

St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic VA Primary School, New Seaham

Mill Road, Seaham, County Durham SR7 0HW

Inspection dates	18–19 May 2016
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	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher leads the school exceptionally well. She has worked effectively with other senior leaders and the governors to secure significant improvements within the school since the previous inspection. As a result, the school provides a good standard of education for pupils.
- Governors are successful in supporting school improvement. They have a very detailed knowledge of the school and good strategic oversight of the aspects that still need to improve.
- Teaching is very effective in almost all year groups and in almost all subjects. Pupils consequently make good progress from their different starting points.
- Children in the early years get off to a good start. Their individual needs are understood and catered for well by a dedicated team.
- The small number of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are supported well. Consequently, most make good progress as they move through each phase of the school.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive. This has a beneficial impact on the progress they make. Pupils behave very well, displaying a strong degree of maturity and support for each other.
- The school provides very well for the spiritual, moral, social and emotional development of pupils. As a result, pupils leave the school well prepared to face future challenges.
- Leaders ensure pupils with special educational needs or disability have the right balance of academic challenge and pastoral care. As a result, their needs are met well.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The curriculum is not always sufficiently broad and balanced in Year 6, reducing pupils' opportunities to study a wide range of subjects.
- On a small number of occasions, the most-able pupils are not moved on in their work quickly enough.
- Pupils' handwriting is sometimes poorly presented and is not being developed effectively enough.
- The use of worksheets sometimes limits the opportunities for pupils to think for themselves, organise their work effectively and write at length.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the breadth and balance of the curriculum in Year 6 so that pupils regularly develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in a full range of subjects.
- Ensure that teachers build more rapidly on what the most-able pupils already know by providing more challenging work earlier rather than expecting these pupils to keep practising work that they can already successfully complete.
- Improve the quality of writing by:
 - providing more opportunities for children to have a go at writing on their own in the early years
 - reducing the use of worksheets so that pupils have more opportunities to think for themselves, organise their work effectively and write at length
 - raising teachers' expectations of the quality of presentation and handwriting as well as pupils' pride in producing neat and tidy work
 - providing more opportunities for pupils in Year 6 to write extensively in subjects other than English.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Since her permanent appointment shortly after the previous inspection, the headteacher has galvanised the school community. She provides a clear vision for the future and is held in very high esteem by parents, staff and governors. Her work with other leaders and governors has brought about the necessary changes required to make this a good school. Together they have worked hard to create an ambitious culture where most pupils learn how to make good progress and fulfil their potential. The openness and honesty of leaders when discussing aspects of the school's performance are admirable.
- Senior leaders are an effective team. They constantly evaluate the impact of their actions and are not afraid to question each other when they feel things could be better. This is having a positive effect on outcomes for pupils, especially those in danger of falling behind.
- Middle leaders who have responsibility for key curriculum areas are now having greater impact on improving teaching and learning. They have been afforded increasing levels of responsibility as their leadership experience has developed, allowing them to offer class teachers the support and challenge required to improve classroom practice.
- The performance of teaching and support staff is monitored carefully. Staff appraisal and performance targets are closely linked to those areas of school improvement that impact directly on outcomes for pupils. Professional development is also targeted on those areas that have maximum impact on the progress that pupils make.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and improvement planning is effective. Appropriate priorities are clearly identified. The action towards tackling areas for development is effective and progress is rapid. It is closely monitored and evaluated by leaders and governors.
- Most pupils benefit from an increasingly effective and engaging curriculum. However, this is not always the case in Year 6, where the preparation for end of year tests has reduced the time and opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in subjects such as history and science. In other year groups the school has created a curriculum that is relevant and valued by pupils. There is an impressive range of clubs and extra-curricular activities. Pupils were keen to tell inspectors how much they enjoyed their learning experiences.
- The social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of pupils is carefully considered. Leaders place a strong emphasis on pupils understanding their own heritage and that of other cultures. The curriculum provides many opportunities to understand democracy and the rule of law. There are donations to charity, including support for refugees and for disadvantaged children and the elderly in their locality. Cultural diversity is celebrated in events including visits by authors. Consequently, pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- Additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is used well, as is the funding received by the school to develop physical education and sport. Leaders and governors monitor the use of additional funding carefully, ensuring value for money and maximising the impact it has on outcomes for pupils, including their physical and emotional well-being.
- Support and challenge from the local authority has had a very good impact. Regular visits have taken place to check that pupils make good progress. This, together with useful advice, has helped to improve the school rapidly since the last inspection. The impact of the support of a national leader of education was clear to the inspection team, especially in the confidence and quality of leadership at every level.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors know the school well. They have a clear understanding of their role. They have ensured that the headteacher and other school leaders have been given the right level of challenge to bring about the improvements required to make this a good school.
 - High-quality reports from the headteacher provide governors with a wide range of detailed information which they use well to question and challenge. In addition, they find things out for themselves through regular visits. Consequently, they are very well informed of the school's progress and priorities for development.
 - The governing body carries out its statutory duties effectively. Governors ensure that performance targets for all staff, including support staff, are closely linked to outcomes for pupils.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Safety and welfare are given the highest priority by the headteacher, leadership team, governing body and all staff. Policies and procedures are robust, as are the

