

St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Newton Aycliffe

Central Avenue, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham DL5 5NP

Inspection dates

27–28 June 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Senior leaders have wasted no time in tackling concerns raised at the time of the previous monitoring visit. They provide a good education for all pupils, especially those who are vulnerable or have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Governors challenge leaders more robustly and are well trained to support the school. Senior leaders regularly check the school's work but do not always use their data as efficiently as they could to help them improve pupils' outcomes more quickly.
- Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge so pupils reach expected standards in most subjects. However, teachers do not often provide activities that require the most able pupils to grapple with the concepts and ideas in tasks so these pupils have limited opportunities to apply more complex thinking.
- Leaders have recently improved phonics teaching and it is now good. This year, more pupils met the expected standards in the Year 1 phonics screening check than previously.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to maintain the well-being of disadvantaged pupils but few reach the highest academic standards found in school.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. Staff are attentive to their needs and parents and carers work closely with the special needs coordinator to boost progress even further.
- Personal development and welfare are central to the school's Christian ethos and are managed well across the school. Older pupils are encouraged to take on leadership tasks in their spare time, helping them to become responsible and active citizens.
- Safety education is good. Pupils understand how to respond appropriately if they come across bullying or discrimination.
- Most parents and pupils agree that behaviour in school is good. Staff apply the behaviour policy well and pupils respond positively. A small minority of pupils display challenging behaviour but this has improved over time.
- In the early years, children make good progress overall. Assessments are used judiciously to plan the next steps in children's learning. As in the rest of the school, the most able children in the early years are not challenged sufficiently with their learning.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the achievement of the most able pupils by:
 - ensuring that staff do not miss any opportunities to deepen and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding in English and mathematics
 - planning activities that require pupils to grapple with the concepts and ideas in tasks so that they can apply more complex thinking
 - supporting the most able disadvantaged pupils to work at greater depth, especially in writing.
- Sharpen the systems for leadership and management that already exist in school by:
 - using data more efficiently to analyse and demonstrate the success of new initiatives
 - refining performance management targets set for staff so that they link directly to specific pupils' outcomes.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior leaders have worked swiftly to address the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous monitoring visit. New staff recently appointed to the leadership team ably support the headteacher in raising achievement, especially for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- External support from a team of advisers has helped the school to tackle many of the concerns raised previously. This external support consists of specialists from the diocese and the local authority working together with senior leaders. By working collectively, they have moved the school forward quickly.
- Leaders recognise the strengths in school and know where further improvement is required. They now work more closely with members of the governing body. Leaders share information more readily and with greater clarity to provide governors with a better understanding of the school.
- All senior leaders are committed to providing a broad curriculum that allows a wide range of learning opportunities. They are passionate about giving pupils skills for life and for future employment in a global world. During the inspection, for example, a group of French pupils were visiting the school. They worked cooperatively with pupils in Year 5 to learn about science, technology and mathematics, and all the pupils used both French and English to access their learning.
- The school uses the physical education (PE) and sport premium funding for primary schools effectively to increase the number of sports taught and to improve the teaching of PE. This contributes well to increasing pupils' enjoyment of school. Pupils told inspectors that they particularly enjoyed their dance and gymnastics after-school clubs. They said a variety of school activities helped them to keep fit and lead healthy lives.
- Senior leaders have established specific systems to check pupils' progress and to monitor staff performance. However, they do not use them efficiently to make even more improvements to the school. Often these different systems in school are not linked together to give the fullest picture possible of the information on how well the school is doing. Senior leaders do not set challenging targets for staff in their performance management and so pupils' outcomes are not as high as possible. For example, few of the most able pupils make more than expected progress, especially those who are the most able disadvantaged pupils.
- Funding for pupils who have special educational needs and disabilities is used effectively. Many changes to the school's special needs provision have improved outcomes for this group of pupils. Parents are very pleased to have increased contact with staff about their children's specific needs and achievements.
- Effective use is made of the pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils in that it helps the majority of pupils reach the expected standards for their age. Senior leaders monitor the progress of disadvantaged pupils closely but do not use data and other information as precisely as possible to increase achievement even further for this group. They do not use data effectively to demonstrate the impact of their support for

disadvantaged pupils or to set higher targets for their progress, especially the most able disadvantaged pupils.

