

St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School, Berwick

Prince Edward Road, Tweedmouth, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland TD15 2EX

Inspection dates

23–24 February

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- In all subjects too few pupils make good progress from their different starting points. This is also the case for pupils supported by pupil premium funding and those who have special educational needs or disability.
- Teaching is not consistently good. The school's assessment and marking policy is not always applied and this hampers pupils' progress.
- When teaching reading, time is not used well enough and lessons are not precisely enough focused to ensure consistently good progress.
- The reading curriculum is not effectively organised to ensure smooth progression across key stages.
- The early years requires improvement. Children are not sufficiently challenged by adults to think deeply, or come up with solutions for themselves as they play.
- School leaders' checking of the quality of teaching is not yet rigorous enough to ensure that inconsistencies and improvements are addressed promptly.

The school has the following strengths

- The school is improving quickly. The recently appointed headteacher has acted swiftly to bring the staff team together. They have high and realistic aspirations for pupils and the school.
- Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good. Older pupils enjoy their roles and responsibilities such as considering ways to help members of the community.
- Governors offer appropriate challenge and support and are fully involved in the drive for improvement.
- Sports premium funding is used well to broaden pupils' sporting opportunities and develop their skills. After-school clubs are well attended and specialist coaches provide effective teaching.
- Pupils behave well. They are polite and courteous. The school is a warm and harmonious community where pupils of different backgrounds mix happily.
- Pupils are motivated by the range of visits they make and the visitors who enrich the curriculum.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the frequency and rigour of checks made on the quality of teaching by all school leaders so that inconsistencies and improvements are promptly addressed.
- Raise standards and accelerate progress in reading by:
 - ensuring that teaching is precisely and clearly focused on developing specific reading skills
 - using time more effectively in lessons so that all children are practising their reading skills
 - ensuring that the reading curriculum provides smooth progression between each key stage.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils make consistently good progress by:
 - in the early years providing challenge to enable children to think more deeply and find solutions to problems for themselves as they play
 - ensuring that the school's assessment and marking policy is consistently applied.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Over time, the checks made by all leaders including middle leaders to ensure that new developments have been correctly and effectively implemented have not been rigorous or frequent enough to bring about consistently good teaching. For example, inconsistencies which were identified in the implementation of the new assessment and marking policy in the autumn term still exist.
- The reading curriculum has not been designed to ensure clear progression from one key stage to the next. This has resulted in an inability of leaders and staff to judge whether progress is at a fast enough rate.
- After a period of instability and changing leadership, the recently appointed headteacher has acted quickly to stabilise the school and ensure that the focus is on raising achievement for all pupils. She has rapidly gained the confidence of staff and raised morale. Staff report that it is now a pleasure to come to work and they are more than willing to 'go the extra mile' on behalf of pupils. Aspirations are high and expectations are clear.
- Many of the procedures which have been put into place are new and recently established so they have not all had time to make a sustained difference to pupils' progress. Governors are determined to ensure that those who undertake additional responsibilities and teach more effectively are appropriately rewarded. Therefore systems to check staff performance are thorough and are based on individual strengths and stage of career.
- Checking of pupils' performance and progress is now regular so school leaders can act more rapidly to identify underperformance and provide additional tailored support to help pupils catch up. Additionally, pupil premium funding has now been carefully targeted to support eligible pupils. School staff know pupils well and have a clear picture of what needs to be done to ensure that they achieve as well as possible. Where this is the case, progress is beginning to accelerate although it is not yet sustained.
- Leaders and governors know the school well and have correctly identified the main weaknesses which need to be tackled. Their plans rightly prioritise the need to ensure that the reading curriculum is tackled and that the teaching of reading is improved. The curriculum is making a positive difference to pupils' education. The curriculum for writing and mathematics now provides clarity and ensures continuity. There are good opportunities to broaden pupils' experience and motivate them, such as visits to Lindisfarne or gaining first-hand experience of handling reptiles. A range of after-school clubs add to pupils' enjoyment.
- Through well-focused training and development, the headteacher has successfully enabled teachers and support staff to undertake additional responsibility for aspects of school life. This has enhanced pupils' personal development and welfare through the introduction of a breakfast club and 'mini vinnies' – a group of pupils who provide support to the local community.
- Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is promoted very well and is responsive to the community. For example, younger children enjoyed learning about Buddhist traditions from a parent who visited them. Pupils are fully involved in preparing aspects of weekly worship in school and there are regular opportunities to reflect and think deeply, such as when writing a prayer. Opportunities to learn about different communities and consider those who need help support pupils' preparation for life in modern Britain.
- The use of the sports premium is effective. Increasing numbers of pupils participate in the different activities offered. All pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 learn to swim and make good progress towards reaching the standard expected of them by the age of 11. Staff confidence has been enhanced through the use of specialist coaches.
- Parents have trust in the school and the headteacher. They appreciate the range of after-school clubs available and the information they receive to help with their children's learning. They are well informed about school developments.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors are ambitious for the school. They acted decisively to ensure sustainable leadership when it was required, including providing additional support and guidance for the headteacher. They have manageable plans to ensure that improvements continue at a rapid pace.
 - Governors have swiftly addressed the issues highlighted in a review of their performance. They now have the correct skills and knowledge to provide support to move the school forward and to challenge where it is necessary.

