

St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108838
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	309813
Inspection dates	6–7 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Moira Fitzpatrick

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 on roll	
School	276
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Paul Cook
Headteacher	Mr Michael Gallagher
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2004
School address	Grindon Lane Sunderland Tyne and Wear SR4 8HP
Telephone number	0191 5536080
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is slightly larger than average. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds, with less than 5% from minority ethnic groups. A very small number of pupils speak English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly average, so too is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has fewer pupils than usual with a statement of special educational need.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school. Pupils reach broadly average standards by the time they leave and their achievement is adequate. They make satisfactory progress in most of their learning from the time they start in the Nursery. The exception is in reading, where progress at both key stages is not as good as in writing or mathematics. Pupils take pride in their work so that handwriting and the quality of presentation are good and their books are a pleasure to see. Results of national tests for Year 6 pupils in 2007 were broadly average and the large majority of pupils made satisfactory progress from Year 2, though a few did not. Currently, school data indicates that Year 6 pupils are on track to meet the challenging targets set for them in this year's national tests.

Pupils' personal development is good, reflecting the emphasis the school places on developing qualities of respect, care for others and a sense of community. Pupils have a good idea of how to stay safe and healthy and they make a good contribution to the smooth running of the school. They work well in lessons and their good behaviour produces a positive atmosphere for learning. The school takes satisfactory care of pupils and ensures that they feel safe and secure. Relationships are good and pupils know where to seek help if they have concerns. Academic guidance is only satisfactory, because teachers' knowledge of National Curriculum levels is not always accurate. This means that work set for pupils does not consistently give them the best starting points for good learning. While the school has a good amount of information about pupils' learning it is not using this effectively enough to track pupils' progress towards short term targets.

Teaching and the curriculum are satisfactory. As a result, pupils make adequate progress over time. In better lessons, pupils are set work that allows them to work independently at their own pace because tasks are well matched to their needs. Some pupils do not make enough progress when they are withdrawn from lessons for specific learning programmes, either because staff have not been adequately trained to teach these, or pupils' behaviour deteriorates because the methods and resources do not capture their interest or motivate them. The curriculum provides a good range of activities to enrich pupils' learning which are very popular with all age groups.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. While self-evaluation is satisfactory, it has not been incisive enough for the school to recognise the weaknesses which are a barrier to better progress in learning. With additional support the school is now gaining a clearer picture about how to raise standards and success can be seen in the improvement in science. The school is benefiting from the energy and commitment shown by new staff. As yet management tasks are not sufficiently delegated to them so that they can contribute more fully to the school's knowledge of itself and so strengthen its capacity to improve. Governors give good support to the school and have a growing knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses so they are better able to hold it to account for standards and provision. There has been satisfactory progress since the last inspection and the school is adequately placed to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Provision is satisfactory and improving so that there are some good features, especially in the range and quality of activities for learning. Children enter the school with a range of skills that

are typical for their age, except in speech and language where they are sometimes below that level. They make satisfactory progress to reach the nationally expected goals by the end of Reception, though a minority of boys sometimes do not meet the goals for language development and personal, social and emotional development. The curriculum is well organised and a good range of activities is provided for children both in and outdoors. Teaching is satisfactory, but not enough use is made of the detailed information that staff gather about children's learning to plan challenges that would increase the pace of learning. Warm relationships and a good emphasis on regular routines ensure children feel safe and secure and quickly settle into school. Relationships with parents are good. Parents expressed their pleasure with how well their children are cared for and nurtured.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in reading especially in pupils' ability to read and understand a wide range of texts in all subjects.
- Improve the accuracy of teachers' assessment and their use of it to plan and track pupils' learning.
- Improve the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in those lessons for which they are withdrawn from class; improve provision and ensure that staff have sufficient knowledge to teach specific programmes effectively.

A small proportion of the school's whose overall effectiveness is judged to be satisfactory but which have areas of under performance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 Inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 1 and by the end of Year 2 reach broadly average standards in writing and mathematics, and below average standards in reading. This reflects the 2007 results of teachers' assessments. These assessments showed boys' attainment was well below that of girls.