- Leaders have created a positive and purposeful environment in the school, where older pupils have the chance to adopt many helpful roles and responsibilities. For example, pupils who are moving in to Year 6 next year have recently applied for the roles of head boy and head girl. Pupils have completed application forms, undertaken interviews and written their own manifestos in a mock election. Opportunities such as these allow pupils to gain a very good knowledge of democracy, responsibilities and the rule of law.

Governance

- Governors have recently worked with a national leader of governance to help them audit and improve their skills. As a result, the governing body now challenges and supports the school more robustly.
- Governors offer a variety of skills and wider contacts to the school. In particular, governors support the school with links to local industry giving pupils the chance to meet and work with many local engineering and information technology firms.
- Governors now have a better understanding of the school's finances and are more involved with decisions about staff pay and salary progression. They have undertaken a range of training opportunities to ensure that they can challenge staff and senior leaders effectively and constructively.
- Governors have supported leaders well with the challenge of recruiting staff. They manage periods of staff turbulence successfully and, as a result, good standards continue across the school.
- Governors ensure that staff receive appropriate help if it is required, and support senior leaders appropriately to tackle any incidents of weaker teaching. Staff are aware of the governors' ambitions for continuous improvement and share their high aspirations.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's record of pre-employment checks is compliant with requirements. Senior leaders attend training for safer recruitment and follow all the necessary procedures to appoint new staff.
- Staff keep detailed records of any incidents that show a cause for concern and report these promptly to senior leaders. Designated staff follow up incidents with external agencies as required, and are not afraid to challenge and ask for more help if they believe it is what their children and families need.
- Governors have reviewed and ratified all safeguarding policies since the previous monitoring visit. Designated governors for safeguarding monitor and check the school's work in this area robustly.
- Teachers and support staff understand all reporting protocols, including those for whistle-blowing and reporting concerns about pupils' attendance.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Over time, teaching has been at least good in different year groups and across a range of curriculum subjects. In some classes, especially those taught by senior and middle leaders, highly skilled staff provide some excellent opportunities for learning. For example, in a Year 4 class, pupils generate stories by using a games board and dice. Pupils enjoy the exciting format of the activity and use many literary techniques to produce imaginative stories.
- Teaching assistants often make useful contributions to learning, especially within the teaching of phonics. During the inspection, staff used good subject knowledge to pronounce sounds accurately and this provided a good example for pupils to copy. The teaching of phonics is good.
- Mathematics teaching has improved due to recent staff training. Teachers generally use precise instructions and clear explanations to ensure that pupils understand new ideas and concepts. In Year 2, teachers use these skills to teach pupils about tally charts and they use effective questioning to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding of bar graphs. Teaching in mathematics is now good overall but the most able pupils do not make as much progress as they could. Some staff do not deepen and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding readily. At times, opportunities for pupils to grapple with the concepts and ideas in a task are lost so that pupils do not develop more complex thinking strategies.
- Work in pupils' books demonstrates the improvements made to the teaching of writing. Pupils have many opportunities to write for different purposes, using a range of styles and genres. Pupils often use writing in different subjects to help them practise and consolidate their skills. They choose words thoughtfully and use new vocabulary to good effect within their own writing. The teaching of writing is good across the school, with particular strengths seen in key stage 2 books. However, for the most able disadvantaged pupils, progress is not yet as high as it should be.
- Staff plan carefully to provide tasks that meet the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers and their assistants work with pupils to remove barriers that prevent learning. Inspectors observed staff intervening sensitively to support pupils with hearing impairments. Likewise, teachers provided exciting tasks to sustain the attention of pupils with concentration difficulties in science and technology.
- In English and mathematics, teachers usually plan additional activities for the most able pupils to complete after they have finished the main task set. However, the additional activities planned are often too easy. Teachers do not set tasks that require the most able pupils to grapple with their learning, and this group rarely have to use complex thinking that might stretch their abilities further. In many year groups, teaching of the most able pupils is not as effective as it could be.
- Teaching is good in subjects other than English and mathematics where staff use good subject knowledge to enliven learning. Pupils enjoy learning a broad range of subjects. Older pupils give sophisticated answers to questions asked about robotics in their

technology work. Good teaching in science ensures that pupils develop skills linked to scientific enquiry and experimentation.

