

St Helen's Catholic Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115307
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	363832
Inspection dates	5–6 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Steven Hill

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	267
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Rose
Headteacher	Sheila Rainsford
Date of previous school inspection	21 May 2008
School address	Sawyers Hall Lane Brentwood CM15 9BY
Telephone number	01277 215626
Fax number	01277 201114
Email address	admin@st-helens-inf.essex.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Eighteen lessons were observed, taught by 12 teachers. Meetings were held with staff, groups of pupils and representatives of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at samples of pupils' work and a variety of documentation, particularly that related to safeguarding pupils and that showing the progress and attainment of different groups. Questionnaires were analysed from staff and from 100 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- To what extent are subject leaders involved in monitoring provision and outcomes, and how effective are they in driving improvements?
- Is work in class better matched to pupils' needs since the last inspection?
- Do pupils have enough opportunities to learn about and engage with communities beyond the immediate locality?

Information about the school

This is a large infant school which draws its pupils from a wide area of the town and beyond. About three quarters of the pupils are White British, with the rest coming from a large number of different minority ethnic heritages. Since the last inspection, the school has moved into new, purpose-built accommodation on a different site, on the edge of town. A below-average percentage of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The percentage who have statements of special educational needs is also below average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language has risen since the last inspection, and is now greater than in most schools.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

The school provides an outstanding education for its pupils. It has gone from strength to strength since the last inspection, and excellent teaching ensures high attainment for all groups of pupils. Pupils make outstanding progress in their learning, and greatly enjoy all aspects of school, because work is matched very closely to their needs and interests. The exciting curriculum greatly enhances pupils' enjoyment of lessons, and excellent care, guidance and support mean that they feel extremely safe and secure in school. Behaviour is excellent and pupils have extremely good relationships with each other and with staff. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Boys and girls from different ethnic or social backgrounds all play and work together exceptionally well, so the school is a harmonious and happy community. It promotes community cohesion extremely well within the school and in the locality. However, pupils have relatively few opportunities to interact with and learn about different communities in the United Kingdom. They do learn about the wider world, for example in geography, religious education and personal and social education. They are successfully encouraged to apply the school's mission statement to 'love one another' broadly. Following the floods in Pakistan, for example, it was at the instigation of a pupil in Year 1, and reflecting pupils' great concern for others, that the school held a 'non-uniform day' to raise money for flood victims.

Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are helped to build very effectively on the excellent start they make in their learning in the Reception classes. Attainment at the end of Year 2 has been consistently well-above average in reading, writing and mathematics for a number of years. A slight weakness in mathematics identified at the last inspection has been overcome, and progress in mathematics is outstanding. A key strength of teaching and learning is the pupils' extremely positive response to teachers' very high expectations. Pupils are continually urged and helped to analyse their own and their classmates' achievements, and to strive to improve. Pupils in Year 2 commented that they, 'work hard...try your hardest...do your very best...don't give up, and try to make your teacher proud.'

The headteacher provides very clear direction to the work of the school, and is supported extremely well by colleagues. Subject leaders make a major contribution to the monitoring of teaching and achievement. The school's very thorough tracking of the progress of individuals and groups means that if any do not make good progress they are quickly identified and prompt action is taken to help them catch up. This process, together with very regular and effective monitoring of different aspects of provision, contributes to the school's excellent self-evaluation. Along with the maintenance of very high standards, and pupils' excellent personal development, this demonstrates the school's outstanding capacity to sustain and build upon its many strengths.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend the excellent work done to promote community cohesion locally by:
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to learn about and interact with different communities in the United Kingdom
 - building on the existing link with Kenya to involve pupils more directly and regularly in this relationship.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