day-to-day routines for keeping children safe from harm. Staff training is up to date and carried out at a level appropriate to each member of staff's area of responsibility. During the inspection, staff and parents were able to explain to inspectors very clearly why children are safe in school. Initiatives such as ensuring pupils are aware of the danger of strangers and of safety on the road are seen as very important. Pupils told inspectors they feel safe at school and talked with confidence about keeping themselves safe when using the internet.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **is good**

- The quality of learning is good because teachers have created a purposeful environment where hard work and high expectation is typically the norm. Learning at St Cuthbert's starts from the moment pupils enter the classroom. Lessons are usually interesting and stimulate learning very well. Pupils say that they enjoy their lessons.
- In almost all classes, pupils make rapid gains in their learning because teachers plan work that requires pupils to think deeply about the subjects they study. In Year 5 for example, pupils showed a great deal of maturity in their work about the problems facing the North East of England. They wrote to local Members of Parliament and councillors to research their views and produced high-quality reports.
- Many teachers ensure that the lessons they plan build effectively and progressively upon pupils' prior skills and knowledge, making sure that most groups of pupils are challenged appropriately and consequently make rapid progress. Occasionally the level of challenge is too low for the most able. This is when opportunities to deepen understanding, or move pupils on to more thought-provoking activities, are not taken quickly enough. As a result, pupils over-practise simple work before moving on to the challenging work.
- In Year 6, pupils' progress in literacy and numeracy has been rapid. This has sometimes been at the expense of providing a stimulating, broad and balanced curriculum. Pupils in Year 6 have not always been given an exciting and inspiring curriculum to cover the full range of knowledge, understanding and skills that are expected in the national curriculum.
- Pupils are often taught about, and understand, how to be resilient when faced with demanding and taxing activities in their learning. Their very positive attitudes contribute strongly to the progress they make in lessons. In a mathematics lesson, pupils utilised these skills very effectively to overcome their initial difficulties to grapple successfully with a range of problems involving quadrilateral shapes and their angles. The application of mathematical reasoning skills across the curriculum is strongly developed.
- Teaching assistants work effectively, in partnership with class teachers, to support pupils' learning. They mirror teachers' skilful use of questioning to gauge pupils' understanding and deepen their understanding.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is a strength. This usually allows them to assess pupils' understanding and change the level of challenge. They do this by ensuring that appropriate support is instantly available to keep pupils engaged and on task when they are finding some aspects of their learning difficult.
- Teachers develop pupils' reading skills well across the school. Those pupils who read to inspectors did so confidently and fluently.
- A new marking policy is consistently used and is helpful in providing guidance for pupils so that they know how to improve their work. Feedback is immediate and incisive, helping pupils to understand misconceptions or take their learning on to the next stage. For example, in a Year 2 lesson, clear instructions and guidance helped pupils to write a diary about a seaside visit in the past. Feedback given by the class teacher and teaching assistant, as well as pupils' checking of their own work, helped pupils to produce high-quality writing of sentences with conjunctions, contractions and adverbs.
- Teachers plan good learning opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills across a wide range of different subjects in almost all classes. The use of worksheets in some classes and subjects limits the opportunities for children to write extensively and fluently. The practising of writing across subjects is not as strong in Year 6 as elsewhere in the school, but pupils use the basic skills of punctuation and grammar well in their English books.