- Teachers encourage a love of history using very practical homework opportunities. Year 3 pupils, for example, were keen to share their historical models and research with inspectors. In addition, some of the Year 6 writing about historical events is very impressive.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Recent changes to pastoral care have started to improve pupils' emotional well-being and mental health. Counselling sessions support pupils who are vulnerable or who have specific emotional needs. Pupils appreciate the chance to talk about their worries and concerns. The school supports pupils' emotional well-being effectively.
- Pupils cooperate sensibly and respond eagerly to teachers' questions, often giving detailed answers. Pupils comment on each other's work constructively to point out success or suggest alterations.
- Staff value pupils' views and older pupils take on numerous responsibilities to support their peers, such as acting as playground buddies or making decisions on the school council.
- Pupils are very proud of their new prayer garden, which they designed and built in the outside area as a quiet space to think, pray and relax. This demonstrates how well the school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils talked excitedly about meeting the bishop who made a special visit to bless their prayer garden. Pupils said they felt honoured by his visit.
- Specialist staff are employed to deliver physical education in school. Pupils enjoy the chance to take part in many different sports and physical activities, with gymnastics, yoga and dance classes mentioned as particular favourites. Pupils understand how drinking water, taking exercise and healthy eating help to keep them fit.
- Pupils know how to stay safe at school, at home and online. They told inspectors that bullying did not happen very often at their school because pupils are usually kind to each other. A pupil commented that 'Nobody is made fun of here because they are different. Everyone gets along quickly and happily.' Pupils say that staff would step in promptly to protect them if anyone hurt, bullied or upset them.
- Leaders track and respond to information about pupils' well-being and behaviour effectively, but they could use their systems and records more purposefully here to show how their work improves pupils' personal development over time.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils generally behave well in lessons and during the more unstructured times of the school day.
- Persistent absence is falling, especially for disadvantaged pupils, because staff work closely with parents to stress the importance of regular attendance. The school does not authorise holidays in term time because they try to maximise pupils' learning across the year.
- Most pupils enjoy their lessons and are proud of their school. One commented that 'Our teachers are nice and work very hard. Teachers have been so supportive over the years.'
- Around school, pupils are polite, well mannered and courteous. They make visitors feel welcome by holding doors open for them, greeting them with 'Good morning' and stepping aside to allow them more space in the corridors.
- Leaders demonstrated that behaviour has improved over time. They showed that fewer pupils need to use the school's reflection room now because they rarely become angry, aggressive or boisterous.
- Inspectors noticed that pupils were articulate and keen to help others. For example, pupils raised large amounts of money at their Lenten market and donated their profits to local charities.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Outcomes for pupils have improved since the time of the previous inspection, particularly in English and mathematics. The 2016 cohort of Year 6 pupils made significant progress in reading, writing and mathematics during key stage 2. Most of these pupils reached the expected standards for their age at the end of Year 6 and were well prepared for the demands of secondary schooling.
- The school's own assessment information shows that pupils in key stage 2 also made good progress this academic year. The rates of progress are noticeably higher in classes managed by senior leaders. Pupils' books show that progress in writing is swift. Their work is neat and well presented. The books demonstrate that pupils' spelling and use of grammar have improved over the year together with better use of punctuation and literary techniques.
- In 2016, most of the pupils in Year 2 reached the standards expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. A similar number of the current Year 2 pupils have met expected standards this year.
- In both key stages last year, few of the most able pupils worked at greater depth in any subject and few reached the very highest standards possible for their age. In particular, fewer of the school's most able disadvantaged pupils worked at the higher level in any of the subjects of the national curriculum. Pupils' books show that teachers often miss opportunities to extend and deepen pupils' thinking in English and mathematics, especially for the most able pupils in each class.

