

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St Joseph's Catholic Infant School, Birtley

Mitchell Street, Birtley, Chester le Street, County Durham DH3 1LU

Inspection dates:

22 October 2024

Outcome

St Joseph's Catholic Infant School, Birtley has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The executive headteacher of this school is Kate Swaddle. This school is part of Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO) Nick Hurn, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Martin Gannon.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school has high expectations for its pupils. The school has recently redesigned its curriculum to support pupils to move seamlessly into the next stage of their education at the end of Year 2. The content of the curriculum is ambitious. Pupils achieve well.

Staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. They create an environment where pupils treat everyone with respect and dignity. Pupils follow instructions swiftly and show kindness to each other. Children in the early years take turns and share toys respectfully with one another. Pupils enjoy playing with the new scooters and resources at lunchtime. They use them with care and consideration.

Pupils enjoy their learning and the variety of opportunities on offer. They rightly say that 'all are welcome', at their school, echoing the school's vision. They are keen to talk about their visits to the library, the farm and the zoo. The school plans these educational visits to enhance the curriculum. This ensures that the curriculum is 'a never-ending story', developing pupils' understanding of the world.

The school teaches pupils how to stay safe in a number of ways. For example, pupils practise their road safety skills on the playground, looking left and right before crossing the road.

The school provides pupils with leadership opportunities. This develops pupils' self-confidence and sense of responsibility. Pupils meet regularly with pupils from the junior school to raise funds for local charities and to discuss global issues.

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

The school sequences its curriculum well to build pupils' knowledge and skills from the early years upwards. Leaders make sure that there is continuity in the curriculum between the infant and junior schools. The school provides a clear cycle of training for staff. This enables them to deliver the curriculum with confidence. The school prepares pupils well for the next stage of their educational journey in the junior school.

The school uses a 'take three approach' at the start of each lesson. Pupils recap learning from three different phases, such as the last lesson, the last week and the previous term. This helps many pupils to remember important knowledge. However, this is not used to consistent effect. On occasions, some pupils struggle to recall the essential knowledge in their current topic.

The school teaches phonics daily. It groups pupils by the sounds that they know. This ensures that teaching matches pupils current phonics knowledge. The school provides extra phonic sessions for pupils who are not keeping up with the programme. Pupils show resilience and determination in their reading to read unfamiliar words successfully. Staff enable pupils to read well.

The school focuses on improving children's oracy skills from the early years. It ensures that every unit of work includes ambitious vocabulary closely linked to what pupils learn. Staff encourage pupils to participate in worship times to develop their self-confidence and voice projection. The school encourages pupils to use extended sentences rather than single word responses to explain their thinking. To support some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), adults model sentences for pupils to repeat. The school has significant expertise in relation to the provision for pupils with SEND. Its early identification processes are a strength of the school. The school is tenacious in securing support for some pupils from external agencies.

The school ensures that adults explain new ideas clearly. Adults check that pupils understand new concepts. However, there are times when staff do not address pupils' mistakes and errors. This means that misconceptions remain for longer than necessary.

The school prepares pupils for life in modern Britain. Leaders successfully prioritise developing children's social, emotional, physical, and mental well-being. Pupils gradually build their self-confidence as they begin to engage in activities to help their community. The school provides pupils with a range of extra-curricular clubs to develop their talents.

The school has high expectations for attendance. There are effective procedures in place to both challenge and support families where pupils are not in school often enough. A range of strategies, including rapid follow up of any absence, help to make sure that attendance is improving, especially for those who need it most.

The school's leadership team are ambitious and driven to make continuous improvements to the school in the best interests of the pupils. The school shares subject leadership opportunities across the federation. This significantly reduces workload, giving staff more time to focus on lesson preparation. The federation local governing committee support the school. They visit regularly to challenge and hold the school to account.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- On occasions, teachers do not use assessment as effectively as they could to check how well pupils have learned the intended curriculum. This means that misconceptions and gaps in learning are not identified and addressed as well as they could be. The school should ensure that teachers use assessment well to enable pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding over time.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding,

behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St Joseph's Catholic Infant School, Birtley to be good for overall effectiveness in May 2015.

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.

Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	148809
Local authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	10346779
Type of school	Infant
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	64
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Martin Gannon
CEO of the trust	Nick Hurn
Headteacher	Kate Swaddle
Website	www.stjosephcatholicschoolsbirtley.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school joined Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust in November 2021.
- The school is federated with St Joseph's Catholic Junior School. The two schools share an executive headteacher and local governing committee.
- The executive headteacher was appointed in September 2022 and the assistant headteacher in January 2024. The deputy headteacher is an established member of staff in the junior school.
- As the school is designated as having a religious character, it is inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005. The school was last inspected in June 2024.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, other leaders across the federation, the trust, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors also met with representatives of the local governing committee, a delegate for the CEO of the trust, a trustee and a representative of the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. Inspectors spoke with groups of staff and pupils to gain their views about the school.

Inspection team

Alison Stephenson, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Chris Mitchinson

Ofsted Inspector

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