

# Blackbrook St Mary's Catholic Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	104802
<b>Local Authority</b>	St. Helens
<b>Inspection number</b>	355634
<b>Inspection dates</b>	30 November 2010–1 December 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Brian Holmes

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	399
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Peter Alcock
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Julia Ashton
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	4 March 2008
<b>School address</b>	Chain Lane St Helens Merseyside WA11 9QY
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<b>Email address</b>	blackbrook@sthelens.org.uk

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 15 lessons and observed 14 teachers. They held meetings with parents, groups of pupils, members of the governing body and staff. The inspection team observed the school's work and looked at its assessment data, evidence of activities and events, information about the curriculum and monitoring and evaluation documents. Inspectors analysed 146 questionnaires completed by parents and carers, 201 pupils' questionnaires and 29 questionnaires returned by staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- Whether progress in mathematics in Key Stage 2 is as strong as progress in English.
- Whether provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is effective in enabling these pupils to make good progress.
- Whether teaching is consistently good across the school and enables all pupils to learn independently.
- The effectiveness of teaching and of the curriculum in meeting the needs of all pupils, particularly those who are more-able.
- Whether leaders are effective in improving the attainment and progress of specific groups of pupils, such as those who are known to be eligible to take a free school meal and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

## Information about the school

Blackbrook St. Mary's is a larger than average primary school. Since the previous inspection there have been significant changes in the leadership of the school. The large majority of pupils are from White British heritages. A small number of pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free schools meals is broadly average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is lower than average. The school has received an award for its extended school's provision and has achieved the Activemark and the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

This is a satisfactory and improving school. It has strengths in its provision for pupils' care, guidance and support, which have a positive effect on pupils' personal development, as in their excellent understanding of how to stay safe. Parents and carers are very supportive of the school's ethos, typically describing the school as 'a big community'. like an extension of the home'. Senior leaders have a clear vision for raising attainment and are robustly identifying areas for improvement, with increasing evidence of success in addressing issues.

Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage from starting points below those expected, and well-below in their language development. By the end of reception, attainment is line with expectations in most areas except writing because children need more opportunities to practice their skills. In Key Stage 1, pupils make satisfactory progress and attain in line with the average expected, except in writing where the opportunities they have to write longer pieces of work are limited and not stimulating enough. In Key Stage 2, progress is satisfactory and improving and is strongest in writing. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. In reading and mathematics, progress varies between year groups. Initiatives in Key Stage 2 to improve reading skills, through guided reading, and mathematical skills, through a calculation policy, are at an early stage of their implementation. Teaching is satisfactory and improving, with examples of good and outstanding practice. However, in some lessons assessment information is not used sufficiently to ensure that there is enough challenge for middle ability or for more-able pupils. The curriculum is becoming more creative but pupils have do not have enough opportunities to apply their reading, writing, mathematical and information and communication technology (ICT) skills in all subjects. Pupils' good behaviour and above average attendance contribute positively to their learning. They have a good understanding of how to live healthily and enjoy activities that promote good health such as 'Wake Up, Shape Up'. Pupils make a positive contribution to the school and the community through the school council and by taking on responsibilities, such as being play leaders.

The school has improved the quality of pupils' education and is sustaining those improvements. Senior leaders have embedded the school's self-evaluation processes, which are rigorous and accurate. There is a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Improvements in the rate of progress in writing in Key Stage 2 and for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, as well as the maintenance of above average attendance and strengths in pupils' personal development, indicate that the school has a good capacity to sustain its improvement.

