

St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Blackhall

Coast Road, Blackhall Colliery, Hartlepool TS27 4HE

Inspection dates

8–9 March 2017

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| 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

- Governors and the headteacher have set a sure course for continuous improvement for the school. Their vision for the school and ambition to provide high-quality care and high levels of achievement are being realised. The school is improving rapidly.
- Recent changes in leadership and in the way the governing body operates have brought a sharper, more effective focus to monitoring and evaluating teaching and its impact on pupils' progress.
- Pupils make strong progress from different starting points across a wide range of subjects, including in English and mathematics.
- Leaders monitor the quality of teaching and the progress that pupils make regularly. They have an accurate understanding of how well pupils learn. Leaders recognise that they need to hone their skills further in developing individual teachers' skills.
- Teaching is effective. Staff know pupils' learning needs very well. They plan engaging lessons effectively. Teachers check pupils' understanding, but do not use answers to challenge pupils' learning further. Staff maintain high expectations of pupils' conduct.
- Pupils behave well and apply themselves to their learning. They feel safe and cared for. They enjoy school life and feel valued as members of the school community.
- Pupils develop a refined sense of right and wrong, are considerate and respect each other's differences.
- Pupils have a deep understanding of children's and human rights. They know about different backgrounds, cultures, traditions and lifestyles. As a consequence, they are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- Governors have strengthened their focus on pupils' learning and progress. They have good knowledge of the school's performance. They have become much more challenging in holding leaders firmly to account.
- Children in the early years flourish. Well-led staff use accurate assessment to plan activities that support children's development and learning. As a result, children develop their communication and language and their personal development skills very well. Children are kept safe and love their time in school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by developing the skills of recently appointed senior and middle leaders to sustain further improvements in teaching, learning and assessment.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by using questioning more consistently to challenge and stretch pupils' thinking, when pupils are ready to move forward in their learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Governors and the headteacher share a well-articulated vision for the school. Their ambition for pupils motivates staff to provide high levels of care and good opportunities for pupils to develop the personal skills they need to flourish and achieve well. Pupils understand and respond to their day-to-day experiences in school positively. As a result, they make good progress across a range of subjects, including in English and mathematics. The school is improving quickly.
- Governors and senior leaders analyse information about the school and have an accurate understanding of its performance. They have demonstrated the capacity to address the areas of weakness identified in the outcomes for pupils in 2016 rigorously and rapidly. As a consequence, good teaching has a positive impact on pupils' learning. Pupils from different starting points, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are making much faster progress than was the case last year, especially at key stage 2.
- The headteacher and other leaders, many of whom are new to their posts, plan and monitor actions to improve teaching, learning and assessment. They link their findings to whole-school and individual staff development. Leaders have introduced, and are continuing to develop, new schemes of work. They recognise that further work is needed to ensure closer alignment between the curriculum plans and assessments, and use them to develop teachers' individual skills further. Staff value their continuing professional development because they feel valued and understand the contribution it makes in meeting pupils' needs.
- Subject leaders participate in local networks to moderate pupils' work and share best practices that help pupils learn well. By doing so, leaders, with the headteacher, have refocused the core work of the school firmly on pupils' learning and personal development.
- The headteacher checks that leadership in the early years, including in the provision for two-year-old children, is effective. Insightful leadership, accurate assessment and healthy partnerships with parents and other external teams ensure effective provision and good outcomes for children.
- Leaders organise the curriculum to provide pupils with wide and interesting age-appropriate learning opportunities. Learning and the good progress seen in pupils' books in science and a wide range of other subject areas, such as design technology, history and religious studies, are supported effectively by well-developed programmes of study in English and mathematics. Curriculum time for art, physical education, music and modern foreign languages ensures a good breadth of learning for all pupils.
- After-school clubs, such as the drama, cookery and sports clubs, extend pupils' opportunities to learn in different ways. Broad-ranging educational visits both enrich pupils' academic learning and enhance their interpersonal skills. The curriculum and good-quality teaching prepare pupils well for their next steps as they transfer into secondary school.

