

St Leonard's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108846
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	324846
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Margaret Farrow HMI

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	179
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Lisa Gibbons
Headteacher	Mr Peter Gair
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Tunstall Village Road Silksworth Sunderland Tyne and Wear SR3 2BB

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2009
Inspection number	324846

Telephone number
Fax number

0191 5536288
0191 5536290

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St Leonard's is a smaller than average-sized primary school with a higher than average number of girls. Children enter the Reception class when they start school which is the final year of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Nearly all pupils are White British and no pupils are at the early stages of speaking English. An increasing, but below average proportion, is known to be eligible for a free school meal. An average number of pupils are deemed to have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, none of whom have a statement of special educational need. The school holds the Active School Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Leonard's is a satisfactory and improving school with notable strengths in the good quality care and support provided to pupils. This promotes their good personal and very good spiritual, moral and social development. It builds pupils' self-esteem and confidence and enables them to enjoy their time in school, as evidenced by their good attendance and impeccable behaviour. It is a happy and nurturing school where everyone is welcomed, valued and supported. Relationships between pupils and staff are good and pupils work and play together in harmony. The school is well respected by, and lies at the heart of the Catholic community it serves. It has undergone rapid improvement in the last year following a long period of turbulence in staffing, including long term sickness absences. This led to a dip in standards and achievement, particularly in English, immediately prior to and following the previous inspection.

The headteacher, well supported by his recently reconfigured senior management team, provides a calm, strong driving force and direction to all those involved in the life of the school. He values and encourages the contribution of all staff. As a result, everyone shares a common commitment to helping the school improve. Staff morale is high and purposeful actions have been taken to tackle areas in need of improvement.

Standards are rising at both key stages because of the headteacher's relentless focus on improving them. In 2008 the proportion of pupils reaching the expected levels for their age at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 was above, and sometimes well above, the national average. However, the proportion attaining higher levels in English and mathematics in Year 6 was well below average. Due to previous underachievement, the progress pupils make by the time they leave school, given their starting points, has been uneven over the past three years: inspectors agree with the school's judgement that it is satisfactory overall. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has improved since the last inspection and these pupils now make satisfactory progress because of improved regular assessment of their achievements, and the effective extra support they receive from teachers and support staff alike.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The proportion of good lessons is increasing but there is still variability across the school. Senior managers have developed good individual pupil data and regular tracking information to help teachers plan work that is better matched to individual pupils' needs. However, not all teachers are using this good information consistently enough. Consequently some pupils have not been making the progress they should, particularly the most able. Inspection evidence indicates that most pupils are currently making at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress in their learning. Although the school has developed a good marking policy, this is also inconsistently applied so pupils do not always fully understand how well they are doing and what they need to do next. Nevertheless, pupils say that lessons are good, especially science, and this adds to their clear and stated enjoyment of school.

The satisfactory curriculum has been remodelled and provides coherence and continuity as pupils move through the school. Teachers are developing effective links between subjects and are creating more opportunities for pupils to apply the skills they learn in different situations and contexts. The curriculum is suitably extended through good use of information and communication technology (ICT) and by a range of enrichment activities, including educational visits and lunchtime and after-school activities. Pupils say they like the sporting activities in which they can take part, particularly the regular opportunities to use the trim-track and monkey bars.