The achievement of all groups of pupils is outstanding. They reach high standards of attainment from levels that, when they start in Reception, are broadly in line with expectations. Pupils are keen to learn and take a pride in their accomplishments, so that they make at least good, and often outstanding progress in lessons. Their collaborative skills are excellent and strongly support their unusually good skills in evaluating their own and their classmates' success. For example, in a design and technology lesson, pupils in Year 1 made excellent progress when making a 'pirate island'. Their models very accurately matched their plans and, after discussing their work thoughtfully in pairs, they identified clearly how they could be improved. In an English lesson in Year 2, pupils improved their speaking and listening skills, as well as learning a great deal about fossils. They demonstrated high standards in analysing and structuring factual writing, following clear modelling by the teacher, and they responded very enthusiastically to challenging questioning. Pupils show high levels of skill in using information and communication technology (ICT) in subjects across the curriculum.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make excellent progress. Their different specific needs are analysed accurately, and carefully targeted support and a high level of challenge help them progress quickly in lessons. Their achievement is much better than would be expected from their starting points when they join the school, and many reach the standards expected for their age by the end of Year 2. Pupils who speak English as an additional language do exceptionally well, progressing at least as fast as their classmates; many of these pupils are among the school's highest attainers by the end of Key Stage 1.

Pupils' outstanding personal development has been maintained since the last inspection. Their excellent relationships with each other support their exceptional collaborative skills, and they are very capable of working independently when required. Their outstanding behaviour and positive attitudes strongly support their learning in class and their high levels of enjoyment in all aspects of school life. They have an extremely good understanding of how to eat healthily, and join in enthusiastically with exercise. Their strong moral sense and care for others support their excellent contribution to the community, as do the many responsibilities they cheerfully undertake, for example in the school council. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in their high attendance. This, along with their excellent basic skills and their very positive attitudes prepares them extremely well for the future in school and beyond.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

¹ 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?

Teaching and learning are at least good and many lessons are outstanding. High expectations of work and behaviour lead to excellent progress. Teachers and other adults monitor pupils' ongoing progress and continually challenge them to refine and improve their work. Teachers give excellent feedback to pupils on how they are doing, and show them clearly how they can improve. Pupils' understanding and their reasoning skills are perpetually improved through searching questioning that gets them to justify their conclusions and to explain their thinking. Adults provide excellent role models in the respect and courtesy they invariably show pupils, who respond in kind; they like and respect their teachers, are keen to please them, and work hard to do so. Teachers make very good use of ICT to clarify their explanations and enhance pupils' understanding.

The excellent curriculum makes good use of a variety of different practical, hands-on learning opportunities that enthuse and interest pupils. The excellent links that are made between different subjects greatly enhance learning and make topics more meaningful for pupils. Extremely effective use is made of pupils' skills in literacy and ICT to drive progress in other subjects. For example, in an excellent music lesson in the computer suite, pupils used a challenging program to compose music to illustrate aspects of the life of Florence Nightingale. Their mutual evaluation of each other's work in response to the teachers' clear explanations led to them reaching very high standards in musical composition as well

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as ICT. The curriculum is greatly enhanced by visits out, a wide range of visitors to the school and a very good range of over-subscribed extra-curricular clubs.

Excellent pastoral care underpins pupils' outstanding personal development. Very effective links with outside agencies, and with parents and carers, are used to support the school's own very good knowledge of pupils' needs. Procedures are followed meticulously and monitored rigorously. Pupils are rightly very sure that adults will keep them safe, and are confident in turning to them for help. One said that they can '...always rely on the teachers to look after us.' Transition arrangements, particularly for pupils whose circumstances might make them vulnerable, are of high quality. Carefully-tailored support, based on a thorough knowledge of individuals' circumstances, makes a strong contribution to how pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those new to learning English, are helped to settle socially in school and hence make excellent progress.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Outstanding systems to monitor provision and its impact on pupils' outcomes underpin the high quality of education. Any issues are identified and staff work as an extremely effective team to address them, and to effect improvements. This mutual support has led to the increased proportion of lessons where teaching and learning are outstanding. Governance is good. The governing body has secure systems to gain an understanding of the schools' strengths and weaknesses and hold it to account, but has accurately identified that it has had a relatively limited input to the school's strategic direction. It is putting plans in place to address this. The governing body has done an excellent job in working with staff to ensure that safeguarding is outstanding. Full advantage was taken of the move to the new school to build in high-quality systems from first principles. The administration of policies and their implementation is rigorous and meticulous. The school has very effectively sought the views of parents and carers, and has responded quickly to their views to upgrade procedures. This typifies the excellent links with parents and carers, who are given very good information about their children's progress and school life, and who greatly contribute to the school's work. Links with other partners are very effective in contributing to pupils' well-being, particularly in supporting those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Excellent links with other partners, for example the local secondary school, make a strong contribution to the curriculum. The school is rigorous in tackling potential discrimination, and its excellent tracking systems both ensure and demonstrate that boys and girls from different groups all make the same outstanding progress. The promotion of community cohesion is excellent locally, based on the school's very thorough understanding of its context, and it rightly evaluates its impact as high. It

