

Our Lady and St Thomas Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114257
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	325978
Inspection date	9 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Graeme Clarke

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)	103
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 Alison Aisbitt
Headteacher	Mrs Frances Gowland
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	Cumberland Terrace Willington Crook County Durham DL15 0PB
Telephone number	01388 746336

Age group	4–11
Inspection date	9 June 2009
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Fax number

01388 748229

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors collected evidence from: lesson observations; scrutiny of pupils' work, assessment information and other documents; interviews and discussions with the headteacher, staff, pupils and governors. They evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following aspects:

- the progress and achievement of children, and their personal, social and emotional development in the Reception Year
- the standards reached and progress boys and girls have made:

-presently in Year 6 since Year 2

-others throughout the school from September 2008 to date

- the effectiveness of the school's arrangements to improve consistency in the way teachers and teaching assistants support all pupils.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspectors found much evidence to confirm that the school's own evaluations are justified, and these have been included in the report.

Description of the school

This smaller than average size primary school serves the town of Willington and the surrounding area, both of which have social and economic deprivation. An above average proportion of pupils is eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average and a small number have a statement of special educational need. Almost all pupils have a White British heritage. Early Years Foundation Stage provision is in a mixed Reception and Year 1 class.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Our Lady and St Thomas Primary School ensures its pupils receive an outstanding education. They achieve outstandingly well because their excellent progress and very high levels of personal development and well-being result from the fully inclusive education the school provides. The headteacher, very ably supported by her assistant headteacher, leads and manages the school exceptionally well. Under the leadership of a very experienced chair of governors the overall quality of governance is excellent. Together, they ensure that the whole staff successfully promote the school's Christian values and their philosophy that 'every child really does matter' and should achieve as well as possible. The school works unstintingly to care for its pupils and to give them a very rich experience. Very productive partnerships with parents, the parish, the local community, heritage and outdoor centres and with schools abroad make a huge contribution to pupils' education and the excellent promotion of community cohesion. Almost all parents hold the school in the highest regard. One parent, of an older pupil, reflects their confidence, 'This is an excellent school in many ways. My child is fulfilling her potential both spiritually and educationally. The school has excellent leadership and teaching. Our Lady and St Thomas is a school which nurtures children and prepares them for secondary school and growing up.'

A very well designed creative curriculum, contributes substantially to pupils' very high spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Assemblies; dedicated activity days, especially in the arts and for enterprise; visitors such as artists and musicians; residential visits to outdoor centres and extensive use of information and communication technology (ICT) all play a key part in enhancing pupils' learning and enriching their experience. Senior and experienced teachers are first-rate role models for younger recently appointed staff and have very successfully helped them develop expertise so that throughout the school excellent teaching inspires pupils to outstanding achievement. Teachers provide well suited activities, carefully tailored to pupils' abilities. In a very effective partnership with assistants in classes, they skilfully support and motivate all pupils to be attentive and industrious, to take a full part in lessons and to take care to present their work very well. The new reading and writing initiative for Reception to Year 3 is exemplary. Intensive, closely targeted sessions for pupils in small groups very successfully foster literacy skills. This initiative promotes excellent progress and raises standards by all pupils, including the gifted and talented and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teachers mark pupils' work frequently and diligently congratulate them on their accomplishments. Their systematic marking gives pupils useful pointers and guidance about how they can improve their work, in English especially, but is an aspect that is not yet consistent in other subjects, such as mathematics, throughout the school.

Children join the Reception class with skills and abilities below those typical for their age. Overall standards in 2008 in Year 2 fell below average because in 2006 a significant minority of pupils moved into Year 1 with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Nevertheless, they made good progress and all reached challenging targets. Pupils in the present Year 2 have made excellent progress: their standards are much improved and are above those expected for their age. Results in all subjects in the Key Stage 2 statutory assessments have been significantly above average every year up to 2008, which is a very impressive record. Many pupils in Year 6 in 2008 made exceptionally good progress and exceeded their very challenging targets. Academically gifted pupils reached the highest standards and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities did very much better than their counterparts nationally. Throughout Years 3 to 6 pupils are making excellent progress. Standards in each year are high. Pupils presently

in Year 6 are again this year on course to do really well and reach well above average standards. Boys and girls do equally well. The small number of pupils who join the school from other countries make excellent progress. Given their starting points pupils' achievement is excellent and many leave school with high standards.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. The school deservedly holds both the Healthy Schools and Activemark Gold awards which reflect how pupils understand clearly the importance of diet, personal hygiene and physical activity for a healthy lifestyle. Many thoroughly enjoy taking part in sports and other physical activities such as in the walking club. They feel safe in school and are adamant that there is no bullying. They value the school's arrangements that allow them to let their teachers know of any personal concerns and are assured they are dealt with promptly and effectively. They happily celebrate their classmates' accomplishments. They thoroughly like coming to school and speak warmly of the friendships they make and enjoy. They are very positive in their attitudes and show confidence and maturity, for example, when answering questions, sharing opinions and talking with adults. The school works successfully to promote regular attendance which is well above average. Absence rates are very low in comparison with similar schools. Pupils behave impeccably: they are considerate towards each other in and out of lessons and polite towards adults. They take justifiable pride in their contribution to school life as members of the school council which supports other pupils as 'happy helpers' to minimise bullying. They willingly support charitable work to help worthy causes both locally and farther away. The school enables pupils to make an outstanding contribution to community cohesion. The 'global citizen' ideal is realised through studies of their own heritage, European languages, of other faiths and though links with schools in Africa and India. Together they greatly strengthen their awareness of life locally and provide global perspectives. Pupils' strong social development, experience of enterprise, well developed basic skills and links with the secondary sector prepare them really well for their future.

