

St Helen's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115147
Local Authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	379020
Inspection dates	19–20 October 2011
Reporting inspector	George Logan

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	211
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Glen
Headteacher	Elizabeth Mouchel
Date of previous school inspection	9 June 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 12 lessons taught by eight different members of staff. Inspectors held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor, and with staff and pupils. They looked at pupils' books, records of their progress, teachers' lesson planning, playtime activities and the school's documentation, which included records of teaching and the main improvement plan. Responses to inspection questionnaires completed by staff, pupils and by 51 parents and carers were also considered.

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

- The team looked at the consistency of progress which pupils make, particularly in mathematics and that of pupils who speak English as an additional language, and their current levels of attainment.
- It considered the extent to which staff use assessment information effectively to plan challenging work to enable all pupils, particularly those identified as more able or gifted, to make good progress.
- It explored the effectiveness of senior leaders and managers and the governing body in developing the school's capacity to make improvements.

Information about the school

St Helen's Catholic Primary School is of similar size to the average primary school. The school serves an increasingly mobile and diverse inner-urban community, close to the centre of Southend-on-Sea. Over half the pupils are at varying stages of learning to speak English as an additional language. The proportion has doubled in the last six years, but is highest in the younger age groups. Four-fifths of the children who entered the Reception Year in 2010 were beginners in English when they started. The most numerous groups are those of Eastern European, Philippino and Indian origin. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly below average; most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties or speech and language needs. However, the proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need is higher than is typical of a school of this size. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The school offers a breakfast club which is managed by the governing body.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St Helen's Catholic Primary School provides a good education. The school has sustained a good pace of improvement since its last inspection. Pupils' achievement and personal development are good. Standards have risen steadily at both Year 2 and Year 6, particularly in English, and are now broadly average. Partnerships with parents and carers are good. Parents and carers value the good-quality care provided by the school and have good opportunities to find out how to support their children's learning. Pupils enjoy school greatly and feel very safe. They are well behaved and have positive attitudes to learning. Most have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. Attendance is above average.

Children make good progress in developing their basic literacy and numeracy skills in the Reception Year as a result of effective teaching. Across the school, generally good teaching ensures that progress is good overall. Pupils who are at the early stages of learning English make good progress in acquiring the language in Years 1 to 2 and their progress in other subjects is steady. By the time those pupils are in Year 3, their progress in English and in other subjects accelerates and is good because of their better understanding of English. The recent focus on developing pupils' writing has had a significant impact on progress and outcomes. Attainment in English is now slightly above average. However, neither progress nor attainment in mathematics has improved to the same extent. While more pupils reach the expected level in mathematics than is the case nationally, the proportion of more-able pupils attaining the higher level is lower. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with more complex physical and cognitive needs, are supported well and make good progress.

The school has an effective system for setting individual academic targets and pupils' self-evaluation skills are well developed. However, teachers' marking is inconsistent in quality and does not always provide pupils with clear guidance as to the next steps in learning. Despite otherwise good teaching, expectations of pupils' handwriting and the presentation of their written work are not consistently high. Good extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities contribute well to pupils' good personal development.

Although roles within the senior leadership team are being reassigned at present, leadership and management are good overall. Senior leaders track pupils' progress thoroughly, so maintaining a good oversight of their progress. The governing body has a secure understanding of its role. Increasingly, it holds school leaders to account. School self-evaluation is accurate. Overall, the school has good capacity for

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improvement because school leaders have a convincing record of continued success, with standards rising, during a period when the school's intake has changed significantly and there is a clear determination to sustain improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the proportion of higher-attaining pupils in mathematics to be at least in line with the national average by:
 - ensuring that planning and provision in mathematics take account of the needs of more able pupils, so enabling them to make more rapid progress
 - providing additional challenging opportunities for pupils to use their mathematical skills in subjects across the curriculum.
- Improve the quality of teachers' marking and pupils' work by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of pupils' handwriting and the quality and presentation of their written work
 - ensuring that teachers' marking raises pupils' expectations of what they should achieve and indicates the next steps for their learning clearly.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Typically children enter the Reception Year with skills levels and experience below age-related expectations. By the end of the year, they have made good progress in all areas of learning. Although their attainment in communication and language and in number is better than when they started, it is still below average on entry to Year 1. In broad terms, pupils' progress accelerates throughout the school as their knowledge of English becomes more embedded. Robust teaching which increasingly engages and challenges pupils, together with close monitoring of progress, is contributing to steadily improving outcomes by the end of Year 6. That is especially so in English where all groups of pupils, including the more-able, are challenged well.

