

St Hild's College Church of England Aided Primary School, Durham

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114270
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	357510
Inspection dates	16–17 September 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	175
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jane Holmes
Headteacher	Mrs Suzanne Lithgow
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 11 lessons and observed seven class teachers. They held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils and analysed 43 questionnaire responses from parents and carers and looked at questionnaires from staff and pupils. The team also looked at development plans, the pupils' progress data, 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 her reports.

- The impact of action taken to accelerate the rate of pupils' progress and raise the achievement and attainment of all pupils.
- The extent to which the Early Years Foundation Stage is effective and whether the available provision is being fully exploited.
- Whether actions taken by the senior leaders are improving the school's performance and building the capacity to sustain improvements in the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils.

Information about the school

St Hild's is a slightly smaller than average primary school. The majority of pupils are from a White British background, with a tenth of pupils who speak English as an additional language. Almost one tenth of pupils are from a Gypsy Roma heritage. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. The school is part of a national pilot scheme that enables all pupils to access a free school meal. A new headteacher was appointed in January 2010. The school has achieved the Artsmark Gold, International Schools status and the Impetus Award for Human Rights.

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**3****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****3**

Main findings

St Hild's is a satisfactory school which is improving quickly because the headteacher has established a strong focus on getting the best out of all pupils regardless of starting point and background. Consequently, there is a positive climate for learning in the school. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive in their support. One comment, 'We couldn't ask for a better place to ensure the right start to my child's life.' sums up their views. They particularly appreciate recent changes which have, 'Motivated and strengthened the school.'

The starting points of most children are below those typical for their age. They make satisfactory progress during Nursery and Reception, although opportunities to explore and investigate the world around them when outside are limited. By the end of Year 6, attainment is broadly average, although in science pupils' problem solving skills are less well-developed. Overall, progress is satisfactory but it does vary: for example, it is more rapid in Years 5 and 6 and slower in Years 1 and 2. Those pupils with special education needs and/or disabilities and those new to learning English as an additional language also make satisfactory progress. The impact of school action to tackle underachievement is striking in current Year 5 and Year 6. Here, pupils are on course to achieve above average standards in all subjects because teaching inspires and excites. Their good achievement and enjoyment is evident in lessons.

While some good and outstanding teaching was observed, in the majority of lessons in Years 1 to 4, expectations of what pupils should achieve are not yet high enough, and teachers' approaches to learning lack energy and imagination. Consequently, demands made of pupils are too variable, including for those who are more-able and talented. For example, not all questions sufficiently test these pupils' knowledge and understanding. The use of assessment to tailor activities to pupils' needs is improving, but practice is not fully embedded in all classes. Pupils' personal development is good because the school takes good care of everyone. Their behaviour is good in the happy, friendly atmosphere. Their enjoyment of school life is reflected in their much improved attendance. Pupils are challenged to think about the diverse world in which they live and willingly participate in a wide range of local community activities.

The headteacher is resolute in her determination to tackle underperformance and sustain improvements. She is ably supported by all staff. The governing body provide much expertise but recognises that their monitoring requires greater rigour. Robust systems to check pupils' progress are now in place and strategies to evaluate the impact of action taken are proving effective. Self-evaluation is accurate. Good links with parents, carers, local schools and external agencies, add to the momentum of improvement. As a result there is a satisfactory but strengthening capacity to continue

to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the rates of progress and boost achievement still further, especially in science, by ensuring that:
 - all activities allow pupils to apply their skills to solve problems
 - pupils are consistently challenged to justify their ideas, explain their methods and check their solutions.
- Raise the quality of teaching and learning, especially in Years 1 to 2, from satisfactory to good, by making certain that:
 - staff expectations of what pupils can achieve are raised
 - assessment information is used consistently to plan tasks and activities
 - there is a constant focus on achievement in all pupils' learning
 - all activities are purposeful and challenging, especially for the more able and talented pupils.
- Extend the opportunities for Early Years Foundation Stage children to explore and investigate when learning outdoors.
- Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils' progress and their achievement are satisfactory given their below average attainment on entry to Nursery. They are currently improving quickly as a result of better quality learning. Nevertheless, rates of progress vary across age groups. Current school information, confirmed by inspection evidence, indicates that Year 5 and Year 6 pupils are making at least good progress and achieving well, because learning captures their imagination, constantly challenges pupils' thinking and demands explanations. Almost all these pupils are on course to reach above average attainment, including in science where some imaginative opportunities are provided for pupils to apply their skills. The proportion of pupils on target to reach higher levels exceeds national averages. Teaching does not always engage pupils' interest or question their thinking sufficiently, especially in Years 1 and 2, and, as a result, progress is slower.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and provides a strong focus on mutual respect and successfully supports good personal development. Pupils display a good awareness of the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle and being safety conscious. They enjoy active playtimes and show patience and tolerance when playing together. Pupils are keen to improve the school and value their role in decision making. Pupils are confident that bullying is rare. As one pupil remarked, 'We don't normally have anybody misbehaving in here!' Pupils report that staff are close by to resolve any

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

worries or concerns. Older pupils display exemplary attitudes, listening to each other's views and ideas. This augments the positive climate for learning.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
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	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, but with examples of good and occasionally outstanding teaching. When lessons are more active and demanding, assessment information is used effectively to identify gaps in pupils' learning. When this is added to the successful use of open-ended questions and up-to-date technology, pupils' understanding and thinking is enhanced. In lessons where progress is slower, activities lack challenge, variety and pace, which sometimes lead to pupils becoming restless. Intervention and support promotes pupils' personal development well, although it does not always consolidate and extend their learning enough.

