

St Peter's RC Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122368
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	340136
Inspection dates	6–7 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Andrew Johnson HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	127
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr Simon Lerche
Headteacher	Mrs Felicity Penny
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Northumbrian Road Cramlington Northumberland NE23 6DB
Telephone number	01670 716343
Fax number	01670 716343
Email address	felicity.penny@northumberland.gov.uk

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

T: 08456 404045
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. Inspectors visited 10 lessons and saw all the teachers in Years 5 and 6 and a sample of teaching in Years 7 and 8. They talked with students in lessons and held meetings with them, the governors and staff. The 47 questionnaires completed by parents and carers were analysed together with those completed by almost all the students and staff. Inspectors also observed registration periods, lunchtime and other social activities. Students' work and school documentation such as safeguarding information and records of students' progress were examined.

The inspectors reviewed many aspects of the school's work and looked in detail at the following:

- how successful the school has been at making improvements since the last inspection
- how teachers make sure all groups of students make rapid enough progress
- the effectiveness of leadership and management and the impact of partnerships.

Information about the school

St Peter's is a small voluntary aided middle school. The school is federated with St Paul's First School and St Benet Biscop High School. The first school and St Peter's operate with one headteacher and governing body but legally are two separate schools. The Year 5 and Year 6 students are educated at the St Peter's site in Cramlington. The school shares this site with St Paul's. The Year 7 and Year 8 students are educated six miles away at the St Benet Biscop High School in Bedlington. A small but significant number of students are from Traveller communities. They tend to join and leave the school at a variety of times throughout the year, although the overall stability of the school population is above average. Nearly all students speak English as their first language and are from a White British background. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is average.

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

St Peter's is a good school. Changes made since the last inspection have had a significant impact; for example, achievement in mathematics has improved and is now good. The curriculum which was satisfactory is now outstanding. The partnerships that have been established to promote learning are exemplary and, as a result, Year 7 and Year 8 students have learning opportunities that are precisely matched to their needs and abilities. Care, guidance and support have also improved and are good. The outstanding work of the headteacher has enabled the school to move forward quickly. By the time students reach the end of Year 8 achievement is good across a broad range of subjects. Students are well prepared for the next phase of their education and most go on to do well in GCSE examinations. However, the school recognises that progress in some subjects in Years 5 and 6 is slower than in the rest of the school, for example, developing students' writing skills. A number of actions to improve this situation were put in place last year and initial national test results in 2010 show that standards in English have risen.

Behaviour is outstanding and bullying is very rare. Exclusions are very rare. Students are proud of their school and very positive about the quality of the education they receive. A very high proportion of parents and carers who returned the questionnaires were pleased by the quality of education their children are offered. A small number commented on a need for more consistent communication about their children's progress and thought that more could be done to ensure homework was always set. The school is working hard to develop a better approach to this aspect of its work.

The quality of teaching and learning is good and pupils develop good skills, knowledge and understanding in a very wide range of subjects. The school is right in its ambition to raise the proportion of outstanding teaching. Assessment practice is generally good and makes a strong contribution to raising achievement. However, some teachers do not always use the assessment information they gather to monitor progress and set challenging enough tasks for the more able students.

Students feel extremely safe because of the good care, guidance and support they receive. The school mission statement 'learn to value, learn to give, learn to achieve', typifies the school's approach to the development of students' sense of social and moral responsibility and spirituality, which is outstanding.

Other effective aspects of the school's work include its strategies to promote community cohesion which are good. The school offers an inclusive environment and promotes equality of opportunity well. It is right to be proud of the welcome it gives to students from Traveller families, although the attendance of some of these children is low; when

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they do attend, they make good progress.

The effectiveness of leadership and management to embed ambition and drive improvement through partnership working is outstanding. Effective systems are in place for the self-evaluation of the work of the school. The systems used to monitor and evaluate its work are good and this, together with its track record, demonstrates it has a good capacity to improve. However, there is variation in the quality of the work of subject leaders and the impact they have on improving provision. Resources are deployed effectively to achieve good value for money but too little is done to share best practice across the two sites.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement particularly in English and science in Years 5 and 6 by:
 - – monitoring the progress of the most able students more frequently and with more rigour
 - – ensuring that students' targets are always challenging enough.
- Improve the quality of teaching by;
 - – sharing the existing outstanding practice in teaching more widely
 - – ensuring teachers consistently make good use of use assessment information to set challenging tasks, especially for the more able
- – enhancing the effectiveness of subject leaders in improving and coordinating lesson planning and target-setting.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students approach learning with highly positive attitudes. They enjoy learning and their behaviour is outstanding. In the lessons observed, students' learning was usually good and in Years 7 and 8, it is often outstanding. Students develop good skills, knowledge and understanding across a broad range of subjects in Years 7 and 8. Overall achievement is good by the time students reach Year 8, although there is a lack of consistency in the rate of progress across different year groups. National test results over the last three years at the end of Year 6 show that students reach above average standards in mathematics and broadly average standards in English and science. However, the proportion of students reaching the higher levels, particularly in English tests, is low. School tracking data indicate that progress has accelerated in Years 7 and 8 since the new federation arrangements were established. The small proportions of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress.