- Leaders' work in developing a coherent and well-considered personal, health, social and economic education programme is a strength. Alongside Catholic values, reflecting the religious character of the school, pupils' learning about children's and human rights enhances the school's work to promote diversity and equality. Frequent opportunities to talk about and practise rights respecting principles, as promoted by Unicef, help keep pupils safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.
- Pupils learn about fundamental British values and the part they can play as young members of society. Pupils are curious about differences in others' backgrounds, beliefs and lifestyles, and are open to, and respectful and tolerant of them.
- Leaders ensure that the personal, health, social and economic education programme keeps a firm focus on pupils' understanding of the importance of healthy relationships, and how to keep well physically and emotionally.
- Pupils know that they have an important role in showing respect for others and ensuring that bullying in school does not happen, or is dealt with effectively. They learn how to keep safe using the internet and mobile technology. As a consequence, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Governance of the school

- Governance is effective. Governors challenge school leaders and themselves by:
 - restructuring governance committee responsibilities to refocus firmly on the learning and progress made by all groups of pupils
 - planning effective use of the primary physical education and sport premium – specialist staff are employed to ensure that pupils build their movement, strength and sports skills incrementally; this contributes to their wider learning, promotes healthy lifestyles and establishes positive habits
 - ensuring, with senior leaders, that additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is used wisely – they plan spending carefully to address specific weaknesses in pupils' learning; effective interventions help these pupils to learn well, and they make good progress as a result
 - visiting the school more frequently than in the past to check that key priorities, which lead to improved outcomes for pupils, are being pursued rigorously
 - making effective use of performance management to celebrate the school's achievements and set targets to challenge the headteacher and staff further – they link pay progression to improving teaching and outcomes for pupils, and ensure that professional development supports staff members' professional practice.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- Governors ensure that the arrangements to keep pupils safe and to safeguard them are up to date and reviewed regularly. Staff are well trained, keep a sharp eye out for any signs of neglect or abuse and know what to do if they have a concern. Governors make sure that safer recruitment practices are followed. All the necessary checks to make sure that only suitable adults work with children are carried out and recorded carefully.
- Governors and leaders maintain a culture of safeguarding by making effective use of a range of external teams to support pupils and their families, provide early intervention when it is needed, and respond to any issues that emerge. Staff talk with pupils in age-appropriate ways to help them understand a range of risks, from crossing a road safely, to the dangers of alcohol and substance misuse. As a result, pupils learn to think about possible consequences and how they can act to keep themselves safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is effective. Teachers use their good subject knowledge and knowledge of pupils' needs to plan interesting and engaging lessons. Teachers maintain high expectations of pupils' conduct. As a result, pupils enjoy their learning, participate in lessons enthusiastically and try hard to complete their tasks well.
- Staff are skilled at developing positive relationships with pupils that encourage and enhance learning, and help pupils to make good progress. As a result of this effective partnership in learning, pupils pay good attention to instructions, and feel confident to ask questions and make suggestions.
- Staff are adept at asking questions to make sure that pupils have not misunderstood key learning points. Staff correct pupils' understanding if this is the case, with well-judged, additional explanations or examples. However, on occasion, staff are less effective in using questioning to check when pupils are ready to be moved on, by reshaping and increasing the challenge in learning tasks. As a consequence, at these points, opportunities to deepen and stretch pupils' thinking and make the very best rates of progress can be missed.
- Teachers use a common approach to feedback on learning, which leaders have developed, taking into account pupils' ideas and views. As a result, pupils are helped to understand how well they are learning. The homework that pupils complete, particularly in reading, brings them enjoyment and supports their wider learning effectively.
- Phonics teaching is effective. From the early years upwards, pupils learn and make good use of their phonics skills to help them decode and make sense of words. Careful assessment of pupils' recognition of sounds and letters is used to 'scaffold' learning skilfully. As a result, pupils become increasingly confident readers. This supports their access to the wider curriculum and the progress they make across a range of subjects.

