

St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Blackhill

Inspection report

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 114248 |
| Local Authority | Durham |
| Inspection number | 338322 |
| Inspection dates | 9–10 February 2010 |
| Reporting inspector | Gillian Salter-Smith |

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 | 5–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 247 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr M Westgarth |
| Headteacher | Mrs Joan Lacey |
| Date of previous school inspection | Not previously inspected |
| School address | Pemberton Road Blackhill Consett DH8 8JD |
| Telephone number | 01207 502657 |
| Fax number | 01207 503237 |
| Email address | blackhillstmary@durhamlearning.net |

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Age group | 5–11 |
| Inspection dates | 9–10 February 2010 |
| Inspection number | 338322 |

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2010

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 19 lessons, observed nine teachers and spent around 60% of the time looking at pupils' learning. They held meetings with governors, staff and a group of pupils. They observed the school's work, the school improvement plan and documents relating to the safeguarding of children and the school's self-evaluation form. Eighty seven parental questionnaires, 98 pupil questionnaires and eight staff questionnaires were scrutinised.

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

- achievement of current pupils, especially the more able
- provision for children in the Reception classes and their development in communication, language and literacy, particularly for boys, and knowledge and understanding of the world
- the use of assessment arrangements to support learning
- the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and development of pupils' skills in this subject
- the impact of leaders in making improvements and raising achievement
- how well community cohesion is planned and its impact evaluated.

Information about the school

The school is slightly larger than average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is slightly higher than most schools. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and of these very few are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is above average. The school has a stable population with few pupils joining or leaving other than at the usual times. There has been recent significant building work undertaken with a new office and toilet area and two new classrooms for Year 2 and Reception.

The school has the Healthy Schools Award, the Intermediate International Schools' Award, a Quality Mark from the Basic Skills Agency and the Financial Management Standards in Schools award.

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St Mary's is a good school. The high quality of care and support provided by the school ensure that pupils feel safe and secure and develop into confident learners. Pupils enjoy school and learning and they behave well. 'School is fun and you learn too ċ' and 'My school is a safe and happy place to learn...' are comments typical of many pupils. Pupils achieve well and attainment, by the time they leave in Year 6, is above average. The curriculum provides excitement and challenge and good teaching helps pupils to make good progress in most lessons. On some occasions inconsistencies in the quality of teaching slow down learning. Children in the Reception class make good progress and enjoy learning and play. However, children's levels of development are not always assessed with enough accuracy when they start in the Reception class so that matching provision to their individual needs is, initially, more difficult.

The school's highly supportive atmosphere, based on strong Christian values, helps pupils to develop into mature and responsible young people. Pupils are highly conscientious when taking on responsibility within their own school and the peer mediators were impressive in their calm and measured approach to dealing with others' difficulties. The school council is very well organised and has given pupils a significant say in the development of many areas of the school. Additionally, pupils make a very strong contribution to the wider community. Pupils develop a good awareness of different cultures around the world and Europe but they are less aware of the wide range of cultures and backgrounds that comprise UK society. Levels of attendance are average and improving. Attendance is affected by holidays taken in term time.

Leaders at all levels, including governors, set out a very clear and common purpose based on caring for all pupils, keeping them safe and helping every one of them, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to do their best. A strong determination to raise achievement and improve the effectiveness of provision is reflected in the significant improvements made in many areas of the school's work since the previous inspection and the upward trend in attainment. Staff work very well as a team towards this common purpose. Secure monitoring and evaluation help leaders to identify correct priorities and make the necessary improvements. Improved mathematics' results for the more able pupils are an example of this rigorous process of self-evaluation and improvement demonstrating a good capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure teaching and learning are consistently good by:
 - providing challenge for the more able pupils in every lesson

- ensuring that there is close attention paid to improving basic literacy skills when they are used in subjects other than literacy lessons.
- Gain a clear picture of children's levels of development when they start school in Reception.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to understand and engage with pupils from other cultures and backgrounds represented in UK society.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils enjoy lessons, they concentrate well and are industrious. 'Teachers make lessons fun and you learn without realising it' was typical of pupils' views. They enjoy the opportunity to think out their answers and discuss their thoughts with a partner. They work well independently. They are confident in giving answers and most enjoy sharing their work with the class. In lessons based on the topic of 'Titanic', pupils responded very well to the stimulus of the music and the sample love letter. They used their imaginations very well indeed to produce imaginative writing, rich in vocabulary, that reflected the emotions and feelings of people in that tragic situation.

All groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities respond well to carefully focused adult support that develops pupils' independence and meets their learning needs. Attainment is above average overall and has improved significantly since the previous inspection. The school has recognised and tackled weaker areas of attainment and progress evident in previous years, such as boys' writing and the more able girls in mathematics, and improvement in these areas is seen in recent results and pupils' current work. There is no overall pattern in the differences between girls and boys.

