

# Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	135246
<b>Local authority</b>	Cheshire West and Chester
<b>Inspection number</b>	381852
<b>Inspection dates</b>	19–20 April 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Brian Padgett HMI

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>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	464
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Margaret Pearson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Katherine Brickland
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	2 July 2009
<b>School address</b>	Capenhurst Lane Ellesmere Port CH65 7AQ
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## Introduction

### Inspection team

Brian Padgett  
Gillian Hunter  
Jeremy Barnes  
Eithne Proffitt

Her Majesty's Inspector  
Additional inspector  
Additional inspector  
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Twenty four lessons and group activities were observed involving almost all teachers and teaching assistants. Particular attention was given to observing the teaching of reading and hearing pupils read. All aspects of the school day were observed, including activities in the before- and after-school childcare provision. Meetings were held with parents and carers, groups of pupils, members of the governing body and staff with leadership responsibilities. Inspectors looked at school documentation, including school development plans and safeguarding documents. Questionnaire returns from staff, pupils and from 232 parents were scrutinised.

## Information about the school

The school is much larger than the average primary school. It serves the parish of Our Lady Star of the Sea and St Bernard's and is situated next to Ellesmere Port Catholic High School. As a Catholic school, pupils come from a wider catchment area than a comparable non-denominational school. Families from a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds send their children to the school, although the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the average. The great majority of pupils are White British with a small proportion of pupils from minority-ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.

A breakfast and after-school club, 'Our Star Club', provides childcare for working families. As it is managed by the governing body it was inspected as part of the school's inspection. Inspectors' findings are incorporated within the main body of this report.

The school has achieved several awards in recent years, such as Healthy School status, an International School award and an ECO award in recognition of its contribution to sustainable development. The school exceeds the current floor standards expected by the government for English and mathematics at Year 6.

**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

<b>Overall Effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>

## Key Findings

- This is a good school. It is improving and already has many strengths. Most striking are the excellent behaviour of pupils and their enjoyment of learning. The school has an exceptionally good ethos that stems from the outstanding relationships between staff at all level and pupils of all ages. Pupils are very proud of their school.
- The quality of teaching is good and the basic skills are taught very well, especially reading. Pupils’ attainment is above average. They make good progress and this is beginning to accelerate further as strategies to improve achievement begin to take effect.
- Under the new leadership, the school, supported well by the governing body, is building effectively on its well-established strengths. The staff are determined to move the school forward from being good to being outstanding. They are open and receptive to new ideas for improvement. Senior staff recognise what needs to be done to refine management systems and they are well on their way to laying the necessary foundations for improved provision.
- The school is held in the highest regard by parents and carers. They are justified in their belief that the school offers high quality opportunities for their children outside as well inside lessons. These are well seen in the excellent range of lunchtime and after-school activities and in the high quality childcare provided by ‘Our Star Club’.

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

- Raise the achievement of pupils, particularly the most able, beyond good by:
  - the greater involvement of pupils in their learning in lessons and by the encouragement of independence in their choices

- within the Early Years Foundation Stage, promote independence and choice in particular by developing outdoor learning further within the natural environment.
- Refine management systems and school self-evaluation further by developing a greater emphasis on evaluation and the impact of proposals on pupils' learning.

## **Main Report**

### **Achievement of pupils**

Pupils achieve well and reach above-average levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. Children begin Nursery with development levels that are broadly in line with those of most children of their age but with language and communication skills below those seen typically. By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, at the end of Reception, children attain more highly than most children at five years, having made a particularly good start in reading. By the end of Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils' attainment is above the average. Standards appeared to fall slightly in 2011 in Year 6 but there were particular reasons why this cohort of pupils was not typical for the school. This current school year, in lesson observations and in the school's records, pupils in all classes and of all levels of ability are making above expected levels of progress and, in some classes and aspects, well-above that expected. Pupils who experience difficulty learning, including those supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs, are often taught in small groups and receive more support in learning basic skills. The extra teaching they receive from teachers and teaching assistants ensures they make good progress and that they do not fall behind.

Reading was a particular focus for the inspection. At Our Lady's reading is a high priority, especially in Key Stage 1 and in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where every opportunity is taken to promote the learning of sounds and reading. Reading strategies are very successful and attainment is above average at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. In Years 1 and 2 even pupils who find reading difficult read confidently and tackle words that are new to them with success. The support of parents, carers and volunteers is sought. Pupils who read at home as well as at school make particularly good progress. Parents and carers are very supportive of the school. Virtually all parents and carers who responded to the parents' questionnaire believed their children made good progress.

