

Inspection of a good school: St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, New Seaham

Mill Road, Seaham, County Durham SR7 0HW

Inspection dates:

28–29 January 2020

Outcome

St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, New Seaham, continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are glad that they attend St Cuthbert's. They feel happy and safe. The warm and friendly ethos in the school is tangible. Parents, carers and pupils describe the school as having a family atmosphere. The school's values and faith ensure that pupils are kind and considerate of one another. They treat each other with respect. Older pupils look after the younger ones. Behaviour in lessons is good. Pupils are eager to learn. They get excited by the interesting curriculum content. They read often and widely. Topics such as Impressionism and the Vikings are rich in new knowledge. Teachers are improving the depth and breadth of the curriculum. Most subjects, including English and mathematics, are well developed. Leaders are developing subjects such as art and geography this year. Leaders know they have more work to do in some other subjects next year.

Sometimes, pupils fall out with one another, but the staff are quick to sort things out when they know about it. This means that fall-outs rarely develop into bullying. Pupils learn about their rights. Older pupils take on lots of responsibilities. Some act as anti-bullying ambassadors. Others are play leaders or buddies. There are plenty of well-attended after-school clubs to further develop pupils' interests.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders are improving the quality of education. A programme to review the curriculum is well under way. The curriculum is increasingly rich and vibrant in subjects such as art and geography. Leaders know some other subjects, such as design and technology and music, will need further attention next year. They are supporting teachers with their planning and considering the workload of staff sensitively.

Leaders have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They know that pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are making

good progress and attaining well in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Reading has a high priority. Children start to learn phonics as soon as they start the Reception Year. Lower-school staff are well trained in the phonics programme. Children make good progress in learning the sounds that letters make. Typically, over 90% of pupils attain the standard expected in the Year 1 phonics screening check. The few pupils who fall behind get extra help and most catch up. Leaders have bought new books that are closely matched to the words that pupils have learned. These books are helping pupils to read more fluently. Pupils' comprehension of texts is good. However, some of the texts used for comprehension work are too simple. They do not contain enough new vocabulary to extend pupils' understanding.

Pupils also attain well in mathematics. Here, too, the curriculum is well planned. Topics are sequenced carefully. Teachers plan interactive and lively lessons. There are good opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge practically. I watched Year 6 pupils measure and calculate the perimeter of the netball court and hopscotch area. This helped them to develop their understanding. However, in some mathematics lessons, some pupils cannot quickly recall mathematics knowledge they had learned previously. This is because teachers do not have systematic methods in place to revisit content already covered.

In history, pupils retain lots of details about the topics they have studied. Their history books are full of interesting facts and informative sources. Topics are brought to life through visits to places of interest, such as Durham Cathedral. Teachers make good use of the local area to help pupils understand their heritage. In art, pupils are now spending more time experimenting with media, refining drawing skills and appreciating the work of artists. Although their skills are improving, there are not enough opportunities to foster the talent of the most able artists.

Leaders have ensured that the curriculum extends far beyond the academic. Pupils are taught about personal safety, children's rights and about relationships. Assemblies introduce news stories and topical events. Pupils have a good awareness of how to stay safe online.

Pupils take care of one another and take their responsibilities seriously.

The quality of education is also good in the early years. The Reception classroom is vibrant. Children have a wealth of carefully planned activities available. They become engrossed in activities that develop their grasp of letters and numbers. There is plenty to stimulate their curiosity of the world. The early years leader ensures that there are interesting topics each week. During this inspection, children were learning about festivals. They could confidently write 'Gung Hay Fat Choy' on their Chinese New Year cards.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have made all the necessary checks on staff appointed since the last inspection. All members of staff appreciate the need to keep pupils safe. There are well-understood

procedures for reporting concerns. Leaders keep detailed records of these concerns and are quick to act when it is needed. The headteacher knows the community well and works effectively with families to resolve any issues. Leaders also work effectively with other agencies, when they are required to do so.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils across the school do regular reading comprehension. The approach helps pupils to retrieve information and to use it to justify their answers. However, the choice of texts used are often not challenging enough in vocabulary to extend pupils sufficiently. Leaders should ensure that teachers select more demanding texts and ask more searching questions, especially of the most able pupils in each class.
- In mathematics, some pupils' recall of content they have previously learned is not rapid enough. This slows down their ability to reason and solve problems. Leaders should develop more systemic approaches, so that pupils regularly revisit and recall prior content.
- The quality of the curriculum in art is developing well this year. The training and professional development that teachers have received are helping them to teach with more confidence. However, the curriculum plans do not include enough opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge of art and design independently. Leaders should introduce opportunities into their scheme of work for teachers to enable pupils to explore their own, more personal artistic responses. This would help to foster the skills of the most able and interested pupils.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 18–19 May 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	114235
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10121792
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	197
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Helen Coates
Headteacher	Nicola Noble
Website	www.stcuthbertsprimary.com/
Date of previous inspection	18–19 May 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school provides a Catholic education.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has appointed a new deputy headteacher and one other teacher.

Information about this inspection

- I met the headteacher, deputy headteacher, special educational needs coordinator and subject leaders and teachers. I also met a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- I spoke to a representative of the local authority on the telephone.
- I focused on the quality of the curriculum in reading, mathematics, history, and art and design. I met the curriculum leader of each subject, visited lessons, talked to pupils, looked at a sample of books and talked to teachers.
- I looked at other information about behaviour, extra-curricular activities and wider enrichment events offered by the school.
- I observed how pupils conducted themselves during the day.

- I looked at the checks the school makes on adults who work in the school. I talked to senior leaders responsible for safeguarding and looked at records of the actions they have taken to protect pupils at risk. I spoke to pupils to see how safe they felt. I also checked whether members of staff understand and abide by the school's safeguarding policy.

Inspection team

Chris Smith, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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