An overwhelming proportion of parents who completed the inspection questionnaire expressed very high levels of satisfaction with the school, especially with regard to their children's enjoyment, safety, and the progress they make. The headteacher has made great efforts to improve communication with parents since his appointment shortly after the previous inspection. Parental responses testify to this, as a high number indicated that their views and their children's views are taken into account. All staff are firmly committed to ensuring pupils' safety and well-being and current safeguarding requirements are met and regularly reviewed. Strong partnerships with the diocese, the school's pastoral support worker, the school nurse and outside agencies provide timely support for individual pupils. This is particularly the case for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those who are experiencing difficulties in their lives.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall with strengths in the headteacher's leadership, the emerging skills of the senior management team, the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation, and the role of governors which has improved significantly since the last inspection. Governors, alongside the recently appointed and enthusiastic chair of governors, are now relishing their role of challenge and support in holding leaders to account for the school's performance. The school has addressed all areas identified for improvement in the last inspection report well. This, together with the improvements in standards, the quality of teaching, the increasing impact of pupil assessment and tracking information, and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the school's work, indicates the school has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The quality of provision in the EYFS is satisfactory. Children enter achieving at least the level expected for their age. They settle quickly and soon understand how to work, share and play together. They learn in attractive surroundings and there is a range of activities provided indoors and out. These are carefully planned to include all six areas of learning in the EYFS, although there are some missed opportunities, especially outdoors, to extend physical and creative development. Children are very well looked after and all welfare requirements are met. They make satisfactory progress so that by the time they enter Year 1 the majority meet the nationally expected goals in literacy, knowledge and understanding of the world, personal and social development and exceed expected levels in mathematical development. They are approaching expected levels in physical and creative development. Generally girls achieve better than boys. The school has identified the need to address this. The EYFS leader is working hard to improve provision in line with recent national developments in early years education, with effective short-term support from the local authority. There is an increasingly appropriate balance between activities that adults lead and those that children choose for themselves. However, children's capabilities are not always used as a starting point in planning to ensure plenty of challenge for the more able. Adult observations are increasingly well used, and children's interests are beginning to be considered as, for example, when children chose to set up the role play area as Goldilocks' house. There are good links with parents who are kept informed about their child's progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Challenge all staff to make sure the good data and information they hold about individual pupils is used in their planning and in their teaching so that all pupils can achieve their best.

- Improve the proportion of teaching that is good or better.
- Ensure the good practice in marking is embedded across all lessons and subjects.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children enter the Foundation Stage with at least expected levels of skills and understanding. They make satisfactory progress by the time they enter Key Stage 1, although there has been some past underperformance. Since 2007, standards have been improving at Key Stage 1 and in 2008 end of key stage assessments were above the national average, significantly so in writing. They were in line with results for pupils in similar contexts. The proportion of pupils attaining Level 4 in the 2008 Key Stage 2 national tests in mathematics and science was also well above the national average. English results dipped slightly, but remained above those found nationally. However, the number of pupils attaining higher levels in English and mathematics was well below the national average. Standards are improving particularly well in science because pupils have been given more opportunities to take part in practical enquiries to develop their investigational skills and enjoyment of the subject. The progress pupils make is satisfactory overall. Although improving, not all make the progress they should, particularly the most able pupils, because planning and teaching are not always well matched to their learning potential. Regular tracking data show pupils are on course to attain their challenging 2009 targets and thus maintain the improved standards gained in 2008.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils have a very good understanding of healthy lifestyles and the importance of exercise. Evidence from regular pupil surveys and from pupils spoken to during the inspection indicates that they feel very safe in school. In addition they learn how to stay safe on the roads, about cycle safety and about the dangers of fire, alcohol, smoking and drugs. They say that even if bullying occurs it is quickly sorted out and they feel well looked after in school as there is always an adult they can turn to when they have problems. Whilst their spiritual, moral and social development is very good and enhanced through the caring, Christian ethos which pervades the school, pupils' knowledge of other cultures and of growing up in Britain's diverse society is more limited. Pupils say they enjoy coming to school and this is evidenced by their happy demeanour and exemplary behaviour in lessons, on the playground and during lunchtimes. They say they enjoy the many opportunities to take responsibility in the school, for example as play leaders, special friends, through their involvement in Liturgy, or as school council representatives. They take their responsibility for supporting those less fortunate than themselves very seriously and raise funds for a great number of charities. Pupils are proud of their responsibility in helping to choose pupils to sit at the 'Golden Table' and are pleased that their efforts are recognised through regular praise and celebration. Pupils' are articulate, considerate, and confident and have very well developed social and communication skills. These attributes, together with their good basic skills and good transition arrangements in Year 6, equip them well for the next steps in their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Good relationships between staff and pupils, and pupils' very good behaviour, characterise all lessons and this helps to ensure that pupils are willing and ready to learn. Clear planning, teachers' perceptive questioning, a good balance of teacher and pupil talk, a lively pace and good use of resources, typify those lessons that are good. In such lessons work is well matched to individual pupil's needs. Good use of support from teaching assistants and the effective use of interactive whiteboards sustain pupils' interest and involvement and ensure no time is wasted. Pupils are encouraged to be fully involved in their own learning, and are adept at communicating their views equally well in groups or individually. Where teaching is satisfactory, planning does not take full account of pupils' different abilities. Too much time is taken reinforcing concepts that some pupils already understand and this slows the pace of their learning. Sometimes there is too much reliance on work sheets, which limit pupils' ability to respond creatively to what has been taught. Consequently some pupils are not challenged to do their best. Senior leaders are aware of this and are taking action to ensure more pupils gain higher levels in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The satisfactory and improving curriculum is broad and balanced. Good efforts are made to ensure all pupils have equal access to the curriculum and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported by adults in class so that they can learn alongside their peers. Effective links with other providers, such as sports coaches, French teachers from a partner secondary school and guitar tutors, help pupils develop a variety of skills further. The school's recent focus on developing cross-curricular ICT, literacy and numeracy links is being embedded across the school but it is too early to evaluate the impact of this in terms of pupils' progress, although pupils say they enjoy such opportunities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are very well looked after and cared for; a particular strength is the use of the pastoral support worker and links with the church which ensure the needs of all pupils are met, especially those who are most vulnerable. The assessment of pupils' learning has improved and is now good. New tracking and assessment systems are making a difference to pupils' attainment in some lessons because it quickly highlights those who may be underachieving or 'stuck' and actions are taken to remedy this. An increasing proportion of pupils receive clear academic guidance, through individual targets and effective marking, helping them to understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. However, senior leaders are aware that the good practice in some lessons is not yet fully in place in all and they are working hard to remedy this through training, support and sharing the good practice clearly evident in the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has welcomed the short-term external support from the local authority and, together with the deputy headteacher, has worked systematically to improve the regularity and accuracy of assessment and the monitoring of teaching, achievement and standards. Subject leaders have been afforded significant roles and are increasingly involved in rigorously monitoring and evaluating the impact of strategies introduced to improve the school's performance. They value their roles and the professional development opportunities provided which are honing their skills and competencies. Such developments are contributing to improvements in the quality of teaching and standards across the school. Self-evaluation is accurate and inclusive. As a result staff and governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. The school's action planning sharply identifies key improvement priorities and these are regularly monitored and reported on, enabling all to understand the impact of actions taken and what needs to happen next. The school makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion but is aware that more needs to be done to provide opportunities to enhance pupils' understanding of the different ways in which they are part of different communities.