In this exceptionally well led and managed school, all staff contribute through firmly established procedures that ensure the school runs well day-by-day. Governors' close involvement with the school means they have a first-hand view which is extended by informative reports from senior staff and participation in evaluating its work rigorously and accurately. Together with senior leaders, they have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and plan improvements clearly and implement them successfully. A particularly strong feature of their work is their outstanding analysis and arrangements made to promote community cohesion. Partnerships strongly enhance the community the school serves and well laid arrangements widen pupils' perspectives of the diversity of culture in Britain and world-wide. Taking pupils' excellent achievement and outstanding personal development into account, they obtain the best of value from resources. Governors ensure the school meets all responsibilities and current government requirements to safeguard the welfare of pupils and prevent discrimination. The school has continued to develop since the last inspection which reported outstanding provision in many areas. It has sustained high standards and achievement in English and science, improved standards in mathematics and enhanced outdoor facilities for learning. Given the school's determination to build on its strengths and exceptionally successful track record since the last inspection, more ambitious goals are well within reach. It has an outstanding capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Overall, provision in the Reception Year is good. Several aspects are outstanding. Children join the school in the Reception Year with abilities and skills that are below those typical for their age and well below expected levels in their use of language and number. By the end of the Reception Year in 2008 children's abilities were broadly average, except in writing, which the school identified as a particular weakness. A very effective initiative to help children's grasp of letters and sounds is well established and having noticeable success. In this very effectively led and managed stage, the school has successfully overcome the effects of changes in staff. Teachers and assistants work harmoniously to ensure children benefit from skilful teaching and a rich range of opportunities. This year, as a result of very effective development of teaching skills, there is an increase in the number of children currently in Reception making excellent progress. Standards remain broadly average but more children are on track to reach average to above average standards by the end of the year for language and mathematical development, knowledge and understanding of the world and creative and physical development.

Very effective induction at the start of the year helps children soon to develop excellent relationships with each other, to socialise, share equipment and play with each other very productively. In particular, very carefully planned arrangements help children to settle quickly and follow classroom routines. Well organised activities lead them to make excellent progress in their personal, social and emotional development.

Adults know children well, and ensure they are safe and particularly well cared for. Staff draw on information from their comprehensive records of children's accomplishments to provide carefully planned activities that foster play and social interaction. Children thoroughly enjoy making very effective use of the indoor facilities to explore and investigate which stimulates their interest and imagination. Use of the new outdoor facilities is developing well although the school does not yet derive maximum benefit from them to help children achieve as widely as possible. The school fosters strong links with parents and local services to promote children's welfare. Parents are delighted about how well their children have settled, enjoy school, and make such good progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve children's breadth of achievement in the Reception Year by consolidating arrangements to exploit and make the best use of the new outdoor learning facilities.

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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
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

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

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?	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
The extent to which 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 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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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**

10 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Our Lady and St Thomas Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary, Durham, DL15 0PB

Mrs Graham and I really enjoyed our recent visit to inspect your school. Thank you for helping us when we came into your classrooms to see you at work. You were very polite and helpful and we did enjoy talking with those of you whom we met. We were pleased to see how much you enjoy taking part in lessons and activities during and after school, how you value the help you get and the friendships you make. You are very well behaved and polite to others in lessons and outside. We were pleased to see how you contribute in so many ways to life in school and how you help others who are less fortunate than you. I know the headteacher and all the staff are very proud of you.

Your school is outstanding in many ways. All the adults in the school look after you very well and that is why you feel safe and happy. We were delighted to see how you make excellent use of new technology in lessons, how you listen carefully and give good answers to questions or express your opinions really well. We noted how you work hard and take care to make your work neat. You make outstanding progress and many of you reach high standards in your work. We know that you will strive to gain high standards in the future. When we spoke with some of you we found you clearly know the levels of work your teachers want you to reach. We were especially pleased that those of you in need of extra help do really well.

Children in Reception make good progress. They thoroughly like working inside and in the new outdoor area. We have asked the school to help those of you in Reception make even more use of the outdoor area so that you get the best chance to learn as much as possible.

You all have many excellent opportunities at Our Lady and St Thomas to learn about life and these should stand you in very good stead for the future. Some of you will soon be leaving to move on to a secondary school. I hope that you all do really well.

Yours faithfully

Graeme Clarke and Edith Graham

Inspectors