly where improvements need to be made. In addition, it has proved it can exceed challenging targets and tackle the weaknesses identified in the last inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, particularly in science at Key Stage 4.
- Ensure all teaching is matched to students' different learning needs.
- Improve lesson planning; the use of data; tracking and assessment of students' work to ensure students are challenged to achieve the best they can.
- Ensure the school planning, monitoring and evaluation cycle is more strongly linked to raising the attainment and achievement of all students, particularly at GCSE.
- Increase the frequency of lesson observations, and use the information gained to ensure more consistently good teaching and learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students' attainment on entry varies from year-to-year and ranges from broadly average to below average. A higher proportion of lower and middle attaining students enter Year 7 in this school compared to most schools, particularly in terms of their English standards. Standards at Year 9 and 11 are below average, but they were higher than in previous years in 2006. The school exceeded its targets, narrowing the gap between St Hild's and other schools nationally. The proportion of students gaining at least five good GCSEs improved significantly. The number of students leaving school with at least one GCSE or equivalent was similar to the national average. Indications are that the school is on track to achieve its 2007 targets, particularly at Key Stage 3.

Students now make good progress in Key Stage 3 and satisfactory progress in Key Stage 4. Girls at Key Stage 4 and boys of average ability do not always progress as well as expected. The school has restructured the curriculum and task groups of teachers have been set up to remedy and monitor the progress of these groups. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory and sometimes good progress because of the effective support and guidance that they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students are proud of their school. They say they 'would not want to go anywhere else'. They value the positive relationships they have with each other and adults and they say they are well supported. Students feel safe. Bullying and racist incidents are rare and when they do occur, they are dealt with well by staff. Students know about safety in lessons and around school. They adopt healthy lifestyles by participating in two hours of sport each week and also by involving themselves in the wide range of out of school sporting activities. All students stay for a school lunch and eat healthy meals, but not all are appreciative of them. Students learn of the dangers of drugs and alcohol abuse in their health and relationships education lessons. Many students make a good contribution to school life through the work of the school council. They welcome opportunities to take responsibility; for example, acting as prefects, peer-mediators, student librarians and sports coaches in primary schools. Charitable fundraising is a strong feature of school life and students make a good contribution to the local community. For example, they are involved in the regeneration of the local area, and support the community through their work on the 'eco' and 'ASDAN' groups.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. In the best lessons, such as in history and English, teachers use a range of strategies, teaching styles and resources to motivate and interest students. They plan work that challenges students and raises their enjoyment of learning. In these lessons students make good progress, they know how well they are doing and what they need to do to progress further. Sometimes students are encouraged to check and assess their own work and this is successfully developing their independence skills and confidence. Although the school has plans to share such good practice, they are not fully developed in each subject department. Consequently, the quality of teaching is inconsistent. In some lessons, expectations of students are not high enough and teaching is dull. As a result, some students are restless and do not try their best. In these lessons, planning is often not suitably matched to individual students needs. It does not always identify what students are expected to achieve, or how teaching will support this.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is of good quality. It meets statutory requirements and is responsive to local circumstances. An increasingly broad range of academic subjects and vocational courses are making a positive difference to students' aspirations and achievement. This includes vulnerable students and those at risk of being excluded. For example, the Phoenix Centre, the Bridge Unit

and focused support in the St Christopher's Unit provides vulnerable students with alternative curriculum opportunities or individualised learning programmes. This has resulted in their increased attendance and achievement. The school has developed a range of strategies to ensure more students meet expected levels in literacy. Good careers advice extends across both key stages. A diverse range of extra-curricular provision provides students with a range of opportunities that broadens and enriches their life experiences. These include performing arts, digital photography and the junior sports leader award.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and support provided to students is good and is evident in the school's ethos, the pastoral support, and in the care and mutual respect that helps every student feel safe and valued. The new building provides a safe and secure environment for students. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are robust and meet statutory requirements, and thorough risk assessments are in place. Good relationships and joint working with local primary schools ensure students' smooth transition into Year 7. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and looked after children are well supported, as are students at risk of being excluded. The outstanding range of partnerships with the voluntary sector, other schools and key professionals in support agencies provide good levels of additional support when required. Careers advice is of good quality. However, inconsistent use of data for tracking pupils' progress in some lessons means students are not always clear about how well they are doing and what they must do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Self-evaluation is accurate and is used effectively to draw up plans for future school improvement. The effectiveness of the plans is reflected in improvements in students' attendance and in rising standards in English, mathematics and science at Year 9. Morale is good because teachers are recognising that students are reaching higher standards than in previous years. The next step is to raise students' achievements at Year 11. The school's capacity to raise standards further is good because there are many strong leaders and managers at all levels in the school. Governance is good. Governors have a good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses and monitor its work vigorously and effectively. Financial planning, management and control are very good. The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and the atmosphere for learning is good. However, there is a considerable difference in the quality of lessons that students receive. Consequently, there is a need to monitor lessons more frequently and to share good practice more widely.

Specialist engineering status has been effective in widening students' horizons and presenting increased opportunities for links with further education and the world of work. Examination targets linked to the specialist subjects have been broadly met.

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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	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?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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?	3
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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

13 June 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of St Hild's Church of England Voluntary Aided School, Hartlepool, TS24 9PB

Thank you for making us so welcome during our two-day visit. The team enjoyed talking with some of you and we were pleased to hear that most of you enjoy school and appreciate the wide range of activities you can attend after school and abroad. I would also like you to thank all of the parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire. The vast majority who responded are positive about the quality of care and education you receive and particularly the leadership of your headteacher. A small number think behaviour in school is not good, but we found your behaviour good in lessons and around school. We recognise the improved and sometimes good progress you are making, but we think some of you can do even better. We believe the school provides you with a satisfactory and improving quality of education. We also found the following things.

- You say you feel safe and well cared for because of the good support you receive from each other and adults.
- You know how to be healthy, take part in many sporting activities and you have access to good healthy meals, but not all of you are appreciative of them.
- The quality of teaching in lessons is satisfactory and some of it is good. Where it is good you are fully involved in interesting well planned lessons. In more satisfactory lessons, you are not always stretched to do your best and sometimes you are restless and less attentive.
- You access a good and broad curriculum.
- Your views are increasingly taken into account through the school council, although you would like lockable bins to stop the seagulls making a mess.
- You enjoy having opportunities to take responsibility such as peer mediators and prefects, but you would like to have prefect badges so that people can see your role.

We have asked the school to improve the standards you attain, particularly in science GCSEs. We also want the school to make sure the quality of teaching, planning and target-setting and review of your work is always of high quality; and to ensure that this and other information is used consistently to guide you to achieve the best you can.

Once again, thank you for welcoming us so well. The inspection team and I wish you all the best in your future lives!

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow HMI