

St Benet's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108837
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	337165
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Clive Petts

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	359
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr Oliver Keyes
Headteacher	Mrs Ann Blakey
Date of previous school inspection	28 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 18 lessons and observed 14 class teachers. They held meetings with the Chair of Governors, staff, groups of pupils, analysed 140 questionnaire responses from parents and carers and looked at questionnaires from staff and pupils. The team also looked at development plans, data on pupils' progress, documents relating to the safeguarding of pupils, school policies and procedures; scrutinised pupils' current and past work; and spoke to the school improvement partner to discuss their reports.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the current achievement and progress that pupils make, particularly in writing and applying their skills to problem-solving situations in mathematics and science
- the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage, especially in using the outdoor provision
- the effectiveness of leadership and management in ensuring consistency in the quality of learning in all subjects and for all groups of pupils.

Information about the school

The school is much larger than average. Nearly all pupils are from a White British background with very few speaking English as an additional language. The proportion known to be eligible for free schools meals is low. A smaller than average number of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities and very few have a statement of special educational needs. The senior leadership and management team has recently been restructured. The school has been awarded the Silver Artsmark and the Activemark.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. It has a number of outstanding features. Senior leaders enjoy the total confidence and trust of parents and carers because safeguarding is excellent and the school provides exceptional care of pupils in a safe, nurturing family environment. The remark from one parent, 'the school is inclusive, supportive and nurturing and my child loves the life and the staff,' sums up parents' and carers' views. At the heart of the drive to secure and sustain further improvements are the passion and quiet determination of senior leaders who, despite unsettled staffing, have established an extremely positive climate in which even more can be achieved. All governors and staff share their ambition.

Most children start school with skills expected for their age. By the end of Year 6 attainment is high overall and particularly so in English. Pupils' learning and progress is good and in individual cases is outstanding for those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Achievement is outstanding in English and it is good in mathematics and science. This is because there are not always enough opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical and scientific skills across the curriculum. Teaching is good and teachers use the information from the rigorous assessment system to inform their planning. As a result, support is targeted correctly and closely checked. However, in a few lessons tasks do not consistently provide the right level of difficulty. Marking is positive but does not always make pupils aware of the next steps to improvement.

The good curriculum is being developed to provide more first-hand experiences to help put learning into context and to link the learning in different subjects. Creative activities and enrichment programmes are a strength with pupils keen to give their best. Pupils are polite, value their friendships and, as a consequence, their behaviour is exemplary. They enjoy excellent relationships with adults, enabling them to take full advantage of all that is offered. Their awareness of the benefits of a healthy, active lifestyle and staying safe is outstanding and their enjoyment of school life is reflected in their excellent attendance.

Shrewd leadership by the headteacher has led to a transformation in the culture and ethos in the school. She has established an open, vibrant and friendly atmosphere. Excellent partnerships enhance all that the school offers. The school's self-evaluation accurately identifies the strengths and areas for development. Decisions taken are having a positive impact, for example extending the outdoor learning space for Early Years Foundation Stage, although this is not yet fully reflected in measurable outcomes for children. Nevertheless, changes are moving the school forward. The school, therefore, has good capacity for further improvement.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further raise achievement in mathematics and science by:
 - ensuring that all lessons have the appropriate level of difficulties and challenge to match individuals' abilities and talents
 - providing more opportunities across the curriculum to apply skills in analysing and solving problems
 - giving pupils clear steps for improvement to boost achievement.
- Improve the quality and breadth of outdoor learning in Early Years Foundation Stage.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils achieve well, enjoy their learning and make good progress in most lessons. Pupils respond very well to the chance to reflect on their ideas with a classmate, analyse their solutions and justify their choices and decisions. Pupils confidently answer open-ended questions and happily share their feelings and emotions. In lessons when progress sometimes slows, activities are less demanding and approaches less well-matched to pupils' talents. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good and sometimes outstanding progress because intervention is prompt and classroom support highly effective.

Positive action taken in the last two years to improve writing has resulted in exceptional achievement and high attainment, especially in English. Although attainment is high in mathematics and above average in science, it is not consistently as high as English because pupils lack confidence in applying their skills across the curriculum. The school's data on pupils' progress, supported by inspection evidence, demonstrate that achievement in mathematics and science is rising as staff more consistently plan to meet individuals' needs, but it does not yet match that of English.

Pupils' appetite for school life and their desire to succeed is reflected in their outstanding behaviour and attitudes. Consequently, lessons are often full of life but composed and orderly with pace rarely interrupted. Pupils confidently state that bullying is rare and staff are always on hand to encourage or share a worry or concern. Pupils understand the benefits of eating sensibly, keeping fit and being safety conscious. Pupils' excellent spiritual, moral and social development is evident in the high quality of relationships they enjoy with everybody. Their strengthening grasp of the diverse nature of the world around them prepares them well for the future.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The majority of lessons are good with examples of both outstanding and satisfactory teaching. The high expectations of staff help create an extremely positive climate for learning in nearly all lessons. In the most inspiring lessons, active learning engages pupils and gives them the confidence to reflect, reason and express a view or solve a problem. In lessons where pace is a little slower, approaches are not as engaging and demands, especially of their thinking, less taxing. Oral feedback from the teacher helps pupils improve their work but there are times when written feedback in their books specifying the next steps to improvement is limited.