In mathematics, lessons challenge most pupils and stimulate learning well. For example, in a Year 4 mathematics lesson, pupils were successfully engaged by the lively presentation and brisk pace set by the teacher. For a small group of pupils at an early stage of learning English, a short but intensive withdrawal group session of 'Talk Maths' was very effective in capturing their interest and reinforcing their knowledge of specific shapes and their attributes. In another mathematics lesson, in Year 2, lively presentation and very carefully planned tasks ensured that all pupils were working at an appropriate level. That had a very positive impact upon the pupils' engagement and learning. However, not all lessons provide consistently challenging work in mathematics for more-able pupils.

Personal development outcomes are a strength. Pupils demonstrate mature attitudes and treat each other and adults with courtesy. The school council gives pupils some awareness of the democratic process. Good social skills and secure basic skills ensure that pupils are satisfactorily prepared for later life. While pupils' spiritual, moral,

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social and cultural development is securely good, the spiritual dimension is a particular strength, in the context of a highly inclusive community. The school maintains very good links with places of worship across a range of different faiths.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

Teaching and learning are good. Relationships are a significant strength and pupils are well motivated to learn. Staff use good questioning techniques to explore pupils' understanding and extend learning. That was a key strength in a Year 6 geography lesson, when pupils were challenged to justify their decisions as to which town sites might offer better protection in the event of flooding. The curriculum is generally well adapted for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the impact and effectiveness of support staff has been extended by specialist training. The deployment of a specialist assistant supports good practice and, ultimately, good progress for pupils at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. Pupil progress meetings, rigorous tracking systems and the further development of assessment practices are contributing to more effective evaluation of pupils' learning needs. Planning to meet individual needs is mostly accurate. However, the school is just beginning to address issues around some underperformance amongst more-able pupils in mathematics. Individual learning targets have a positive impact on pupils' learning. Opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own writing and that of others have been developed, but the frequency and rigour of teachers' marking and teachers' expectations of the quality of pupils' written work are not always high enough.

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

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The recently restructured curriculum offers a good range of learning experiences. Newly developed topics promote cross-curricular skills effectively. That is more evident for writing, a key focus in the last year, than for mathematics where creative and challenging opportunities to apply mathematics skills in topic work are missed. Class topic books provide a good record of the wide range of activities covered within each topic. There are good opportunities for art, music and physical development. Currently, the school is focusing upon the development of outdoor learning opportunities, making the most of the extensive grounds. Personal, social, health and citizenship education has a positive impact on pupils' personal development. External partnerships contribute well to extending pupils' learning. A good range of special events, visits, enrichment activities and good extra-curricular provision make a significant contribution to pupils' learning and enjoyment. They contribute also to their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

All staff are responsive to pupils' needs. Transition arrangements are generally good, particularly in supporting pupils identified as potentially vulnerable. The school works well with external agencies to support pupils who need additional help. There is good practice, evident in several cases, in supporting the health, social and behavioural needs of pupils facing challenging circumstances. The breakfast club makes satisfactory provision for the welfare of pupils prior to the start of the school day.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher communicates a clear sense of direction for the school. As a result outcomes are steadily improving. Roles and responsibilities are being reassigned, following staff changes within the senior leadership team. The headteacher maintains a detailed oversight of current priorities, supported by regular monitoring of lessons and detailed analysis of performance data. Thorough tracking systems support staff in monitoring pupils' progress. Accurate self-evaluation ensures that the priorities identified in the school development plan are appropriate. Key subject leaders are involved in monitoring progress and checking the quality of teaching and learning. The targets within their action plans are not always sufficiently sharply focused on measurable outcomes. The school promotes equality of opportunity well and does not tolerate discrimination of any kind. Good leadership of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and for those who speak English as an additional language ensures that most of these pupils make good progress.

