

St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Meadowside, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, SR2 7QN

Inspection dates 24–25 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- From their individual starting points, pupils achieve well and make good progress. Increased rates of progress in 2013 mean that more pupils are making better than expected progress. This is leading to rising levels of attainment, and standards are now above average, particularly in reading and mathematics.
- Teaching is consistently good with some that is outstanding. Teachers have very good partnerships with teaching assistants and together they ensure that pupils access the appropriate support they need to meet their individual needs.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. In lessons pupils are fully involved and want to learn. They are very polite and well-mannered. Their caring nature towards their friends and to others is very evident as they work and play together.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils are strongly encouraged to become active and reflective members of society through a range of activities and responsibilities.
- Parents are highly supportive of the school. They recognise the dedication of staff who provide a safe and happy environment in which their children can learn with confidence.
- The inspirational headteacher is supported by an effective leadership team and a strong governing body. Together they have rapidly improved the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The proportion of outstanding teaching is not yet high enough to ensure consistently outstanding progress.
- Progress in writing is not as good as it is in reading and mathematics.
- Information on the school website does not yet fully meet requirements.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 20 lessons including the teaching of groups. Two observations were shared with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. In addition, the inspection team listened to readers from Year 1 and Year 6.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, pupils, members of the governing body, staff and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 54 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), as well as discussions with parents at the start of the school day and correspondence from parents.
- Inspectors took account of 43 staff questionnaires.
- Inspectors looked at a range of evidence including the school's own self-evaluations and priorities for future improvement, documentations relating to the monitoring of teaching, work in pupils' books, school data on pupils' current progress, planning and monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and safeguarding procedures.
- Inspectors observed pupils before school, during morning playtime and lunchtime.

Inspection team

Kate Pringle, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
David Bridgewater	Additional Inspector
Anne Vernon	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a much larger than average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those children in local authority care or for service families, is lower than average.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British background.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is below average.
- The proportion supported at schools action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The present headteacher took up post in September 2012 and there have been additional changes to teaching staff.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
 - ensuring that teachers always spend the right amount of time introducing new learning at the start of lessons and allow enough time for pupils to practise and learn new skills.
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to learn by themselves including through activities which provide more opportunities for problem solving and innovative thinking
 - ensuring that tasks always enable pupils to start at levels which challenge learning from the outset
 - ensuring that teachers consistently provide good opportunities for pupils to return to past work, make corrections and learn from mistakes.
- Improve attainment levels in writing, especially for boys, so that they match the levels found in reading and mathematics, by:
 - extending opportunities for pupils to write creatively and reflect their own ideas
 - widening opportunities to write at length across the full range of subjects making more use of different writing styles.
- Making sure that the school website contains information for parents which fully meets requirements.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Children start school with skills that are typical for their age although on occasion there can be groups of children whose skills are below expected levels. Until recently, pupils left school with attainment that was in line with national standards. As a result of improvements to the quality of teaching and better tracking of progress, unvalidated results for 2013 suggest that attainment has risen significantly to above average. Additionally, a greater proportion of pupils are making more than expected progress than in the past two years. Evidence from lessons and pupils' work shows that attainment has risen swiftly in other year groups.
- Children make good progress across the Early Years Foundation Stage especially in their personal development and well-being. Settling quickly into a warm and supportive atmosphere they quickly gain confidence as they take full advantage of a wide range of stimulating activities both indoors and out. Children show increasing independence as they dress themselves in outdoor clothing and show considerable enjoyment as they enter the wet world of pirates or make lunch in the mud kitchen. They confidently share their emerging learning with adults and enter into reflective conversations with adults and each other.
- The recent introduction of a phonics programme for younger pupils is highly effective and is improving abilities to read and spell well. Year 1 pupils are good at sounding out letters and sounds (phonics). They enjoy reading and identify common words confidently tackling those which are more complex. Progress over Key Stage 1 continues to be good showing particular strengths in reading and mathematics. By Year 6, pupils are very competent readers, reading with expression and enjoyment. They interpret texts well and use their reading skills to extend learning in other subjects both at school and at home.
- Pupils' achievement in writing is not yet as good as that in reading and mathematics. This is especially true of boys' achievement in most year groups. Although their attainment is above the level expected for their age it is often below that of girls. Presently there is an inconsistent approach to writing creatively, and there are insufficient opportunities to write at length in different subjects.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make similar good progress to their peers. Changes to how they are taught mean that more time is spent learning alongside of their peers. Their needs are identified quickly and they are well supported within classes and through working in small groups by skilled adults.
- Pupils who are eligible for support through the pupil premium now make good and often exceptional progress. Their attainment exceeds that of 2011 and the gap between their attainment and that of others has rapidly narrowed at both Key Stages 1 and 2. Present indications are that attainment is above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics for this group of pupils by the end of Year 2 and significantly above in Year 6 reflecting the standards reached by other pupils in the school.
- The use of the new sports funding is providing additional opportunities for pupils to engage in a wider range of sporting opportunities and this is encouraging pupils to develop healthy lifestyles.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The quality of teaching is good with some that is outstanding. Teachers are enthusiastic about helping pupils to learn and have good strategies to share their subject knowledge. They plan lessons which engage and motivate pupils so much so that they look forward to the next lesson with anticipation.
- Pupils show outstanding attitudes within lessons. They are fully engaged and excellent relationships with staff and friends secure a positive climate which enables them to concentrate on learning. Good use is made of talking partners to share ideas which help pupils to discuss their answers to questions.