The overall satisfactory curriculum is becoming increasingly effective as opportunities are developed to link subjects together in more interesting ways, for example, visiting Eden Camp, as part of a Second World War theme. Planned opportunities are provided for pupils to apply skills, such as using information and communication technology and

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

foreign language skills across the curriculum. The recently introduced residential experience, together with a programme of visits and visitors, gives pupils an insight into the diverse world around them.

Good care, guidance and support provide effective help and encouragement for pupils, including those potentially vulnerable and those in challenging circumstances. Positive contact with the Traveller community is steadily helping to re-engage families with education. Good links with external agencies help to raise achievement and enhance well-being, for example, by significantly reducing the level of persistent absence.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

A significant strength in the headteacher's leadership is her determination to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Past underachievement and variations in the rates of progress are being successfully tackled. As a result the recent decline in achievement is being successfully reversed. As subject leadership is systematically strengthened and staff aspirations raised, the quality and breadth of learning is improving. Staff confidence, skill and talent are being effectively nurtured by, for example, embedding the use of assessment information to plan imaginative approaches to meet needs. Relationships with parents and carers are good as they are increasingly involved in their children's development. Productive partnerships with the parish church, local schools and Durham University enhance the range of first-hand experiences for pupils. The governing body is committed and supportive and increasingly pro-active.

Good safeguarding procedures ensure that all requirements are met, with good practices across all areas of the school's work and effective training to ensure that all pupils are kept safe. The happy, family atmosphere reflects the school's commitment to inclusion, although senior leaders acknowledge that pupils can achieve more and reach higher levels. Community cohesion is promoted well with good provision to broaden pupils' experience and understanding of other beliefs and cultures.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2

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

The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
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	3
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	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Most children enter Nursery with skills below those expected for their age, with communication and language development a particular weakness. Most children make satisfactory progress as they work towards the goals expected of them and enter Year 1 with below average attainment. Children receive good care and are well looked after. Consequently, children settle quickly and confidently and enjoy good relationships with each other and with adults. Welfare requirements are well met. Occasionally opportunities are missed to extend children's knowledge, for example, using visual prompts at the sink to improve hygiene skills and practice. Staff place firm emphasis on developing early independence, for example, encouraging children to have a drink and snack when they choose to.

Children are happy to lead their own learning. Adult questioning often triggers their curiosity and thinking well but the demands made are not always consistently challenging. Opportunities for children find things out for themselves when the learning area outdoors is limited despite the recent improvements. Adults work hard to provide enjoyable active learning, especially when Thumper the rabbit joins in! Although initial letter sounds and letter recognition are practised, opportunities to reinforce them are not firmly embedded in all activities. Regular observations are thorough and well recorded in a learning journal. Assessments of children's development are becoming increasingly accurate. Children's learning journals include many positive contributions from parents and carers, who are keen to support their children's development. Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving as the school moves forward and aspirations rise.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

About one third of parents and carers returned the questionnaire which expressed their views of the school. These views were overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of its work and all felt that their children are safe and happy in school. Inspectors endorse the many positive views expressed.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Hild's College Church of England Aided Primary School, Durham 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 43 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 175 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	58	16	37	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	32	74	11	26	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	24	56	19	44	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	24	56	19	44	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	29	67	13	30	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	44	23	53	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	51	20	47	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)	19	44	21	49	2	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	47	22	51	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	17	40	23	53	2	5	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	18	42	21	49	3	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	26	60	15	35	2	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	27	63	15	35	1	2	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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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.



Dear Pupils

I want to thank you all for the very friendly welcome that you gave the inspectors when we visited your school. We really enjoyed our time talking to you all.

St Hild's College is a satisfactory and quickly improving school which has a number of good features. We were pleased by your good behaviour and the good care taken of you. You obviously feel safe and confident because of this. You understand the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. The good links the staff enjoy with your parents and carers adds well to your learning. Some of you told us that your teachers make your learning interesting. Your school is taking positive action to improve and this can be seen in your rising attainment, especially in Years 5 and 6. In some classes, you are not helped to do as well as you can.

We have asked your headteacher, staff and the governing body to look at more ways of helping you to improve your work and make faster progress. We want them to expect more of you in lessons and to make your work harder. For example, we have asked them to make sure that those of you in Years 1 to 4 apply your skills to problems in science more successfully, so that you can explain your answers. We have also asked that the school improves the quality of learning in Years 1 and 2 so that your lessons are more challenging and interesting, which will help you make faster progress. Children in the Nursery and Reception classes enjoy the interesting activities provided for them. We have asked their teachers to help them to find more things out for themselves when they learn outside. This will help them to discover more about the world around them.

You can all play your part by working as hard as you can and continuing to attend regularly. Thank you for helping with this inspection.

Best wishes for your future.

Yours sincerely

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