

St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122369
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	314281
Inspection dates	27–28 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Hancock HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	342
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Joseph Ronan
Headteacher	Mr Alan Hodgson
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2003
School address	Highford Lane Hexham Northumberland NE46 2DD
Telephone number	01434 605124
Fax number	01434 601575

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St Joseph's Roman Catholic Middle School is located in the market town of Hexham, on the River Tyne. The school is subject to re-organisation proposals. Nearly all pupils have English as their first language and there are few students from minority ethnic groups. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average and the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is lower than the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Joseph's is a very good school. It has improved since the previous inspection in 2003 and pupils' personal development, care and support are outstanding. All pupils including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress from Year 5 to Year 8. Standards are above average and challenging targets are being met. The school knows achievement and progress in mathematics is not as high as it is in English and science. It has made this a key priority for improvement, working closely with partner schools.

The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good and the quality of assessment has improved since the last inspection. The school knows the next step is to make sure the quality of advice on how pupils can improve their work is more consistent. Attendance is well above average and behaviour is excellent. The curriculum is good, particularly the range and breadth of extra activities and educational visits.

Pupils are exceptionally well cared for, thoroughly enjoy learning, and feel safe. The vast majority of parents are very complimentary about the school. Comments such as '...the school has an excellent caring ethos and the development of the individual child is a very important part of school life...' and '...my child has the confidence to learn and achieve in a highly caring environment...' are routine.

The overall quality of leadership, management and governance is good. Highly effective leadership by the headteacher is making sure managers at all levels are being challenged. The governing body continues to move the school forward and capacity to improve is good. The school's own evaluation of how well it is doing is accurate and the right actions are taken to make improvements. Resources are well used to achieve good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the rate of progress in mathematics.
- Make the quality of advice on how pupils can improve their work more consistent.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Attainment is average when pupils join the school in Year 5. All groups of pupils including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and standards are above average by the time they reach Year 8. Challenging targets are met and exceeded in the higher years. A comment by one parent represents the views of many others when saying '...we are really pleased with the progress our son has made since starting at the school'.

Test results in English and science are better than they are in mathematics. The school is working closely with partner schools to raise achievement, speed up progress, and improve results in mathematics at Key Stage 2.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and show it clearly in their high level of involvement and motivation and the way they

embrace the school's traditional values. Moral and social development are particularly strong and, as a result, behaviour is excellent.

Pupils are extremely polite, friendly, courteous and welcoming to visitors. They speak very highly of the care and support they receive from all members of staff, and are well prepared for the future because they are confident, self-assured, and respect one another. They work well together and make excellent relationships with each other and adults. This plays a big part in them rightly feeling safe and secure.

Pupils know and understand the importance of having a healthy and active lifestyle. They take full advantage of the wide range of sporting activities and participate in numerous creative arts events such as concerts, plays and musical productions. Their concern for the environment is recognised in gaining a silver award for being an 'Eco' school.

Pupils throughout the school have an excellent understanding of the differences and similarities of people from other cultures. Many have an extra dimension to their education as young adults through membership of the international club and the European Union Project which promotes links with schools in Denmark, Germany and Turkey. This work was an integral part of the British Council International Award in 2007. Pupils are generous in raising funds for a variety of good causes. They willingly accept responsibility around school and the school council helps to improve the school and provide an effective 'pupil voice'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are consistently good. This is due to the good planning and preparation by teachers, and the good behaviour and cooperation of pupils. Teachers set clear learning targets which ensure that pupils know what is required. Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is used very effectively to enliven lessons and encourage learning.

The school has taken well judged actions to improve teaching, learning and assessment. It knows the need to make the quality of advice on how pupils can improve their work more consistent to match best practice in the school. Pupils are shown how to judge the quality of their own work so that they better understand their targets and how to succeed. Teachers use assessment information well to plan appropriate work and methods. This ensures pupils of high ability are challenged to progress further and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well provided for and make good progress.

Teachers create a stimulating and supportive atmosphere in which pupils feel free to seek advice whilst responding to the many opportunities for independent and collaborative work. In this way, lessons encourage the development of both academic and personal skills. The deployment of teaching assistants is good, and the school matches their particular skills to curriculum areas where possible. This ensures that they play a full part in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good, offering opportunities well tailored to pupils' needs and interests, and promoting enjoyment and good academic progress. Its provision for enrichment activities, particularly sport and creative arts, is very good and does much to foster pupils' personal development.

All statutory requirements are met. The provision for ICT is particularly strong, for example pupils take part in a business modelling exercise which offers a 'real-life' enterprise challenge as well as requiring complex computer skills. Progress in mathematics is not as strong as in other subjects across Key Stage 2 and the school is investigating how this might be improved.

A prominent feature of the curriculum and of school life generally is its international dimension. In a variety of ways, from the teaching of French, to the International Clubs and links with schools and individuals overseas, pupils become very aware of the wider world.

The school makes good provision for pupils' personal, social and health education, and citizenship. In addition, all pupils take part in Young Enterprise activities which introduce them to international, ethical and fair trade issues at a practical level. The promotion of pupils' social, moral and cultural awareness is good. There are many visitors and visits out of school, including residential trips which broaden the curriculum, for example, a display following a visit to the Anne Frank museum included many perceptive comments.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Relationships between pupils and the staff are excellent resulting in a calm and positive learning environment in which every child feels highly valued. It is a very caring school which provides a high level of support for all pupils including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This contributes significantly to their achievement, creativity and personal development and is enhanced by excellent links with parents, carers and external agencies.

Child protection and health and safety procedures for safeguarding children are in place. Parents are very pleased with the care shown to their children and confirm that they are kept well informed of their child's work and progress within school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's leadership is highly effective and he is well supported by the senior management team. They have an accurate view of the quality of provision, including teaching and learning which is supported by an effective staff development programme.

The value placed on all members of staff and their involvement in the self-evaluation of the school has strengthened teamwork, a recent example being the initiative for the special events to mark St Joseph's Day. The recent re-designation of 'Investor in People' status reflects the importance given to this aspect of school life.

Governors carry out their role effectively, especially in ensuring the prudent management of resources to help the school successfully meet its aims. For example, the development of a new ICT suite is helping to raise standards by enhancing teaching and learning. The provision of classroom assistants is very effective in supporting pupils to improve achievement in lessons. Governors have also become more fully involved in the school's self-evaluation process.

Subject leaders are playing a fuller part in leadership and management with an enhanced role which includes the scrutiny of pupils' work and the application of assessment data. As a result, pupils now have a clearer idea of their progress which has yet to be reflected fully in test results.

Partnerships with other schools, outside agencies and sources of funding are used very productively to enhance provision. Child protection procedures, risk assessments, and health and safety practice meet statutory requirements.

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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?	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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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?	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	1
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	1

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?	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?	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 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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

31 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Middle School, Northumberland, NE46 2DD

Thank you for all your help when I inspected the school with my colleagues. Please would you pass on my thanks to your parents and carers for returning the questionnaires and say we took all their views into account. I thought you might like to know what we thought about your school.

- St Joseph's is a very good school.
- Your personal development, care and support are outstanding.
- You make good progress and standards are above average.
- The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good.
- The curriculum is good, particularly the range and breadth of extra activities and educational visits.
- You are exceptionally well cared for and supported.
- The overall quality of leadership, management and governance is good and your headteacher leads the school very well.

Your teachers and the staff work very hard and want to make the school even better. To help them do this, I have asked if they could:

- make your progress in mathematics even more rapid
- provide you with more consistent advice on how to improve your work.

I wish you every success in all you do in the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Hancock

Her Majesty's Inspector