- Pupils have frequent opportunities to debate and discuss their learning. For example, in a key stage 1 lesson, pupils were excited to discuss their observations of the numbers of cars they saw of different colours. They shared their information effectively to create block graphs to represent their findings and present to other groups. By combining both their numeracy and communication skills during this lesson, pupils were able to explain with increasing precision their understanding of number and ratio.
- Pupils are given time to explore and deepen their thinking. Work seen in books in key stage 2, for example, showed a highly reflective and thoughtful response to their learning about evolution. Pupils were keen to go well beyond learning facts, by recording their personal responses to how it relates to human society. They linked their understanding of differences in species to the different backgrounds, cultures and needs of people around the world. Pupils recorded their thinking about how the rights-respecting 'golden thread' of the school's personal development programme related to their scientific knowledge and the religious values of the school.
- The school's coherent personal, health, social and economic education programme that promotes equality and diversity effectively means that teachers rarely have to deal with bullying or challenge stereotypes or derogatory language. Nevertheless, staff are consistent in giving reminders of their high expectations for respect for others and collaborative approaches to learning, when needed.
- Leaders have changed the report format for parents recently. Reports are informative and provide detailed information about how well pupils are learning. They are explicit about the key areas for improvement. This helps parents understand and support the school's work to improve pupils' learning, and the contribution they can make to it. Pupils, too, are involved in the reporting process by recording their responses and what they are going to do to improve their rates of progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils are proud to be members of their school and the part they play in it. The strong relationships they share with staff help them develop confidence as learners. Their positive attitudes contribute to the good progress they make, and they are proud of their achievements.
- The religious character of the school and the focus on respecting the rights of others support pupils in understanding and celebrating differences in people's backgrounds, lifestyles, beliefs and traditions. Pupils have, as a result, a well-defined sense of right and wrong and grow in understanding of their responsibilities towards others.
- Pupils learn about different types of bullying and the harm it can cause. They are sensitive to the needs of others, in the way they listen and respond to each other in lessons and at breaks and lunchtime. They are confident that bullying is rare and will always be dealt with by staff if it occurs.

- From the early years onwards, pupils learn about other parts of the world. For example, children in the early years were learning about some of the key similarities and differences between life in Peru and in England. This helps children gain a wider understanding of the world around them, and prepares them well for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils learn about how to eat healthily and enjoy physical activities that help keep them well, through physical education lessons and a range of after-school clubs. Pupils and parents are entirely confident that staff will help them if they have a worry or concern. This helps pupils keep well emotionally.
- Pupils learn about the risks of alcohol and substance misuse and how to keep safe using the internet and mobile technology. The school's work on developing pupils' understanding of healthy relationships supports their well-being effectively.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils share the high expectations that staff model and have of them. As a result, pupils conduct themselves well throughout the day.
- Pupils, through their good behaviour, contribute to the orderly, calm environment that supports their well-being and helps them learn by responding quickly to staff instructions. Parents and pupils say that behaviour is good. Parents are firm in their belief that pupils thrive, and are well looked after and safe in the care of the school.
- Most pupils attend school very well. Attendance broadly matches the national average and is improving. While there are small differences in attendance in respect of individual pupils, overall there is little difference in the attendance of pupils from different groups, such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school's work with pupils and families is reducing the small number of pupils who do not attend regularly enough.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Attainment, in particular at key stage 2 in 2016, was low in some aspects, especially in mathematics. However, current pupils make good progress, considering their different starting points, across a wide range of subjects, including in English and mathematics. This is because teaching and the rich, varied curriculum, alongside positive attitudes to learning, is effective. Progress that was slower than expected, in classes where there had been significant changes in staffing, is now accelerating quickly.
- Leaders at all levels, including those new to their posts, have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to improve teaching. As a consequence of their sharper focus on learning, pupils are making much faster progress than previously and are more confident in reapplying their learning, including in formal assessment and test conditions.

- The work seen in a wide range of pupils' books confirms leaders' assessments that progress is good. Teachers' checks on samples of pupils' work are moderated regularly with those of other local schools. This provides the school with confidence in the accuracy of its assessments.
- On occasion, teachers miss opportunities to challenge pupils quickly enough to move on in their learning and deepen their thinking. At times, this limits the progress that pupils can make, including the most able. Nevertheless, good progress was seen not just in English and mathematics books, but also across a wide range of other subjects, including, for example, physical education, religious studies, science, art and humanities.
- The most able pupils are supported well to make good progress in both English and mathematics and a range of other subjects, because teachers use checks on pupils' progress to plan activities that match their abilities. Pupils use teachers' feedback to improve their work. As a result, an increasing number of the most able pupils are on track to achieve greater depth in their learning in mathematics and English.
- Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds make the same good progress as others. In some cases, their progress, particularly in writing, is improving rapidly and is faster than that of others in the school.
- Children in the early years, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, respond rapidly to the skilled work of staff to develop their communication, personal and social skills, through focused small-group and individual support and intervention activities with a range of staff. As a result, they quickly begin to enjoy their time in school and are able to make good progress in all areas of their learning.
- Well-planned interventions and support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities lead to good and in some cases rapid progress, often from very low starting points for pupils. For example, some pupils move rapidly during key stage 1 from simple mark-making to writing individual words and groups of words in a short space of time.
- Teachers' and leaders' work to develop pupils' early reading skills through their phonics programme is effective. A large proportion of children enter Nursery with communication and speaking skills that are well below those typical for their age. They are helped to achieve the expected standard in the national phonics check effectively. More pupils than in recent years are on track to meet the standard at the end of Year 1 this year. With rare exceptions, all pupils achieve the expected standard by the end of Year 2.
- Across the school, pupils read widely. They read with increasing fluency and comprehension. The most able pupils read with good intonation to bring their reading to life. As a result, pupils are able to reapply their skills in other subjects with the same levels of enjoyment.
- Alongside the effective support for pupils' personal growth, the good progress they make prepares them well for the next stage of their education. Older pupils are enthusiastic about moving on to their secondary schools.