The vast majority of students say they feel very safe and in the rare cases of where they feel unhappy or worried they know whom to go to for help and advice. They have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet and lifestyle and have made a significant impact on influencing this area through their school councils. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their education as can be seen from the good progress most of them make when they move on to the high school.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
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	2
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Inspection evidence confirms the school's view that the proportion of outstanding teaching in Years 7 and 8 has grown significantly. In Years 5 and 6, although much improved, it is not yet good enough to raise the attainment of some of the more able students across all subjects.

In the best lessons teachers use their good subject knowledge to set interesting tasks and test students' understanding. They frequently use group work or practical tasks to ensure there are high levels of enjoyment and interest. Although assessment practice is mostly good, in a minority of lessons teachers do not use this information to set targets which challenge the most able.

The outstanding curriculum is closely matched to students' needs and interests. They talk enthusiastically about the range of opportunities they enjoy both in and out of the classroom. These include organising the senior citizens' party, winning the 'young cooperatives' competition and a Shakespeare-on-the-promenade event. The core skills curriculum offered in Years 7 and 8 makes a strong contribution to the good

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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development of students' work and social skills.

Care, guidance and support are good. The school works well with its partners to support students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Students whose circumstances have made them vulnerable also receive good support. The transfer between schools is seamless and students settle in very quickly. Behaviour is outstanding, although occasionally students and parents are confused about the inconsistent application of school rules at the two sites.

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	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

There has been outstanding leadership in driving improvement through the development of effective partnerships. School leaders are very ambitious for the future and have a clear vision of how to achieve their aims. The headteacher and governors have the full support of the staff and morale is high. Although subject and middle leaders know the vision for the school, their involvement in turning this into a reality is not as strong.

Governance has improved since the last inspection because governors are more rigorous in the way they hold leaders to account. They ensure appropriate child protection procedures are in place and safeguarding arrangements meet current government requirements. Effective systems are in place for the self-evaluation of the work of the school and this leads to a school improvement plan that focuses on the correct priorities for improvement.

All forms of discrimination and barriers to learning are effectively tackled and the school's promotion of equality of opportunity is good. The school has a good understanding of its own role in promoting community cohesion and works well in fulfilling this through its partnerships with Catholic and other faith communities.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
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

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The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
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
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

Views of parents and carers

The response from the great majority of parents and carers agreed with the inspectors' judgement that this is a good school where students are safe and well prepared for their future lives. A small number of parents expressed concern about the consistency with which homework was set; inspectors agreed with this view and the school has plans in place to address this issue. A few felt the school dealt with misbehaviour inconsistently across the two sites; inspectors found that misbehaviour was extremely rare and that the systems in place to deal with it were effective and consistent across the two sites.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Peter's RC Middle 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 47 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 127 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	19	40	23	49	3	6	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	21	45	24	51	0	0	1	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	11	23	32	68	3	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	15	32	26	55	5	11	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	12	26	28	60	3	6	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	16	34	20	43	9	19	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	13	28	32	68	1	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)	15	32	26	55	1	2	2	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	16	34	32	68	6	13	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	23	21	45	9	19	3	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	6	13	26	55	10	21	2	4
The school is led and managed effectively	13	28	24	51	7	15	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	18	38	22	47	3	6	1	2

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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	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.



8 July 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St Peter's RC Middle School, Cramlington, NE23 6DB

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

- St Peter's is a good school that has improved since the last inspection. A lot of this improvement has been brought about by the very effective partnerships developed through the excellent leadership of the headteacher.
- The progress you make in most subjects has improved over the last three years and is good. A lot of this is down to you and your excellent behaviour and attitudes to learning. Well done!
- The quality of teaching has improved and is good. The staff look after you very well and you feel very safe in school.

Your teachers, staff and governors want to make the school even better. To help them to do this I have asked them to:

- continue to improve the progress you make in Years 5 and 6, particularly in your writing
- make sure that teachers always set challenging targets for you
- ensure subject leaders work effectively together across both school sites.

I know the staff will appreciate your help and I wish you every success in all you do in the future.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Johnson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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