

# St Godric's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Thornley

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	114277
<b>Local Authority</b>	Durham
<b>Inspection number</b>	311545
<b>Inspection dates</b>	12–13 March 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Margaret Shepherd

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	86
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Stephen Carter
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Jane Lewin
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 April 2004
<b>School address</b>	Thornley Road Wheatley Hill County Durham DH6 3NR
<b>Telephone number</b>	01429 820333
<b>Fax number</b>	01429 820333

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

The school serves the neighbouring villages of Thornley and Wheatley Hill as well as some families from a wider area. The social and economic circumstances are much lower than average. A higher than average proportion of pupils is eligible for free school meals. Pupils are predominantly of White British heritage. The proportion of Traveller pupils is smaller than in previous years. The number of pupils in each year group varies considerably, with some groups as small as four. Classes are organised in mixed age groups throughout the school. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than average with an above average proportion having statements of special educational need. The proportion of pupils who enter and leave the school between the usual admission times, is much higher than average. The school has federation status and is paired with another small neighbouring Catholic school. These two schools work closely with another Catholic school to share expertise and plan the curriculum together.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school. It has some outstanding features and parents are unanimous in their appreciation of its provision. The headteacher has an extremely clear vision of the quality of education required to prepare pupils for their future lives, both academic and personal. The school's sharing of expertise with its local partner schools is working very well. This is resulting in a more effective curriculum and the setting of more challenging targets for individual pupils that enable them to make a faster rate of progress through the school.

Achievement is good. Children start school with standards that are mostly below what is typical for their age. The high proportion of children who join and leave the school during the year and the variation between year groups in the proportion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make it difficult to compare standards at the end of Key Stage 1 with those of other schools. However, children reach average standards by the end of Year 6. Children all achieve well in Reception and in Key Stage 2 progress has increased to good over the past three years.

Teaching and learning are good. The school works hard to match the teaching and curriculum to the particular needs of different pupils. Teachers and teaching assistants work together very effectively. The school puts a high priority on developing speaking and listening skills. Teachers' skilful use of questions, expecting pupils to justify their answers, has resulted in higher than expected standards in speaking throughout the school. In some classes, teachers do not explain tasks clearly enough, especially in independent work and this slows the pace of learning. and the efficient deployment of teaching assistants means pupils achieve well.

The school works tirelessly to provide an effective curriculum. The use of themes to cover different subjects and visits to broaden pupils' experiences works very well, particularly in developing the skills of literacy and numeracy. The school's curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and Traveller pupils is carefully planned. The curriculum for handwriting is not effective and reduces standards in this aspect of writing. The curriculum, together with the very high quality care, support, guidance and excellent partnerships with outside agencies result in excellent personal development and well-being. Pupils work and play together like one big happy family. Older pupils take their responsibilities very seriously and thoroughly enjoy looking after the younger pupils. The strong community ethos extends to international understanding in the form of a partnership with a nursery in Kenya. Even the youngest children are proud of these links. Pupils have an excellent understanding of keeping safe and healthy and thoroughly enjoy their learning. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils prepare very well for their future lives through projects such as running the healthy tuck shop and calculating its daily profits. The school council is very proud of its work.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher manages the federated school organisation very well. Governance is good, particularly in monitoring the school's finances. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. The clear commitment for improvement and the effective communication systems give the school a good capacity for future improvement.

## **Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 2**

The Foundation Stage is good. Some features of its work are outstanding. The coordinator has a very clear commitment to the continual improvement of provision and she leads her team very effectively. Despite the very wide variety of children's skills on entry to the school, they are mostly below, and often well below, those typically expected for this age. Many children have speech and language difficulties. Many children enter and leave the school during their first year of schooling, so the comparison of overall standards is impossible to measure reliably. No matter what skills children have when they start school, they make good progress. By the end of Reception, standards in personal development are higher than expected, whilst standards in communication, language and literacy are lower than those found normally. Teaching and learning are good with excellent features in organisation and planning. This very thorough planning combines the needs of the two different year groups very effectively. The indoor curriculum is outstanding. The combination of following children's initiatives and choices, with the regular teaching of basic skills, works extremely well. The outdoor curriculum is good and there are clear plans to make it as effective as the indoor curriculum. Care, support and guidance are excellent and lead to outstanding personal development.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure there is enough emphasis on handwriting in the curriculum to raise standards.
- Ensure all teachers explain clearly to pupils what they need to do in independent work.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Achievement is good and, by the end of Year 6, standards are average. When children start school their skills vary considerably. Pupils' mobility and the high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and Traveller pupils in some year groups causes unreliability in comparing standards at the end of Key Stage 1. The inspection confirms the school's data that pupils make good progress in Years 1 and 2. The national data showing progress between Year 2 and Year 6 is more reliable as it tracks individual pupils. It shows that progress has improved steadily over the past three years and is now good. Standards in national tests and in work seen by the end of Year 6 are average. Standards in speaking and listening are higher than expected for pupils' ages through the school. However, standards in writing are not higher because of weaknesses in handwriting. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and Traveller pupils achieve well.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