Early years provision

Good

- Leaders, including those responsible for the provision for two-year-old children, ensure that children in the early years make a good start to their education. They do so by ensuring that assessments on entry are accurate, and that subsequent frequent checks on children's learning and development are used by staff to plan activities that interest children and prick their curiosity. Leaders make sure that they listen to parents' information about children's development and interests, when they make their initial assessments. As a result, children learn quickly to explore their environment and make effective use of the well-resourced provision to follow their interests and develop their skills.
- Many children enter the provision with speech, language and numeracy skills that are well below those typical for children of their age. Well-focused teaching and learning activities support children effectively to develop better speaking and basic number skills that improve steadily over time. Gaps in their communication skills and development close quickly. As a consequence, outcomes are increasingly secure in these areas and complement the growth in children's personal and social development.
- Effective teaching and standards of care support children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to make typical, and, for many, more than typical progress from their starting points.
- In the stimulating climate, the most able children are well catered for. Staff skilfully adjust the learning challenge to these children and they too make at least typical and often more than typical progress.
- Children love their time in school. They are proud of their achievements, from using the toilet and dressing themselves, to learning the sounds that letters represent in their phonics sessions.
- Children enjoy trying out new activities, using their creativity to test out their ideas. For example, water play engrossed children, as they worked out which containers of water made the wheel on their toy turn longest, or which models of animals would sink or float.
- Leaders and staff work effectively with parents to form an effective partnership that shares information on each child's development, adding to the overall impact on children's development and learning.
- Leaders make sure that the provision is safe, carrying out checks daily for any hazards. Staff work with children to develop their sense of safety. Children, too, carry out their own daily checks, for example to see whether water or sand has been spilled, or if anything is out of place.
- Leaders make sure that all the safeguarding checks required of adults working with children are carried out carefully. They are well trained in recognising signs of neglect or abuse and know what to do should they have a concern. The headteacher and early years leader ensure that all the statutory welfare requirements are met.

- The rich range of learning, including about the wider world, for example by comparing life in different countries, supports children's personal growth and learning skills. As a result, pupils are well prepared for learning in key stage 1.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 114280 |
| Local authority | Durham |
| Inspection number | 10023860 |

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.

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 2 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 83 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Paul Francis |
| Headteacher | Marie-Louise Binks |
| Telephone number | 0191 586 4308 |
| Website | www.st-josephsrc-pri.durham.sch.uk |
| Email address | stjosephsblackhall@durhamlearning.net |
| Date of previous inspection | 13 December 2012 |

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- St Joseph's RC Primary School provides education for boys and girls, aged between two and 11 years, from the local area in east Durham. It is a voluntary-aided school of religious character.
- There have been significant recent changes in leadership and staffing since the last inspection. The school is fully staffed.
- The chair of the governing body has been in post since the autumn term of 2015, and a number of other governors have taken up their responsibilities only recently. The responsibilities of different governing body committees have been redefined.
- The school does not make use of any alternative educational provision.

- The headteacher is a national leader of education. As well as being headteacher at St Joseph's, she is headteacher of a nearby infant school.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum requirements for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- A section 48 inspection of religious education was last carried out in February 2013.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector met with a group of pupils and talked to many others in classes and around school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other leaders and staff, and members of the governing body. The inspector also met with a representative of the local authority, and spoke with the deputy director for education for the Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.
- A wide range of documents about the school's performance and plans were scrutinised, including records of pupils' learning and progress, monitoring and evaluation by school leaders and governors, and the arrangements to safeguard pupils.
- The inspector visited all classes and observed teaching and learning. Some observations were shared with the headteacher.
- A large sample of pupils' work from different age groups and across a wide range of subjects was examined.
- The inspector took into account pupils' views, those of the 15 parents who expressed their views in Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the views of staff.

Inspection team

Chris Campbell, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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