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## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attainment in writing in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage One by:
  - providing children in reception with more opportunities to practise their writing skills
  - providing pupils in Key Stage 1 with more stimulating opportunities to write longer pieces of work.
- Improve the consistency of pupils' progress particularly in reading and mathematics in Key Stage 2 by:
  - ensuring that assessment information is used to plan work that consistently challenges middle ability and more-able pupils
  - providing pupils with increased opportunities to apply their reading, writing, numeracy and information and communication technology skills in all subjects
  - improving pupils' reading skills through the implementation of guided reading and their mathematical skills through the implementation of the calculation policy.
- About 40% of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit from an Ofsted inspector before the next Section 5 inspector.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**3**

In the best lessons, pupils are fully engaged and make good, and sometimes, outstanding progress. In a Year 4 lesson, pupils worked with high levels of enthusiasm and independence to rapidly improve their understanding of equivalent fractions. In most lessons, pupils work well together in pairs and small groups and are engaged and interested in their learning. In some lessons, where expectations of learning are not made clear, the pace of pupils' learning and rate of progress slows down. Evidence from lessons, pupils' work and assessment data shows that most pupils make satisfactory progress but an increasing number of pupils are making better progress. In writing, whilst attainment in Key Stage 1 is below average, progress improves in Key Stage 2 and is stronger than in reading and mathematics. Progress in mathematics is improving but is not consistent across every year group, which is also the case in reading. By the end of Year 6, attainment is broadly average in English and mathematics. The school is successfully improving rates of progress for specific groups, such as pupils known to be eligible to take a free school meal. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because of the focused support they receive. In a Year 5 lesson, a group of pupils engaged well with the teacher in a discussion about the use of clauses and connectives to write compound sentences.

Pupils feel safe at all times because they are confident that any issues are dealt with quickly. One spoke for many with the comment 'we're like a big family'. Their behaviour is welcoming and positive and they respond quickly to staff when the need arises. They understand well the wisdom of taking exercise and eating fruit and vegetables. Pupils have 'adopted a chef' to work with them and their parents and carers on healthy recipes. They make a good contribution to the life of the school and the community. Their 'voice' is

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listened to through the pupils' conferences and through the school council they link closely with a local residents committee. Older pupils act as 'buddies' for younger pupils. They are appropriately prepared for the next stage of their education through their satisfactory achievement and good attendance. Pupils demonstrate good spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness and have a good appreciation and respect for others' needs.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

## How effective is the provision?

In the best lessons, pupils make good and better progress because they are fully engaged in their learning. In a guided reading session, probing questioning led to pupils demonstrating higher order thinking skills in their analysis of a poem. In most lessons, the needs of all pupils are well met but, on some occasions, the use of assessment to plan work that challenges both middle ability and more-able pupils is not evident. Where this occurs, pupils' progress slows down. Secure subject knowledge and effective use of technology keep pupils engaged in their learning, which moves forward at a brisk pace when teaching is good or better. In most lessons, pupils are given opportunities to learn independently. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively and provide good levels of support, particularly to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Assessment is used effectively in lessons to check pupils' understanding and its use to support learning through marking and feedback is improving. Pupils' work is marked thoroughly with clear identification of what they have done well and what they need to do

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next to improve their work. Pupils understand their targets and are increasingly involved in checking how well both they and other pupils are doing.

The curriculum contributes satisfactorily to the achievement of all groups of pupils, including the most able. The 'Big Writing' initiative in which pupils regularly write longer pieces of work has had a positive effect in improving their progress in writing. Regular guided reading sessions and a focus on phonics are beginning to improve pupils' reading skills, as the introduction of the calculation policy is beginning to improve their mathematical skills. However, these initiatives are recent and need more time to fully impact on progress. The curriculum has been reviewed to encourage links between subjects and more creative approaches but pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply their reading, writing, mathematical and ICT skills in all subjects. There is good enrichment of learning through additional activities, with good take up by pupils. Visitors into school improve pupils' understanding of other cultures, such as Islam and pupils are clear that they enjoy the activities on offer and visits to places, such as Sankey Valley and Chester Zoo.

Pupils are well cared for and the school makes outstanding provision for its' vulnerable pupils. The learning mentor contributes well to meeting the needs of these pupils. Very good relationships between staff and pupils and the strong ethos of care impact positively on the well-being of all pupils. There are good systems for maintaining pupils' good attendance and for dealing with any unacceptable behaviour.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior leaders have a clear focus for improving pupils' attainment and have established robust systems for tracking pupils' progress towards challenging targets. They, along with subject leaders, accurately identify gaps in pupils' learning and take effective action to secure improvement. As a result, all aspects of pupils' outcomes are either good or are improving strongly. Leadership of teaching and learning has successfully increased the proportion of good teaching. Senior leaders are now focused on improving the consistency of teaching in classes where progress is satisfactory rather than good or better.