By Year 6, standards in English are broadly average, though some weaknesses in reading continue to reduce the school's overall performance in English. Standards in mathematics are average. Although science is slightly below average it is improving and is better than last year's test results which were significantly below average. School tracking data shows that Year 6 pupils have made satisfactory progress from Year 3 and are on course to meet their challenging targets in this year's national tests. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally make the same progress as others, but on occasions when they are withdrawn from class for lessons their progress is not as good. This is because teaching assistants are not always able to teach new programmes of learning effectively, such as letters and their sounds.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Children enjoy coming to school because of the strong relationships and positive climate for learning created by staff. Their spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is very good and they show a sensitive awareness of customs and cultures other than their own. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of staying safe and healthy. They are enthusiastic about taking part in the many physical

activities offered during enrichment time. Attendance is at the national average. Behaviour seen in lessons and at break is good, creating a calm and relaxed atmosphere. A few pupils sometimes present challenging behaviour but they are generally well managed. Pupils feel safe and well supported by staff and report that bullying is rare. Pupils contribute to the school community in a number of ways. Members of the school council spoke articulately of their work and showed a concern for the improvement of their school. Pupils take fundraising events very seriously and help raise considerable sums of money for good causes, both at home and abroad. Pupils are adequately prepared for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and some good teaching was seen during the inspection. Teachers have sound subject knowledge and usually plan tasks that meet the needs of different ability groups. Where teachers' assessment of previous learning is accurate, there is a good match of work for pupils so they are able to work independently, make a prompt start with their tasks and their learning is good. This is not yet the case in enough lessons. Inaccuracies in assessment slow the progress that pupils make in some classes so that the rate of learning varies from class to class. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning when they are well briefed by teachers and are clear about the targets their pupils should reach. Again, there are inconsistencies, so that for some groups that are withdrawn from class, targets are not clear and learning does not move at a brisk pace. For some pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities the tasks do not motivate them or capture their interests to enable them to make the best progress possible. In these lessons, pupils can become disaffected and their behaviour deteriorates.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and adequately meets the needs and interests of pupils. Planning for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology is satisfactory, though more precise planning is needed to improve standards in reading. Teachers plan links between subjects so that basic skills are consolidated. For example, this year the school has a focus on improving pupils' writing about science investigations. There is a good programme for personal, social and health education, which teaches pupils about personal health and safety and contributes well to their good personal development.

Some aspects of the curriculum are good. For instance, the school has many links with the community and outside agencies to provide a wide range of enrichment activities. These are organised so that all pupils in both key stages are able to take part to extend their interests and develop their talents. The school plans a number of intervention and support programmes for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Some of these, such as a computer, mathematics program, give good support to pupils' learning. Others that have been recently introduced are not so effective because staff have not had enough training to acquire the skills needed to teach them well. A lack of monitoring of these new initiatives has prevented the school from discovering what is working and what needs further development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The care, guidance and support of pupils are satisfactory. Staff develop strong relationships with pupils, are highly committed to their care and try to respond appropriately to their identified needs. Nurture groups provide specific opportunities to enhance pupils' personal development and the school counsellor offers a valuable service for both pupils and parents. Procedures for safeguarding pupils' welfare and safety are in place.

The school has satisfactory procedures to track pupils' academic progress. However, this information is not fully used to check the progress being made by individuals or groups, or to find out if initiatives are working. Individual and group target setting is insufficiently precise to guide teachers when planning work. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is not monitored consistently to make sure that the work set improves their self-confidence and progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

High levels of staff turnover and absence have affected the school's progress since the last inspection. New staff have been appointed and are bringing new ideas and to the school. These skills have not been fully exploited because management roles have not yet been fully distributed. Nevertheless, all staff recognise the need to improve and the leadership team has made changes that are already having a more positive impact. For example, since the start of this academic year the school has taken advice on improving systems to raise standards and improve achievement, and links have been made with other schools to help it to move forward quickly. Impact can be seen in the more accurate assessment at Key Stage 1 and there are improvements to standards in science.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

8 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Sunderland, SR4 8HP

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school recently. You really helped us find out about your school quickly and looked after us well when we needed help.

Your school is providing a satisfactory standard of education. It is good at developing your personal qualities of respect, care for others and a willingness to learn. Your good behaviour does you credit and helps make your school the calm, welcoming place it is. We were pleased to see that you are making steady progress and that most of you reach your targets. We agree with your school that reading is an area that needs to improve. Your teachers have taught you well about staying safe and keeping healthy. We agree with you that they also take care of you so that you feel safe and happy and are able to learn. It was good to hear that you are well involved in improving the school, as well as in raising funds to help those in need.

We found that while most of you do well with your writing, a number of you need help to improve your reading skills and have suggested that your school help you to do this. We have asked the school to check that when pupils go out of class for extra lessons, the activities are more motivating and closely matched to their needs.

Finally, we felt very lucky to be in school when it was enrichment afternoon so that we could see how much you all get out of the many activities on offer. It was amazing to see how quickly some of you mastered those circus skills and how well you concentrated to learn them. A special thank you to the choir for such lovely singing.

Our very best wishes to you all for the future.

Yours sincerely

Moirá Fitzpatrick, Jane Beckett, Colin Dixon

Inspectors