The vast majority of pupils enjoy a healthy school lunch and can explain clearly what foods are healthy and what should be seen more as a treat. They enjoy running the healthy school tuck shop and organising the monthly preparation and sale of fruit 'smoothies'. Many pupils enjoy sporting activities in addition to the regular physical education lessons. They are very active at lunch and break times, making good use of the trim trails and other equipment with the help of pupil play leaders. Pupils have a clear understanding of right and wrong and are keen to seek solutions to disputes that might arise with other pupils. They know that other adults and the pupil mediators are there to help them. Pupils are very proud of their school and are exceptionally active within their own school in taking on responsibilities such as leading prayers in class and assemblies and acting as 'buddies' to other children. They are highly active in raising funds for charities such as the local hospice and charities further a field. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of education developing secure basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT that they put to frequent good use.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

| | |
|---|----------|
| Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning | 2 |
| Taking into account: | |
| Pupils' attainment ¹ | 2 |
| 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 | 2 |
| Pupils' behaviour | 2 |
| The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 |
| The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community | 1 |
| 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 | 3 |
| The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 |

How effective is the provision?

Teaching has improved significantly since the previous inspection. There are examples of outstanding teaching but also a few occasions when teaching is not as effective. Positive and supportive relationships between staff and pupils set an atmosphere of trust in classrooms where it is alright to 'have a go', make mistakes and learn from them. Well planned lessons ensure a good variety of activities that engage pupils well. Information and communication technology is used to stimulate and support learning. Most lessons move at a good pace and tasks are challenging and ensure that pupils think more deeply and work things out for themselves. The school's focus on improving the assessment and tracking of pupils' progress has helped to ensure that underperformance is recognised and tackled quickly. Pupils have precise individual targets that they say really help them to improve their work. Teachers' marking is supportive and gives very useful guidance on how to improve, although pupils do not always follow up or respond to the teachers' comments. Pupils are clear about what they should learn and increasingly assess their own progress. Work in books is mostly neat and well presented reflecting teachers' high expectations. In the very few lessons that are less effective, assessment information is not always used precisely enough to ensure that every pupil is fully challenged, particularly the more able. Occasionally, pupils' behaviour is not well managed and learning slows down.

Much of the work across the subjects of the curriculum is centred around a theme.

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

Pupils enjoy this approach a great deal and become very enthusiastic learners ready to undertake extensive research and write at length about a host of different experiences. Visits and visitors, such as Second World War veterans, add richness to their experiences. The development of basic skills is well thought through and is a clear focus in most, but not all lessons, across the curriculum. Pupils enjoy a good range of extra activities that include sport and music. French is a well-developed subject that pupils enjoy and has been supported through effective partnership with a local secondary school.

Very carefully planned programmes of support help pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to make good progress. These are especially appreciated by parents. The school ensures that every avenue is pursued in finding the right support for every child and their families. Several case studies of individuals show how pupils have been helped to overcome difficulties and are settled, happy and making good progress. The school's persistence in working with individuals and families to encourage good attendance has resulted in improving attendance. Despite efforts to discourage families from taking holidays in term time, the amount of absence for this reason keeps attendance at average levels.

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?

Leadership sets ambitious targets for itself, the school and for individuals. Rigorous monitoring of pupils' progress and of lessons by senior leaders helps to ensure that actions taken are well focused and effective in bringing about improvements. Performance management for all staff supports whole school improvement and individual professional development. Governors are part of the rigorous process of self-evaluation. They are kept well informed of pupils' progress and many actively monitor provision through the special interest visits they carry out. Consequently, they are in a strong position to be able to challenge leaders and hold them well to account. Governors ensure that statutory requirements are met and are aware that there is more work to do to fully develop all elements of community cohesion.

The school is a harmonious community and there is no racial discrimination. Staff are well focused on meeting every child's needs and recent improvements have helped to close gaps in attainment between girls and boys, and improve progress for the more able pupils.

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

The school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. Recommended good practice is adopted in much of the vetting procedures carried out for adults working with children. Child protection procedures and training are securely in place and good partnerships are established with external agencies to support the arrangements.

The development of community cohesion has been well planned and evaluated for its impact on pupils' understanding. Pupils have a good knowledge of a range of cultures different to their own through links with schools internationally. Pupils are involved with a number of groups within the community, mostly through the well established links with the Church community. The school is aware of the need to further develop pupils' awareness of the breadth of communities and cultures that are different to their own within the UK.

