

Inspection of St Aidan's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Moorhouse Lane, Ashington NE63 9LR

Inspection dates: 30 November and 1 December 2021

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Early years provision **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending this school. There is a strong sense of kindness and mutual respect, in which all pupils thrive. Staff know pupils and their families well. Communication between school and home is strong. Leaders ensure that pupils get the support they need in order to learn.

Leaders have prioritised pupils' personal development. Staff demonstrate and teach pupils good personal and social skills. The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils learn and play together happily from an early age. Children in Nursery and Reception quickly gain confidence and settle into routines. Older pupils show care and responsibility towards others, both in school and within the wider community. A growing range of clubs and activities helps pupils develop broader interests.

There is very little bullying. Pupils trust staff to deal with it effectively if it happens. Staff are alert to disagreements between pupils. They intervene quickly to help pupils sort them out. As a result, pupils feel happy and safe in school.

Leaders have high expectations for what pupils will achieve. They ensure that reading, writing, mathematics and science are well taught. Leaders have detailed plans in place to strengthen the rest of the curriculum. Pupils work hard in lessons, enjoy their learning and are proud of their achievements.

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

Leaders are improving the quality of education for all pupils. They have high aspirations for the school. Leaders have improved the teaching of reading, mathematics, science and pupils' personal development. This work is having a positive impact on learning for all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged.

Most leaders are new to their roles. They have begun working with experienced headteachers from the Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust. This collaboration is helping leaders improve curriculum plans for foundation subjects.

Leaders have prioritised reading and phonics. Staff in the early years are well trained. They take every opportunity to develop children's vocabulary and communication skills. Books and stories form a key part of the curriculum. As a result, even the youngest children enjoy talking about the stories they have heard. This means that children are well prepared for phonics lessons in Reception.

From this strong start in the early years, children are quick to learn to read. Leaders ensure that phonics is taught systematically. Pupils read books that match the sounds they know. They get used to discussing books with adults from the beginning of their time in Nursery. This approach continues throughout the school. Because of this, pupils have a strong understanding of what they read. Most pupils are fluent readers by the time they enter key stage 2. Staff are quick to identify and support any pupils who fall behind. These pupils soon catch up.

Leaders have made changes to the teaching of mathematics and science. They have established when and how teachers should introduce important subject content. Leaders have given teachers the training that they need to do this. As a result of these changes, pupils know and remember the mathematics and science they are taught. Teachers check pupils' understanding regularly. Extra help is provided when it is needed. Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning. Several of the pupils inspectors spoke to aspire to become mathematicians or scientists in the future.

Pupils' learning in other subjects, such as geography and history, is not as strong. Pupils do not always have the prior knowledge they need to understand new learning. This is because learning in these subjects is not sequenced clearly. Some teachers have the subject expertise to correct this for their pupils, but others do not. Leaders, including governors, are well aware of the need to improve pupils' learning in foundation subjects. They have plans to train more teachers as subject leaders and they are working with the trust to develop sequenced curriculum plans.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make strong progress. Staff identify pupils' needs as soon as they start school. The special educational needs coordinator works with parents, teachers and external agencies to get pupils the extra help they need. Parents appreciate this support. They say it has had a positive impact on their children. Strong communication between staff when pupils move year groups helps pupils with SEND to make a good start on the next stage of their learning.

Leaders want pupils to be successful members of society. They have implemented an effective curriculum to support pupils' personal and social development. Pupils learn about healthy lifestyles, online safety and healthy relationships in lessons. Teachers ensure that lessons are relevant to pupils' previous experiences. Pupils value these lessons. Leaders give pupils opportunities to raise money for good causes and learn about differing world views. Pupils eagerly accept responsibility. An elected school council plays an active role in the direction of the school. Pupils show understanding and a desire to make a positive difference to the world around them.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Governors provide robust oversight of safeguarding arrangements. They check on leaders' work to make sure that pupils are safe. Leaders have made sure that the curriculum teaches pupils how to be safe in modern society. Leaders make thorough checks on all adults who work in the school. They ensure that the proper arrangements are in place to keep the school site safe.

Staff know pupils well. Staff are well trained and quick to spot signs that pupils may be at risk. Leaders work well with external agencies and parents to support pupils' needs.

Pupils know where they can find help if they need it.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum for foundation subjects does not support pupils in gaining the depth of knowledge they need. Unlike in the core subject plans, the curriculum in foundation subjects is not well sequenced. New learning does not build carefully on what has been taught previously. Leaders need to implement their new, sequenced plans for the foundation curriculum so that teachers know what they need to teach and when they need to teach it.
- Some teachers do not have enough subject expertise to identify and prioritise key learning in some of the foundation subjects. Senior leaders need to implement their plans to ensure teachers are supported in broadening their subject knowledge and becoming effective subject leaders.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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	122307
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10200630
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	251
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Ann Howe
Headteacher	Michael Moran
Website	www.st-aidans.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24 January 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have been in post in an acting capacity since September 2021.
- The school is part of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and is due to join the Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust.
- The school's most recent diocesan inspection was in February 2019.
- The school does not use any alternative provision for its pupils.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- During this inspection, inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team. The lead

inspector met with governors, including the chair of the governing body. The lead inspector also held conversations with a representative of the local authority, representatives of the Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust and a representative of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. Inspectors spoke with several teaching and support staff and considered responses to Ofsted’s staff questionnaire.

- Inspectors met with pupils throughout the inspection, both formally and informally, during breaktimes, lessons and breakfast club.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, geography and science. Inspectors met with subject leaders, visited lessons, listened to pupils read to a familiar adult, talked with pupils and looked at pupils’ work. Inspectors also spoke with pupils about their learning in other subjects.
- To evaluate the school’s management of safeguarding, inspectors considered relevant school policies and examined the single central record and the school’s procedures for the safer recruitment of staff. Inspectors talked with staff, governors and pupils to check their views on safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire and spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day.

Inspection team

Ian Dawson, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Nugent	Ofsted Inspector
Catherine Beard	Ofsted Inspector

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