- Governors have a thorough first-hand knowledge of the school, based on regular well-focused visits. This has supported them to gain a clear picture of pupils’ performance and the quality of teaching so that school leaders are held rigorously to account.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils’ safety is a high priority. Systems are thorough and staff are reminded to keep pupils’ welfare at the forefront of their thoughts. Leaders work with parents and other agencies, where necessary to ensure that pupils feel safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Frequent changes in staffing over time have resulted in teaching which lacks consistency across subjects and classes. Recently, staffing has been stabilised and procedures are being put in place to clarify expectations, such as the requirement to support pupils to develop their calculation skills daily. However, inconsistencies remain and the rate of pupils’ progress is therefore still variable.
- The recently introduced assessment and marking policy gives very clear guidance on how to support pupils to improve their work, but the policy is not adhered to by all staff. This means that opportunities for pupils to think more deeply about what they have learned and clarify their understanding are missed.
- The teaching of reading is not consistently clear or precise and this hampers pupils’ progress. Although phonics (letters and the sounds they make) is taught well and pupils acquire these skills at a good rate, other skills are not taught as thoroughly or systematically so that some pupils do not acquire fluency in reading at a quick enough pace.
- Time in reading lessons is not used well. Too many pupils are asked to read silently without a focus to develop their reading skills, so it is impossible for adults to check whether pupils understand what has been read or whether time has been used productively.
- Pupils are keen to learn and they set to work quickly and diligently. Time in most lessons is used well to build up skills and understanding progressively within a lesson and from day to day.
- Teachers know pupils well and ask appropriately challenging questions to check their understanding. For example, careful questioning ensured that the teacher knew a group of children were struggling to identify the difference between an adjective and a noun and she was able to intervene quickly to support them.
- Adults have good subject knowledge and this is used well to deepen and extend pupils’ understanding. Adults use correct enunciation of phonics, for example, so pupils learn accurately.
- Support staff form good and trusting relationships with the pupils they work with. They are encouraging and help to raise pupils’ confidence. The guidance they receive from teachers has now improved and this is starting to make a difference to the rate of progress pupils make.

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 feel safe and secure in the warm, family atmosphere of the school. All staff know pupils well and there is always someone to turn to if needed. Parents endorse this. They say nearly all pupils are happy to come to school.
- The recently introduced and popular breakfast club has successfully helped some children to have a calm and relaxed start to the day. Pupils are well-supported by caring adults to cooperate and begin school with the right attitude for learning.
- Partnerships with other agencies are used effectively to support pupils who are experiencing social and emotional difficulties.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language are supported to be proud of their heritage and to celebrate their similarities and differences. Pupils are encouraged to be considerate of others, and those who are recognised and praised in weekly assemblies.
- Good opportunities are provided to develop pupils’ physical well-being. The varying range of after-school sporting opportunities, such as hula-hooping and rugby are very popular.