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has also identified that this is not as strong in the wider world. For example, the school has a long-established link with a community in Kenya, which contributes to pupils' understanding of the wider world, but their direct involvement in contributing to this relationship is not very great.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

The Reception classes share many of the strengths of the rest of the school. Arrangements for beginning school are of high quality and ensure a very smooth start, despite the large number of pre-school providers involved. Excellent relationships with parents and carers are developed from the start. As a result, children are very safe, happy and relaxed in school, and greatly enjoy the wide range of exciting activities that staff provide. Excellent use is made of the extensive, well-equipped outside area to enhance progress in all areas of learning. Children make exceptionally good progress from their starting points. Their attainment by the time they go into Year 1 is consistently above average, and they attain particularly high standards in reading, writing and calculations. This, in particular, gives them a very strong basis for continuing excellent progress in the older classes. Excellent teaching includes very positive relationships and high expectations. Adults are very skilled at developing children's learning systematically, based on regular assessments of their progress and interests. A good balance is maintained between adult-directed activities, and those chosen by children themselves. The adults are very effective when intervening in children's play to develop their learning and to challenge them to think about and explain what they are doing. The provision is led and managed extremely effectively, with excellent teamwork, joint planning and a continual process of seeking to improve provision underpinning outstanding outcomes for children.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school and what it provides for their children. They particularly value that their children are safe and happy in school, and the high quality of teaching. They greatly appreciate the way the school is led and managed. A number of parents or carers wrote in to the inspection team to explain how the school had sensitively helped their children to cope with a variety of problems, including family issues, emotional problems and academic difficulties. The inspection evidence confirms that parents' and carers' high opinions of the school are fully justified.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Helen's Catholic Infant 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 100 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 267 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	79	79	20	20	0	0	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	86	86	13	13	0	0	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	59	59	38	38	2	2	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	68	68	29	29	2	2	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	76	76	22	22	0	0	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	64	64	34	34	0	0	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	64	64	33	33	1	1	1	1
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)	68	68	28	28	2	2	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	68	68	27	27	2	2	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	56	56	37	37	1	1	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	51	51	41	41	3	3	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	75	75	22	22	0	0	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	78	78	21	21	0	0	1	1

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



7 July 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Helen's Catholic Infant School, Brentwood, CM15 9BY

Thank you very much for your warm welcome and all your help when we inspected your school. We really enjoyed talking to you and seeing you work so hard in lessons. We were particularly pleased to see how well you all get along, and make sure that no one gets left out of things. You are growing up to be thoughtful, kind and sensible young people. Your behaviour is excellent. We know that your teachers and the other adults are very proud of you.

Your school is outstanding. That means it does most things very well. You are making excellent progress and reaching very high standards in reading, writing, mathematics and ICT. This is because your teachers are very good at helping you to learn, and you have lots of interesting and exciting things to do. You also are very hard working, and very good at checking your own work and trying to improve it.

The adults are extremely good at looking after you and make sure that everyone is safe and happy in school. They are keen to make the school even better. We have agreed with them that, to do this, they are going to help you to learn more about different people from around this country, and in other parts of the world, and to get in touch with them if you can.

We hope you keep on enjoying life at school, and that pupils in Year 2 carry on doing so well when they move on to the juniors in September.

Yours sincerely

Steven Hill

Lead inspector

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