- Pupils develop their phonics skills quickly in key stage 1. In 2016, a higher than average proportion of pupils met the expected standard in their Year 1 phonics screening check. A high proportion of pupils also met the standards expected in phonics this year.
- The school uses the pupil premium funding effectively to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make good progress in school. Most disadvantaged pupils meet the minimum expectations for their age and improved attendance has helped to boost their progress. However, few of the most able disadvantaged pupils reach the highest standards possible for their age.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their different starting points. Teaching assistants provide sensitive help for pupils with specific needs and teachers scaffold their learning well to hasten progress even further.
- Inspectors reviewed pupils' topic books to check on their work in science and other subjects. The books showed that pupils make good progress overall, especially in science, history and robotics.

Early years provision

Good

- Over the past three years, leaders have continuously improved outcomes for children in the early years. Disadvantaged children make swift progress because planning addresses any gaps in their learning effectively.
- Teaching in phonics is good. Improvements in reading ensure that more children now reach the expected standards at the end of Reception. Staff training in phonics teaching has resulted in at least good progress for all abilities. Children learn to pronounce letter sounds with precision as they decode new and unfamiliar words.
- In mathematics, children's achievement is broadly in line with other children nationally. Children participate in fun activities to help them understand and calculate with numbers. Teachers ensure that skills are built up gradually so that learning is secured. Evidence shows that children move quickly through different stages of learning to manipulate numbers and solve problems skilfully. For example, when adding fruit, they start with real objects then draw their own representations of a problem before moving on to the final stage of using formal calculations.
- Staff do not challenge the most able children sufficiently with their learning in the Reception class. Teachers do not provide enough opportunities for the most able children to think deeply about new ideas and concepts. Sometimes, tasks are too easy for the most able children and their learning slows as a result.
- Outcomes in writing have previously been lower than elsewhere in the Reception curriculum. Consequently, staff make this a focus for their work now. Children have many opportunities to write in different areas of the classroom and they use writing for many different purposes, such as to produce treasure maps in their pirate topic. As a result, children's writing has improved this year. Over time and across subjects, teaching is good in the Reception class.
- Leaders track children's progress very closely across the year. They use assessments effectively to identify individuals and groups who need more support, changing

teaching and provision to meet their different needs. This astute leadership ensures that no children are left behind in their learning.

- There is a calm and orderly environment in the Reception class where children are keen to work alongside their peers, sharing resources patiently as they chat about their activities. Children move around the classroom choosing tasks that interest them and staff offer children individualised support with their learning when it is required.
- Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their different starting points. Staff are trained well to provide specialist support for different groups of children. For example, special activities help children to improve their skills in speech, language and communication.
- Parents are keen to find out about their children's progress. Many parents contribute to the school's own assessments with examples of work children have completed at home. Partnerships between staff and parents are strong.
- The early years leader ensures that the school meets all the statutory requirements for health, safety and child protection. Safeguarding is effective. Staff work closely with outside agencies to access the right support quickly if it is ever needed. Leadership in the early years is a particular strength of the school.

School details

Unique reference number	114265
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10032115

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Katie Bain-Collins
Headteacher	Annette Sowden
Telephone number	01325 300 339
Website	www.st-marysrc.schooljotter2.com
Email address	newtonaycliffestmarys@durhamlearning.net
Date of previous inspection	14–15 May 2013

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- This school is smaller than the average primary school.
- A higher than average proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals.
- Nearly all the pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school has a higher than average proportion of pupils supported by additional funding for special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is broadly average.

- The school does not have a Nursery class and all the children in the Reception class attend full time.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited several classes to observe teaching and learning. The headteacher and deputy headteacher joined inspectors for some of these observations. Inspectors looked at a selection of work in pupils' books and in displays around the school.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school, during indoor playtime activities and at lunchtimes. Inspectors also reviewed the school's records of behaviour and other safeguarding documentation.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders and other staff, including staff with specific responsibilities for pastoral care and subject leadership. The lead inspector met with five members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. A representative of the diocese also spoke to the lead inspector by telephone.
- A group of pupils discussed their views of the school with inspectors. Inspectors listened to six pupils read and talked to them about their reading preferences.
- Inspectors considered 131 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors spoke to several parents informally in the playground as they dropped off their children for school, and met with two parents who requested a more formal discussion.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including minutes from meetings of the governing body, attendance data, information about pupils' progress, the school's evaluation of its own performance and its development plan.

Inspection team

Anne Humble, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Holmes	Ofsted Inspector
Deborah Ashcroft	Ofsted Inspector

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