The good curriculum places firm emphasis on the development of basic skills. Subjects are increasingly linked together to provide relevance and motivate pupils. Although some good opportunities are provided to practise skills, not all activities are exploited to use mathematical and scientific skills. The strong focus on personal development is apparent in the varied first-hand experiences provided, for example the residential visits to Derwent Hill in Cumbria and performance of Chitty, Chitty Bang, Bang' at the nearby Empire theatre. However, opportunities to exploit the links with the school's 'adopted village' in Swaziland are occasionally missed.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding, ensuring that pupils from all backgrounds achieve success. The school can identify some striking examples where personalised support enables pupils to make the same good progress as their classmates. One comment from a parent sums up parents' and carers' views, 'I am happy that at the school gate the school picks up where I leave off.' Excellent partnerships with support professionals help to encourage positive attitudes and contribute to pupils' excellent

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attendance.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The clear, pragmatic vision of the headteacher is fundamental to the school's 'outward-looking' culture. She successfully inspires staff, nurtures their skills and talents and gives pupils confidence to achieve even more. All are valued as individuals and share a clear sense of belonging. This reflects the school's resolve for all to achieve their challenging targets and its commitment to equality of opportunity. Excellent relationships with parents and carers, agencies and local schools add to the ambition of continuous improvement. Governors are very well informed and play an active part in strategic planning. The effective action taken by senior leaders to strengthen monitoring and evaluation is having a positive impact on all areas of the school, especially the quality of learning in the classroom.

Safeguarding procedures are of a very high quality with excellent approaches to quality assurance routines. Child protection practice is especially impressive, reflecting the headteacher's natural dedication to the care of children. Community cohesion is carefully planned and positively promoted with school and the church as one at the heart of the local community. Additionally, there is developing strength in the experiences provided for pupils to develop their understanding of different cultures and beliefs in the world around them.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms	
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children start Nursery with overall skills in line with those expected for their age. They settle happily and confidently into routines and make good progress. By the time they join Year 1 nearly all are exceeding the levels expected of them for their age. Children display early maturity, respond well to adults' high expectations and encouragement and get on really well with each other. Consequently, their behaviour is very good. During activities which stimulate their natural curiosity and keenness to learn they thrive, for example planting sunflower and pumpkin seeds recognising the fact that one will grow 'tall and thin' and one will 'be low and fat'. Although the outdoor area has been extended and provides open access, opportunities to explore, investigate and act out roles are currently limited. Adult-led learning is characterised by skilled use of questions to prompt and consolidate children's skills and thinking. As pupils move confidently between activities, adults promote learning effectively, although the use of questions and prompts to extend children's understanding is sometimes variable. Systematic use is made of the teaching of letters and sounds to promote early reading and writing. Good leadership and management ensure that welfare practice goes beyond that required. Recording of children's achievements is developing well with some very positive contributions from parents and carers. Staff work hard as a team to make certain that those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those newly enrolled or those whose circumstances potentially make them vulnerable make equal progress.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

A minority of parents and carers returned the questionnaire outlining their views of the school. Nearly all of those were extremely positive about all aspects of its work. Inspectors agree with the positive views expressed overall. Inspectors found that the very few individual concerns received were being effectively addressed and managed by

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the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Benet's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 140 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 359 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	80	57	54	39	5	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	111	79	29	21	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	80	57	56	40	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	81	58	54	39	2	1	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	93	66	46	33	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	78	56	57	41	3	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	76	54	61	44	2	1	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	79	56	57	41	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	77	55	59	42	2	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	68	49	66	47	3	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	75	54	61	44	2	1	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	98	70	42	30	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	98	70	41	29	1	1	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



24 May 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Benet's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Sunderland, SR6 9QU

I want to thank you all for the extremely friendly welcome that you gave to me and my colleagues during your school's inspection and for your readiness to help us. We thoroughly enjoyed our time with you.

We were impressed by your excellent behaviour and the exceptional relationships you have with your staff. St Benet's is a good school with a number of very important strengths. You obviously feel very safe and confident because of this. You certainly understand how to lead a healthy lifestyle and keep fit. Many of you told us that your teachers make your learning enjoyable and interesting. Your achievement in English is exceptionally high, although in mathematics and science it isn't quite so high. All of you make good progress. Excellent use is made of the links the school has with the local community, the help and support agencies and of course your parents and carers.

We have asked your headteacher, staff and governors to look at ways of boosting your achievement in mathematics and science by making some of your activities more demanding and providing more opportunities to practise your skills. We have also asked school staff to make it clear what you need to do next to improve in all lessons. This will help you achieve more and make even faster progress.

In addition, we have asked staff to make better use of the Nursery and Reception outdoor learning area so that you have more opportunities to explore and investigate and experience more stimulating role-play opportunities.

You can play your part by continuing to work as hard as you possibly can to make your good school even better. Thank you for helping with this inspection.

Yours sincerely

Clive Petts

Lead Inspector

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