

Inspection of Our Lady Star of the Sea Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary

Thorpe Road, Horden, Peterlee, County Durham SR8 4AB

Inspection dates:	12 and 13 November 2024
The quality of education	Inadequate
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Inadequate
Early years provision	Inadequate
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils do not receive an acceptable standard of education at this school. Many pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, are not able to read and write as well as they should. This includes children in the early years. The school, including the governing body, has low expectations of pupils' academic achievement. It has not taken effective action to ensure that pupils are prepared well enough for their next stage in education.

In contrast to their academic achievement, pupils thrive socially and emotionally. They enjoy attending this close-knit school where relationships between pupils, parents, carers and staff are highly positive. Pupils behave well. They are enthusiastic and keen to learn. Routines are well established and classrooms are calm. Pupils feel safe and trust their teachers.

Pupils benefit from a well-designed personal, social, health and economic education. They enjoy learning about cultures that are different to their own. Pupils experience a range of trips connected to their learning, for example, by visiting open-air museums. Visits to the theatre inspire pupils to take part in dramatic productions. Pupils revel in the opportunities to participate in musicals, and many demonstrate a considerable talent in the performing arts.

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

The school wants every pupil to achieve success in readiness for the next stage of their lives. Even so, it is only partially successful in realising this ambition. The effective provision for pupils' personal development prepares them well to become confident members of society. However, the school has not ensured that pupils' academic achievement sets them up for their future. Many children start in the early years with gaps in their communication and language knowledge and skills. The school does not act quickly enough to support these children to catch up by the end of the Reception Year. The gaps in pupils' basic skills continue and widen as they move through to Year 6. Consequently, many pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged, do not achieve as well as they should.

In some curriculum subjects, the essential knowledge that pupils should learn is clearly identified. In others it is less clear. Teachers can follow their own or the pupils' interests. This leads to a disjointed curriculum and gaps in pupils' knowledge. Teachers' checks do not identify or address the gaps in pupils' learning. This is because they are unsure what to check and when this should happen. In some subjects, such as history and geography, some pupils struggle to recall their learning. The school does not check to make sure that the curriculum is implemented effectively.

The English curriculum does not meet pupils' needs, especially the needs of those pupils who need to catch up. This curriculum is not delivered well enough. Teachers do not adapt what is meant to be taught to make up for gaps in pupils' knowledge. This leads to a lack of progression. Some pupils do not make connections in their learning and remember it on a longer-term basis. For example, one year group is re-learning the same

sounds and letters that they were taught in the previous year. Children in the early years do not learn how to form letters legibly. From this point on, many do not have the opportunity to develop their writing skills. As a result, their knowledge of spelling, punctuation and grammar is weak. This has an impact on their written work in English and hinders their success in other curriculum subjects. Some pupils who struggle to read do not receive the support that they need to improve.

In contrast, the mathematics curriculum helps pupils to build their mathematical understanding well. Teachers have secure mathematical subject knowledge. They have been supported through professional development and know how to teach mathematics well. The system of checking pupils' knowledge and asking pupils to recall their learning is successful in mathematics.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are identified quickly. Adults support pupils with the most complex needs well. However, the school does not ensure that staff make suitable adaptations to their delivery of the curriculum consistently well. This means that pupils with SEND do not achieve as well as they should.

Children in the early years settle into school life quickly. They follow the set behaviour routines and they become independent because they know where to find equipment in the classroom. However, children do not learn all that they should across all areas of learning. The school has not designed an early years curriculum that meets the needs of the children. The quality of staff's interactions with children is variable. Children do not benefit from explicit teaching to promote their language and communication skills. Many children play alongside each other rather than communicating and playing together.

The school prepares pupils well for life beyond school. They learn about different religions and fundamental British values, such as tolerance and respect. The school provides beneficial support for pupils' well-being, including their mental health needs.

The school's work to promote regular attendance is effective. Attendance rates mirror the national average. Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Pupils are polite and respectful of each other. Through their leadership roles, such as being a member of the school council, pupils make a significant contribution to the school.

Staff appreciate the school's work to safeguard their workload and well-being. They value the support that they receive from colleagues, especially when they are new to the school.

The governing body is too accepting of pupils' academic underperformance at various stages throughout school. It is ambitious for pupils' personal development but less so for their academic success. The governing body does not have a clear enough oversight of the work of the school. The school and the governing body do not have an accurate understanding of what needs to improve. They are not doing enough to address the school's weaknesses. The school does not have the capacity to bring about the necessary improvements.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school does not make sure that pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and those who need to catch up, gain a secure grasp of the fundamental writing and reading knowledge that they need to access other subjects and succeed. This means that pupils are not well prepared for the next stage in education. The school must ensure that the design and implementation of the curriculum enable pupils to become fluent readers and writers.
- The curriculum is disjointed in some subject areas. There are limited opportunities for pupils to build on their prior learning and remember knowledge with any depth. The school should ensure that subject curriculums are coherent so that pupils build a deep body of knowledge over time. The school should also make sure that it checks the curriculum is implemented effectively.
- The school does not use assessment strategies and information effectively. Staff do not have an accurate understanding of how pupils are progressing through the curriculum. Pupils' gaps in knowledge are not identified well enough or remedied quickly. This makes it difficult for pupils to build their learning over time. The school should ensure that there are suitable assessment procedures that staff use to identify and then close the gaps in pupils' knowledge.
- Children in the early years are not well prepared for Year 1. This is because the curriculum does not enable them to learn all that they should. It does not take enough account of the gaps that children have in their knowledge when they join the early years. There are weaknesses in how well children's early communication, language and literacy skills are developed. The school must ensure that there is an ambitious curriculum in place and that staff are suitably equipped to help children overcome gaps in their basic skills so that they are ready to learn when they enter key stage 1.
- The school and those responsible for governance are not ambitious enough for pupils' academic achievement. This is especially true for those pupils who are disadvantaged. The school and the governing body do not have sufficient oversight of the school. As a result, they are not doing enough to tackle weaknesses in pupils' education. The school and the governing body must ensure that they raise their aspirations for pupils' academic success so that pupils are ready for the next stage of their learning.

The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection. The position regarding the appointment of early career teachers will be considered again during any monitoring inspection we carry out.

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	114281
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10346301
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	95
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Carole Scott
Headteacher	Joanne Jones
Website	www.olsots.durham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	28 November 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a member of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and has a Christian character. The school's last statutory inspection under section 48 of the Education Act was in October 2019. The next section 48 inspection will take place in the 2024/25 academic year.
- The headteacher leads this school and one other in the local area.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a graded (section 5) inspection under the same Act. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- 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. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other leaders in school and members of the governing body. They also met with representatives from the diocese and the local authority.
- The inspectors considered some subjects in depth. These included English, early reading, science, mathematics, history and geography. They discussed the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- The inspectors gathered the views of parents at the school gate and through their responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. The views of staff were gathered through meetings and their responses to Ofsted's online staff survey. Inspectors also met with pupils and considered the responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.
- The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in classes, during breaktimes and at lunchtime.

Inspection team

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