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The school has worked hard and with some success to ensure that the governing body is representative of the increasingly diverse intake. Although some members are relatively new, all governors have defined responsibilities and as a whole the governing body is very supportive of the school. The governing body’s knowledge and skills in the interpretation of performance data are satisfactory and improving. However, the governing body remains somewhat dependent upon the headteacher’s presentation of information and recognises the need to increase the level of challenge it provides for school leaders. Statutory responsibilities are met, including those for safeguarding. The governing body ensures that safeguarding practice is good, with rigorous record-keeping and consistent application of robust procedures.

Links and partnerships with agencies ensure good support for pupils who have specific needs. Community cohesion is promoted well through the curriculum in relation to diverse faiths and lifestyles so that pupils develop secure understanding of these. Across the year groups, pupils from all ethnic groups relate well to each other creating a strong sense of community in the school. While local links are robust and useful international links with France and Kenya have been developed, there are few effective links at national level to increase pupils' first hand experiences of others from backgrounds different to their own.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Years Foundation Stage provides a well-resourced learning environment. Good leadership and management, an effective curriculum, good teaching and generally good care and support ensure that children make good progress in their learning and development. The school has responded effectively to the increased

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proportion of children who are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language, ensuring that there is a high level of English language support when children first enter school. A mostly effective partnership is formed with parents and carers. Although there are no home visits, pre-entry visits are arranged for all new children so that induction arrangements are generally good. The school maintains individual assessment records to plan the next steps in learning, rather than learning journals which are used in most settings.

Staff make learning fun and provide a purposeful range of activities which challenge children to think and work together. There is a close focus on personal development and language and literacy skills, particularly speaking and listening. Staff ensure that all children have a mandatory daily session to help develop their writing skills. There is a skilled approach to the teaching of letters and sounds. In general, there is a fair balance of child-initiated and adult-directed activities, complemented by purposeful indoor and outdoor activities. Occasionally, there is a tendency for staff to be over-directive, so reducing opportunities for children to initiate activities for themselves and to develop greater independence. Staff use space and resources creatively so that children can access purposeful learning opportunities enhanced by dedicated environmental, music and water areas.

Children have a good understanding of the need to keep themselves healthy and recognise the importance of eating fruit and vegetables. Children appreciate the need to play safely and their behaviour is good. They play together well and generally children contribute well to the smooth running of the day by sharing resources amicably and keeping the room tidy.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
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

A relatively low proportion of parents and carers responded to the survey. However, almost all of those who did respond are extremely happy with the school and with the care it provides for their children. They feel that the school engages well with parents and carers and that their children enjoy attending greatly. One said 'The ethos of the school is great and is built on mutual respect and support.' In the survey, a few parents and carers indicated concerns about pupils' behaviour. The inspection team found no evidence to support those concerns. Behaviour observed in lessons and around the school was never less than good.

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 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 51 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 211 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	35	69	16	31	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	38	75	13	25	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	29	57	22	43	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	30	59	21	41	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	33	65	18	35	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	31	61	16	31	4	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	32	63	19	27	0	0	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)	30	59	15	29	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	25	49	25	49	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	21	41	24	47	5	10	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	23	45	27	53	1	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	32	63	18	35	1	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	36	71	15	29	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.

21 October 2011

Dear Pupils



Inspection of St Helen's Catholic Primary School, Westcliff-on-Sea, SS0 7AY

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you, hearing your views and spending time in lessons. We found that yours is a good school. These are the things we liked best.

- You have good attitudes to learning and make good progress.
- Those of you who enter the school as beginners in English make particularly good progress once you have mastered the English language.
- Those of you in the Reception Year make good progress and are looked after well.
- Teaching and learning are good in most lessons.
- You feel very safe in school and you behave well.
- You undertake lots of jobs and make a good contribution to the school, and have good links with the local community.
- Staff care for you and support you well.
- You understand the importance of eating healthily and staying fit.
- The provision for visits, clubs and after-school activities is good.
- The leadership of the school and partnerships with other schools are good.

So that you do even better, we have asked the school to do the following things:

- help you all, particularly those of you who learn quickly, to make better progress and reach higher standards in mathematics
- ensure that teachers set higher expectations of presentation and handwriting and that they mark your work thoroughly, making sure that you know exactly what you needs to do to improve further.

All of you can help by continuing to work hard and doing your best. We hope that you will have every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

George Logan
Lead inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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