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 | 2 |
| The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being | 2 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination | 2 |
| The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures | 2 |
| 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 are happy and settled in the Reception class. A good range of activities engages the children and gives them opportunity for their own play and development, both indoors and outdoors. Having identified a relatively weaker area of development, a well-focused programme is helping children to gain a wider knowledge and understanding of the world. Staff are skilled in using talk to develop children's thinking and their enquiring minds. Their good knowledge of each child helps to ensure that activities are suitably challenging. For example, one child was challenged to add 5 to 99 because they were ready for that level of challenge. Relationships are positive and behaviour good. Children start the Reception class with very wide ranging levels of

development, but overall development is below that typical for their age and is especially low for boys' communication, language and literacy skills. Children respond well to the good care and support they receive, make good progress and are broadly in line with national expectations by the end of the Reception Year except that boys' communication and language skills are weaker. The school recognises this and is clearly focused on improving boys' progress. Leadership has well focused action plans and is aware of the need to improve the clarity of assessment of children's level of development at the start of Reception in order to meet their needs even more rapidly. The learning environment is attractive and stimulating. Health and welfare arrangements are securely in place.

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

Around one third of parents returned the questionnaires and a very large majority were supportive of the school's work. A number commented on their appreciation of the additional support their children had received and how this had helped their children to overcome difficulties, enjoy school and make good progress. Many commented on what a happy and secure place the school is and how approachable the teachers are. Inspectors agree with these positive views. A very small minority were concerned about the progress their children were making. Inspectors agree that there is some inconsistency in learning and progress from time to time. A small minority did not feel they were kept well informed about their children's progress. Inspectors found no evidence to substantiate this view and consider the school has suitable arrangements in place to keep parents and carers informed about their children's progress.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Blackhill 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 87 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 247 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements | Strongly Agree | | Agree | | Disagree | | Strongly disagree | |
|---|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|---|-------------------|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| My child enjoys school | 55 | 63 | 31 | 36 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| The school keeps my child safe | 62 | 71 | 24 | 28 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school informs me about my child's progress | 39 | 45 | 44 | 51 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school | 36 | 41 | 45 | 52 | 5 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| The teaching is good at this school | 39 | 45 | 44 | 51 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning | 36 | 41 | 47 | 54 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle | 39 | 45 | 46 | 53 | 2 | 2 | 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) | 36 | 41 | 45 | 52 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| The school meets my child's particular needs | 36 | 41 | 46 | 53 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour | 34 | 39 | 48 | 55 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns | 37 | 43 | 42 | 48 | 5 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| The school is led and managed effectively | 35 | 40 | 45 | 52 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school | 44 | 51 | 42 | 48 | 0 | 0 | 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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

| Type of school | Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools) | | | |
|----------------------|---|------|--------------|------------|
| | Outstanding | Good | Satisfactory | Inadequate |
| Nursery schools | 39 | 58 | 3 | 0 |
| Primary schools | 13 | 50 | 33 | 4 |
| Secondary schools | 17 | 40 | 34 | 9 |
| Sixth forms | 18 | 43 | 37 | 2 |
| Special schools | 26 | 54 | 18 | 2 |
| Pupil referral units | 7 | 55 | 30 | 7 |
| All schools | 15 | 49 | 32 | 5 |

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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.



11 February 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Blackhill, Consett, DH8 8JD

Thank you so much for making the inspection team so welcome when we visited your school. I enjoyed meeting the school council and talking to many more of you about your school. St Mary's is a good school where all the staff take great care of you and ensure that you are safe, happy and enjoying school. It was good to hear how much you enjoy learning and how much you appreciate the help you get from your teachers and other staff. You are well taught and there are lots of exciting events and activities that make learning interesting and good fun. Consequently, you achieve well. I was impressed by all the responsibilities you take on, the way you raise money for charities and the way you work alongside others from the church community. The school council deserves to be proud of the many ways it has helped to improve your school. I was very pleased to see how seriously you take on responsibilities whether it is leading prayers, being a play leader or being a peer mediator.

Your leaders, including the governors, are always looking for ways to improve and we have discussed and agreed some ways that the school can improve further. They are going to:

make sure that you are always learning at a good rate by:

- giving tasks that really challenge those of you who are more able in every lesson
- getting you to really think carefully about improving your writing and literacy skills when you are doing work in all your lessons, including creative curriculum time.

improve the way teachers work out how much the children in Reception know and can do when they join the school so that they can make sure they help them to make progress in the very best way.

give you the chance to find out about people from the wide range of cultures and backgrounds different to your own that there are in modern day UK society.

You can help by continuing to try your best, work hard and enjoy school. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

9–10 February 2010

Mrs Gillian Salter-Smith

Lead inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.