- Occasionally the expectation of some teachers in insisting that pupils present their neatest and best handwriting is not high enough. Some handwriting is poorly developed and poorly presented.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils are incredibly proud of their school and their achievements. Those pupils who spoke to inspectors could not suggest any way in which they would change the school. They did, however, agree that sometimes they do not take enough care when they are writing.
- Pupils take pride in fulfilling their roles as school councillors, buddies and ambassadors and take a key role in supporting their schoolmates.
- They have many opportunities to work collaboratively. During their discussions they listen to the views of others with interest and respect, debating issues in a mature manner.
- An ethos of respect and tolerance permeates the whole school community. Those pupils who spoke to inspectors are clear that it does not matter who you are, what you look like or where you come from, everyone is welcome at St Cuthbert's. This attitude is evident in the playground where pupils of all ages and backgrounds play harmoniously alongside each other. One pupil summed it up: 'we are a family and we treat each other with respect'.
- Senior leaders place a high emphasis on supporting the social and emotional well-being of all pupils. Difficult and sensitive issues such as the plight of refugees are discussed in a mature way by pupils.
- Physical health is promoted effectively. Pupils develop a good understanding of healthy eating through initiatives such as after-school cookery club and the many sports that help to encourage a healthy lifestyle.
- The school also ensures children's emotional well-being is looked after through initiatives including a programme that promotes the mental health and emotional well-being of young children in many different countries and cultures. The school is rightly recognised by national groups for its work towards achieving the Rights Respecting School Award and has already received the Enhanced Healthy Schools Award.
- Pupils have a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Visits to school by organisations such as the police help pupils to develop a good awareness of the dangers of strangers and help pupils to stay safe on the road.
- Those pupils who spoke to inspectors are confident that bullying is rare in their school and are sure that adults can be trusted to deal with it immediately. Pupils are aware of the different types of bullying and they know how to report it if it occurred.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is always good and often exemplary. This contributes substantially to the good progress that they make. There are a few occasions when pupils demonstrate low-level disruption, such as talking over the teacher and calling out. This is due to over-excitement at times, but also because routines have not been firmly established in one class.
- Teachers are admirable role models who have skilfully cultivated highly effective relationships with their pupils. As a consequence, most pupils are confident learners who relish the opportunity to take part in lessons.
- Behaviour outside of classrooms is also a significant strength. Pupils move around the school sensibly and without fuss. Playtimes and lunchtimes are calm and pupils return to their classrooms eager to learn.
- Where absence has the potential to impact on a pupil's progress, school leaders are quick to intervene and work with parents to find solutions to problems. Therefore, attendance rates are above those found nationally and the proportion of pupils who are absent regularly is below the national average.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- Outcomes have improved since the last inspection. Most pupils make good progress as they move through the school. This is as true of their social and emotional development as it is of their academic progress. As a result, pupils are very well prepared to take on the challenges of secondary school once they leave St Cuthbert's.
- Pupils left school in 2015 reaching standards above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. This represents good overall progress, given their starting points.