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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
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

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	3
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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 learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

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

23rd January 2009

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of St Leonard's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Sunderland, SR3 2BB

Thank you for making Mrs Richardson and I so welcome when we inspected your school. We were impressed with your very good behaviour and helpfulness as we came into lessons and moved around the school. A special thank you to those of you who spoke to us during the inspection. It was very interesting to hear your views and we were glad to know that you enjoy school. I would like you to thank all of your parents who filled in the inspection questionnaires. Nearly everyone who responded said how happy they were with the quality of education and care you receive.

We believe the school provides a satisfactory and improving quality of education. Its strengths include the good care and support you are provided with, your good personal, and very good spiritual, moral and social development. Christian values fill the school and you are polite, friendly and caring towards one another. You enjoy the opportunities you have to take responsibility for instance as special friends, play leaders and in contributing to Liturgy. Your charity work is impressive and some of you say you really like the opportunities you have to use the trim-track and monkey bars that help you keep fit.

The school has changed many of the ways that it works and this is helping to improve standards. For example, many of you say you particularly enjoy the increasing amount of practical work in your science lessons and this is helping you to reach higher standards in that subject. Although we have judged teaching to be satisfactory overall, we know it is improving and some of it is good. However, it is not consistent enough to ensure that all of you are achieving as well as you could. We have asked the school to make sure that all teaching is as good as the best.

The school now has very good systems for checking how well you are doing and how well the changes made are improving things. Staff are working hard to make sure everything is as good as it should be. We have asked the school to make sure the good information they hold about you is always used in planning lessons to help everyone achieve their best. We want staff to make sure the good marking of some of your work is carried out on all of your work so you always know how well you are doing and what you need to do next.

Once again, thank you for help and friendliness. You are great ambassadors for your school and your community and I wish you well for the future

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Farrow

Her Majesty's Inspector