- Pupils are encouraged to undertake responsibilities. The school council, for example, helped to provide information about e-safety to other pupils and this has contributed to their good understanding of how to stay safe when using electronic equipment.
- Pupils are not fully confident or clear about their learning and how they can improve. Procedures are now in place to help pupils know what they need to learn next and what to do to make progress, although they are not always consistently applied or clearly communicated so pupils' knowledge of these targets is variable.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Behaviour in class is good. Pupils are keen to learn and they cooperate well together. For example, they work in pairs to create exciting sentences.
- Playtimes are purposeful. Pupils are encouraged to play games and use the range of equipment available. Adults use playtimes to develop their relationships with pupils through relaxing and encouraging conversations.
- Pupils display a good understanding of bullying but say that they cannot recall it happening in school. Their views are supported by school records which indicate that poor behaviour, name-calling and disputes between pupils are rare.
- School leaders have introduced good procedures to ensure that pupils attend school regularly. Pupils are keen to come to school and receive an attendance award. Absence is followed up promptly. As a result, attendance has improved and is now close to the national average. Few pupils are now persistently absent.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- As a result of inconsistent teaching, pupils' progress across all year groups and in all subjects has remained variable. Too few pupils, including those who are most able, make consistently good progress from their different starting points in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Standards in phonics at the end of Year 1 have risen year on year and are now above the national average. Similarly, standards at the end of Key Stage 1 rose in 2015 compared with the previous year and were closer to the national average. Consequently, pupils' progress is improving but is not yet consistently good.
- Progress seen in pupils' books and on inspection is becoming more consistent and is improving. In writing, pupils use more complex sentences and their use of grammar is becoming more confident. In mathematics, pupils are starting to tackle more complex investigations with increased skill. However, this progress is at an early stage and is not sustained.
- The progress of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is also variable. Additional support, such as extra reading programmes, is now more carefully targeted but not all has resulted in sustained accelerated progress.
- Pupils who are supported by pupil premium funding make variable progress as a result of inconsistent teaching. Careful targeting of additional support is starting to make a difference to progress but again this has not yet been sustained.
- By the time they leave the school in Year 4, most pupils reach the standard expected of them in reading, writing and mathematics so that they are suitably prepared to move onto the next stage of their education.

Early years provision

requires improvement

- From their different starting points most children make expected progress through the early years. As a result, fewer than average proportions reach a good level of development to ensure that they are fully ready to begin Year 1.
- Adults do not capitalise on opportunities to make children think more deeply as they support them while they play. Questions, such as simple checks on children's colour recognition or number knowledge, are not demanding enough and often result in one-word answers.
- Too many activities offered to children restrict their opportunity to investigate and experiment. Adults' guidance is too close, so that children are not expected to think for themselves or come up with their own solutions. Sometimes activities go on too long and children's attention wanes.
- Adults form warm relationships with children and they settle to school quickly. Children are encouraged to be increasingly independent, such as finding their name when they arrive at school in the morning. They follow rules and routines well and move confidently around the early years unit. They behave well and play together.
- Teaching of small groups of children is lively and well structured. They make good progress in these sessions. Adults demonstrate new learning well and encourage children to practise their new-found knowledge appropriately.
- Assessments are accurate and made regularly. They take account of individuals' interests and capabilities, which is beginning to accelerate children's learning and development. Children who need extra help to reach an appropriate stage of development are now given additional support using the extra funding for pupils who are supported by pupil premium funding. It is still too early to determine the difference this additional support has made.
- Partnerships with parents are good and developing. Parents are encouraged to come into school to read weekly with their child and information from parents is used to help with planning.
- The recently appointed early years leader has begun to tackle weaknesses with enthusiasm and determination. The team meets regularly to discuss the progress of pupils and changes have been made to the outdoor classroom which has resulted in children's improved understanding of the world.

School details

Unique reference number	122309
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10002058

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	85
Appropriate authority	the governing body
Chair	Malcolm Frank
Headteacher	Clare McGregor
Telephone number	01289 307785
Website	www.st-cuthbertsrc.northumberland.sch.uk
Email address	admin@st-cuthbertsrc.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	23 October 2013

Information about this school

- St Cuthbert's Voluntary Aided First School is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is similar to the national average, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is over twice the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those supported through the pupil premium, is just below the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after.
- Children of Nursery age attend the early years unit part time and children of Reception age attend full time.
- The school runs a daily breakfast club which was inspected as part of this inspection.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have been appointed since the previous inspection, as have many members of the governing body.
- The school has received support from a national leader in education, the headteacher of Ponteland Middle School.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in all classes and scrutinised pupils' work, jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspector met with pupils to discuss their work and school life.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, other staff, members of the governing body, and representatives from the local authority and the Roman Catholic diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.
- The inspector observed pupils moving around school and during breaks.
- The inspector met parents informally at the beginning of the school day, analysed 21 responses from Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and the school's own survey of parents.
- A range of school documentation, including the school's view of its own performance, attendance and safeguarding, was scrutinised.
- The 11 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire completed by staff were also considered.

Inspection team

Susan Waugh, Lead Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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