- The best teachers think extremely carefully about the way they deliver lessons. As a result, their lessons demonstrate imaginative and creative teaching strategies which probe and encourage a two-way discussion with pupils. They ensure lessons move along at a particularly good rate and different abilities are effectively challenged throughout the lesson. As a result, all pupils make at least good and often outstanding progress. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson, pupils were challenged from the outset through an excellent use of questioning. Expectation was high and pupils knew this so they chose problems which they knew would make them think hard. Throughout the lesson the teacher checked understanding, picking up misconceptions and providing the right level of individual support.
- From time to time, teachers spend too long showing pupils what to do. This limits the time pupils have to practise and develop their skills. In some lessons, pupils have few opportunities to work on their own and solve problems. Occasionally, a few pupils are asked to repeat what they can do already rather than teachers providing tasks which challenge their learning from the outset. This can occasionally contribute to the slowing of progress.
- The marking of books is regular and thorough with clear and often challenging targets set. Teachers provide helpful comments about where pupils have gone wrong and what they need to do to move on. Pupils appreciate these, and the verbal feedback they receive from teachers. However, opportunities for pupils to respond to comments are varied and there are too few occasions to return to past work, make corrections and learn from mistakes.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Behaviour in and around school is outstanding which makes an excellent contribution to high-quality learning and personal development. Pupils enter the school without fuss first thing in the morning and immediately get on with the activities that have been prepared for them by their teachers. Lunchtime is a sociable event as pupils quietly engage in conversation with their friends and adults. During breaks and breakfast club children play happily, sharing, taking turns and looking after each other.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and enjoy coming to school, and their parents agree. Pupils understand very well what is expected of them including their standards of behaviour and what is not acceptable. They use this knowledge to reflect upon action and consequences of characters in literacy and in other subjects.
- Pupils recognise the different forms of bullying. They feel that bullying is rare and is usually restricted to name-calling. It is dealt with rapidly and effectively by staff. The procedures to address behaviour and bullying are shared with pupils in simple language and the school uses a week in the year to look at 'what bullying is'.
- There are numerous opportunities for pupils to take on responsibility and these are presently being extended. Pupils take on roles as buddies and young sports leaders and individually selected pupils look after the school rabbits to help them to understand how living creatures need care in order to thrive.
- Levels of attendance are high and continue to improve reflecting pupils' enjoyment of school. There have been no exclusions.

The leadership and management are good

- The new headteacher is inspirational and held in very high esteem by pupils, parents, staff and governors. They recognise the considerable strengths of leadership and praise her open approach. There is a strong sense of working together towards a common goal and successful improvements to pupils' outcomes reflect the capacity of the school to improve further.
- School self-evaluation is precise with weaker aspects of the school's work accurately identified as priorities for the coming year. All leaders contribute and are fully involved in developing their areas of responsibilities as they drive forward improvement.
- Outcomes for pupils have greatly improved because teaching skills have been enhanced and

underachievement robustly challenged. The school leaders make regular checks on the quality of teaching and use this information to guide support and training. Pupils' progress meetings identify pupils who are in danger of falling behind and are used to set the challenging targets for pupils and teachers. Teacher's salaries are directly related to their performance in the classroom and this is carefully monitored by governors.

- Work between teachers and support staff is highly successful and is enhanced by the effective engagement of outside agencies. Pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable receive the individual support that they need to play a full part in school life. Progress across the school for all groups of pupils is at least good and is sometimes better than this.
- The good curriculum is increasingly creative, exciting and stimulating. Pupils enjoy experiences within and beyond the school and links between subjects are being consistently enhanced.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is central to the school's work. Many opportunities support pupils' growth into confident, reflective young people. They take on responsibilities, and an ever-increasing range of sporting and cultural activities promotes individual talents, and a healthy lifestyle. Annual residential visits and a recent visit to London by pupils to sing at the Royal Albert Hall are two of the activities which contribute greatly to individual self-esteem and are greatly appreciated and enjoyed by pupils. Strong links with local residents, the church community and Australian pen pals widen pupils' understanding of those from different backgrounds than themselves.
- The local authority provides a light touch support for the school because the school is able to move forward without additional help.
- A review of all policies and procedures is well underway reflecting the changing nature of the school. There is much improved communication with parents since the last inspection, who speak strongly in support of the school and the staff's willingness to listen to, and address, concerns. As yet, the school prospectus does not inform parents of information of pupil performance sufficiently well.
- Statutory safeguarding requirements are met.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors express a passionate commitment to the development of the school and have been central to the rapid improvement that has been secured. Their roles reflect their individual areas of expertise and there is very good understanding of the strengths of the school. They know exactly, where further improvements are needed and carefully monitor progress towards the school's targets. Governors play a central role in the drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning and eliminate any underperformance. They are unafraid to hold the school to account, and continue to extend links with staff to deepen their understanding of aspects of the school's work. Governors ensure that spending is compared against outcome for pupils and have checked that the pupil premium funding has had a positive impact on achievement. They know how the new sports funding is being allocated and intend to check its impact.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	108840
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	425790

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	467
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stephen Armstrong
Headteacher	Lucie Stephenson
Date of previous school inspection	5 October 2011
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