The school's very high priority for extending personal development has an outstanding impact on pupils. They are mature, confident and keen to take on any responsibilities that the school offers. Older pupils revel in their roles in supporting younger pupils. They take their training as buddies very seriously and expect to mediate and negotiate with younger pupils to help them resolve any differences. Pupils have an excellent understanding of keeping safe and healthy. They appreciate the many opportunities for sports in the after school activities and try their best to eat a healthy diet. Their enjoyment of school is obvious, ranging from the enthusiasm of the older pupils seeing their forest trail coming to fruition from their designs,

to the youngest children investigating how well a programmable robot tows a trailer they have constructed from recycled materials. Pupils make excellent contributions to the community, both in helping to create a context of one big happy family for learning as well as much wider afield in their links with a nursery in Kenya. Pupils are very well prepared for their future lives through activities such as calculating the profit they make daily on the healthy tuck shop. The school council members are very proud of their roles in the school and even the youngest child expects their contributions to be valued. Attendance levels are good. Behaviour is excellent as is children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers know their pupils very well. They manage behaviour skilfully and organise the mixed year groups effectively. In some lessons, teachers do not explain tasks clearly enough. This reduces the pace of learning at the beginning of independent activities. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities learn consistently well due to the focussed help from support staff. Teachers use challenging questions both in whole class sessions and in group or individual work. They support pupils skilfully in answering, encourage them to express their own opinions and make sure that every pupil has a turn in responding at some point during the session. This promotes speaking skills very well.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum is good with some outstanding features. Staff work very effectively with their partner schools to plan common topics each half term. This has a positive impact on progress. Planning is based firmly on creative learning and includes interesting opportunities for using literacy and numeracy skills. This is particularly good in science, where children have regular opportunities for investigation. The use of visits at the beginning of projects is very effective. The curriculum does not place enough emphasis on handwriting, resulting in pupils' presentation being untidy. Provision is excellent for pupils' personal development and very effective for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The curriculum is enriched extremely well by the many different activities and clubs outside of lessons.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 1**

Care, guidance and support are excellent. The entire staff work closely together to provide for each pupil. They have an excellent knowledge of every individual and their families. Pupils are confident to turn to any member of staff for advice. Safeguarding systems are in place. Teaching staff provide very clear guidance to individuals on how to improve their work and pupils understand their targets very well. Guidance for personal development is excellent. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early to support their needs. Partnership with outside specialists works very well in supporting pupils' well-being. Parents appreciate the school's work to create strong partnerships with them.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has an extremely clear vision of how she wants the school to improve and works consistently to support staff in making improvements. She uses the school's federated status and the partnership with the other neighbouring school very effectively to extend the expertise of staff, improve provision for pupils and to increase the challenge of the school's targets. Coordinators work very well together to promote their areas of responsibility. Governance is good. Governors appreciate the benefits of the federated status. Self-evaluation is good and plays a key part in the continuing development of provision.

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**Annex A**

## Inspection judgements

<b>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</b>	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
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

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

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**Annex B**

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

14 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Godric's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Thornley, Durham,  
DH6 3NR

Thank you for being so very welcoming to me when I came to your school. You were all so friendly and helpful in answering my questions. I am writing to let you know what I found out.

You receive a good education at your school. The school works hard to help you to make good progress as you move through the school. It plans very interesting activities to help you to learn. Your work on different themes is very effective, particularly the visits that you make at the beginning of each new project. I was fascinated to find out how much you had learnt from the visit that one of your classes made down a coal mine. You have good skills in speaking and listening because all adults work hard to help you to answer questions. Your handwriting is not as neat as it could be and I have asked your teachers to help you make it better in future. Your school is going to make sure that tasks are explained more clearly to you so you know exactly what you have to do, especially when you are working on your own. There are some very interesting projects planned for you. Your forest trail is going to be a very exciting place to explore and learn. Your headteacher, teachers and governors work well together to make your school an even better place to be.

Your personal development is excellent. Everyone in your school does their best to care and support you and to help you understand what you have to do to improve. You have an excellent understanding of keeping safe and healthy and it was obvious that you love doing all the interesting things the school provides. The older pupils look after the younger pupils really well. You learn about the importance of making a profit at your healthy tuck shop and working together in teams to carry out a task successfully. This will help you when you grow up. Your school council is very proud to represent your views, with every one from Reception to Year 6 helping to make decisions.

I will remember all the remarkable things that I saw in my visit to your school and I wish you every success in your future education.

Yours sincerely

Maggi Shepherd

Lead inspector