- The proportion of pupils who achieve the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check is above the national average.
- By the end of Year 2, the levels pupils achieve in reading, writing and mathematics are broadly equal to those seen nationally, with very few pupils not at the expected standard as they begin Year 3. This represents very good progress from pupils' starting points. Less than half of the current Year 3 group achieved a good level of development at the end of the early years.
- Evidence seen during lessons and in books shows that all groups of pupils currently in key stage 1 are making rapid progress in all subjects.
- Achievement in writing across the school is good, though not quite to the same level as in mathematics and reading. Leaders' introduction of high-quality texts to inspire pupils' writing this year has had a positive impact. Pupils punctuate accurately and use a range of adventurous vocabulary to enhance their writing. Sophisticated skills are being developed by older pupils to subtly convey meaning to their audience. Whereas the content of writing is of a high standard, the quality of presentation, including handwriting, is sometimes disappointing.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics. For the past two years progress has been significantly above the national average for pupils in key stage 2. Books show that pupils develop mathematical fluency effectively and have opportunities to deepen understanding of mathematical concepts through problem-solving and reasoning activities.
- Disadvantaged pupils often achieve very well at St Cuthbert's, although the small cohort numbers in some year groups make national comparisons unwise. Evidence in lessons shows that progress for this group of pupils is at least in line with other pupils in all subjects. Senior leaders keep a close watch on the achievement of this group of pupils through analysis of assessment information and checks on pupils' books.
- The progress of the most-able pupils is usually good but there are opportunities to improve this further. This is because the most-able pupils are not always moved on quickly enough.
- Pupils with special educational needs or disability make progress that is at least in line with that of other pupils in the school. This is because the special educational needs coordinator has supported teachers well and helped them to develop the skills to plan lessons that successfully meet the needs of these pupils.

Early years provision

is good

- Strong leadership and effective teaching ensure that children get off to a good start in the early years. They increasingly make good progress from their starting points, so that they are ready for further learning as they enter key stage 1. The proportion of children leaving the early years having achieved a good level of development continues on an upward trajectory and was above the national average in 2015.
- There are high expectations of what all groups of children can achieve. Activities are planned that capture and stimulate their interests, ensuring that skills such as communication and language are developed well. Children make good progress, for example, when they consider the story of *The Hungry Caterpillar*, think about the sequence of the story and are prompted by questions such as what comes next and why?
- The indoor and outdoor areas are well resourced and provide children with a wide range of purposeful learning opportunities. Staff use a range of questions to stimulate ideas that help children to think deeply. As a result, they make good progress in most of the areas of learning. However children's writing is not as well developed as other areas of learning. A few children are not yet independent or confident enough in attempting to write without adult support because too few opportunities are made available for them to have a go at writing on their own.
- Children get along well together and happily share resources. For example, children pooled materials when building a home for a butterfly and talked to each other about the size of door they would need.
- Clear routines and high expectations are firmly in place and contribute strongly to good behaviour across the early years. Children are well supervised, cared for and kept safe by conscientious staff. As a result, children settle quickly, feel secure and are ready to learn. Highly positive attitudes ensure that even the youngest children remain focused on their learning and listen attentively to their teachers.
- The teacher and other adults use assessment effectively to plan learning activities that match the needs of all groups of children.

- The early years leader has gained a clear and accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and has developed a robust plan that is supporting further rapid improvements.
- Efforts to involve parents in the life of the school have proved successful and parents comment favourably on their children's start to their education.

School details

Unique reference number	114235
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10012020

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	201
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Helen Coates
Headteacher	Nicola Noble
Telephone number	0191 581 3090
Website	www.stcuthbertsprimary.com
Email address	seahamstcuthberts@durhamlearning.net
Date of previous inspection	14 January 2014

Information about this school

- This is a slightly smaller than average-sized primary school.
- Since the last inspection in January 2014, the acting headteacher has become the substantive headteacher.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium – additional government funding to support the learning of pupils eligible for free school meals or in the care of the local authority – is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well below the national average and the vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is also well below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is broadly in line with the national average. The proportion identified for additional support with an education, health and care plan is above average.
- In 2015 the school met the government’s current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils’ attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in all classes and some observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher.
- Inspectors talked to pupils about their work and took account of the work in pupils' books. They also considered pupils' behaviour around school, at playtimes and lunchtimes and asked them for their views on the school.
- The results of the pupils' online questionnaire were considered.
- Inspectors also heard a selection of readers from Year 2 and Year 6.
- An inspector joined pupils and staff in the breakfast club.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and staff with key leadership responsibilities.
- Discussions were held with governors and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took into account a wide range of documents including: the school's own check on its performance and the quality of teaching; the school development plan; governor documentation; information on pupils' progress; and records relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding.
- Inspectors looked at the 27 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, including all the written comments. They also spoke to parents at the start of the school day. Additionally they considered 17 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

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Ofsted Inspector

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