The governing body is fully involved in shaping the direction of the school and governors are increasingly involved in school self-evaluation through their committees and links with curriculum teams. The school promotes equal opportunities satisfactorily to meet the needs of all pupils. However, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities currently make faster progress than other groups. Arrangements for safeguarding are

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good and are supported by clear policies and strategies. There is good engagement with parents and carers and sound links with partners, such as local schools, to support pupils' learning and well-being. The school promotes community cohesion satisfactorily. It is a harmonious community with good links in the local community. Plans to promote pupils' understanding beyond the immediate locality are at an early stage of development.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of provision for children in the Early Years' Foundation Stage is good. There are good links with parents and carers who are happy with the setting and appreciate the 'Stay and Play' sessions. Good leadership, with focused team work, and a good knowledge and understanding of the needs of children, ensure that there is a high priority on children's safety and that their needs are well met. Children trust adults and interact with them enthusiastically, resulting in good behaviour and children who are happy and settled.

There are a good range of adult-led and child-initiated activities to meet children's needs and interests in all areas of learning, both indoors and outdoors. Boys, for example, respond positively to the outdoor wormery. Children have good opportunities to develop their speaking skills. Increased opportunities for them to practise their writing skills are being introduced but have not had time to fully impact on progress. Children play and learn well with each other and develop a sense of responsibility through tidying up. They share resources and enjoy good relationships with each other. Progress is good across all areas of learning with outcomes in line with expectations overall and above in personal, social and emotional development. Outcomes in communication, language and literacy are below expectations, particularly in writing.



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*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

## Views of parents and carers

Inspectors' findings endorse the views of the very large majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire who are happy with their children's experiences at school, feeling that their children enjoy school and that the school keeps their children safe. Inspectors followed up the concerns of the few parents and carers who feel that the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour. They concluded after observations of lessons, discussions with pupils and observations of pupils' behaviour that behaviour is good and that any issues that do occur are quickly and effectively addressed.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Blackbrook St Mary's Catholic Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 0 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 399 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	79	54	66	45	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	89	61	56	38	1	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	60	41	86	59	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	62	42	77	53	2	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	70	48	71	49	2	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	63	43	73	50	6	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	62	42	82	56	1	1	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	59	40	78	53	2	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	63	43	80	55	2	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	51	35	83	57	10	7	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	53	36	79	54	7	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	64	44	80	55	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	80	55	63	43	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



2 December 2010

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Blackbrook St Mary's Catholic Primary School, St Helens, WA11 9QY**

Thank you for being so polite, welcoming and friendly when we inspected your school recently. We enjoyed our time at Blackbrook St. Mary's, particularly talking with you. We know that you like your school and enjoy being there.

Blackbrook St. Mary's is a satisfactory and improving school with a number of strengths. We were impressed by your behaviour and attendance, your excellent understanding of how to stay safe and how well you get on with each other. You told us that you like your teachers who, you say, make learning fun. You enjoy the activities that the school offers and like the jobs that you do such as buddies and play leaders. The standards you reach are similar to those in most other schools and getting better. Most of you make satisfactory progress in your learning and pupils with special educational needs make good progress in their learning.

We are asking the school to improve standards in writing for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage by giving them more opportunities to practise their writing, and in Years 1 and 2 by giving pupils more interesting subjects to write about. We are asking the school to improve progress in reading and mathematics in Years 3 to 6 by making sure that teachers make sure your work is always hard enough. We have asked the school to give you more opportunities to use your reading, writing, numeracy and information and communication technology skills in all of your subjects and make sure that guided reading and the calculation policy help to you to improve your learning. All of you can help by continuing to work hard, behaving well and doing your best to help the school improve further.

We send our very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Brian Holmes

Lead Inspector

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