### **Quality of teaching**

Teaching is good. The bulk of the teaching observed during the inspection was good, with about one in every five lessons judged to be of outstanding quality. Parents and carers responding to the parents' questionnaire were almost unanimous (99%) in believing their children are taught well. In all lessons, relationships between adults and pupils were positive and good humoured. Lessons were invariably well organised and planned with work well matched to pupils of differing abilities and stages of learning. Teaching assistants play a major and effective role in the teaching of groups of pupils, so that there is a strong sense of a teaching team in each class.

Teachers focus clearly on pupils acquiring the basic skills, starting in the Nursery, particularly with reading. The curriculum is being developed to provide more opportunities to practise pupils' basic skills, for example, in writing during topic work. This was seen to excellent effect in Year 5 topic books on the Second World War, where imaginative pieces of extended writing were marked to criteria related to the pupils' literacy targets. Mathematics has been a subject under development in the school recently and it is now taught with more relevance to pupils than before. This was observed in Year 4 where pupils had been actively engaged in collecting and interpreting data about their food choices before performing calculations that had real meaning for them. The most effective teaching, of an outstanding quality, capitalised on the pupils' excellent attitudes to learning by involving and challenging them and expecting them to cooperate to solve problems independently of the teacher, who acted more, in these situations, as a facilitator. In these lessons, such as an excellent Year 6 lesson on algebra, pupils' motivation was high and progress exceptional. Teachers promote pupils' social and moral development very effectively. For example, a teacher worked with Year 5 volunteers over lunchtime drafting a letter to a care home, offering support, as part of the school's contribution to 'Mini Vinnies', the junior section of the St Vincent de Paul Society. This was one example of several observed, demonstrating the dedication of staff to the overall development of each pupil, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The inspection looked in detail at the provision for outdoor learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage, as this was an issue raised in the school's previous inspection. Clear improvements had been made within the Nursery and Reception classes. However, despite some examples where children were able to exercise their imagination to the full in their play, opportunities for children to make independent choices remain too restricted, particularly in their access to the elements of a natural environment.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent and make a major contribution to the school's uplifting ethos. This is a very happy school. Pupils' enjoyment of school is obvious. The main reasons for this are the exceptional relationships between staff at all levels and pupils of all ages, something that parents value very highly. For example, 100% of parents and carers who responded to the parents' questionnaire believed their children felt safe at the school and 99% that the standard of behaviour was good. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding; they develop into mature and responsible young people with a thirst for learning and a strong sense of care for others. There are minor disagreements between pupils from time to time. The school has highly-developed arrangements for conflict resolution, promoting good behaviour and for dealing with bullying and anti-social behaviour. Much of this work is centred on the two part-time learning mentors, who are very effective in providing pastoral support. However, external partners are also used. For example, on the days the school was being inspected, older pupils were working with sports tutors on eradicating bullying in sport. Pupils are trained to play a major role in encouraging cooperation and resolving conflicts as 'Max Agent' mentors in the playground and through the work of the school council. There are clearly understood sets of rewards and there are sanctions that provide an effective deterrent for nearly all pupils. Where necessary,

with a very small number of pupils experiencing particular behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, the school works closely with parents, carers and external partners to support these pupils.

## **Leadership and management**

The new headteacher, appointed in September 2011, has made a very effective impact on the leadership of the school. Long-established strengths have been maintained and there is a fresh ambition for further improvement from within the experienced staff. The parent community continues to hold the school's leadership in the highest esteem. Recruitment difficulties for the post of deputy headteacher have not impeded the leadership capacity of the school. On the contrary, the school has shown a willingness to seek alternative arrangements to support the headteacher, with senior staff rotating in acting roles and with the development of the role of the business manager. For example, safeguarding arrangements, the responsibility of the business manager, are fully secure. The effectiveness of this support has enabled the headteacher to focus on teaching and learning and on pupils' progress. It is too soon to see the consequence of this promising start but early indicators suggest that initiatives such as raising standards in mathematics are resulting in improved progress by pupils. A significant factor in the school's drive to build capacity for sustained improvement is the development of support structures that leave teachers free to focus on teaching and learning, such as the pastoral support provided by the learning mentors and the help provided by volunteers.

Arrangements to monitor the work of the school and the performance of teachers are robust. Equality is promoted well; best seen in the provision for pupils who have difficulty learning or who have emotional and social needs. School development plans are clear, based on a sound understanding of needs and fully involve the school's governing body. However, at present, too little emphasis is given to the consequences of actions for pupils and their learning in the evaluation of development plans.

The governing body is forward looking and individual governors bring a wide and pertinent range of skills and backgrounds to bear from outside the education profession. They are keen to see for themselves how the school operates and they undertake a regular programme of visits. They appreciate what they called a 'step change' in the quality of information they receive, as this enables them to support and challenge the leaders more effectively.

The curriculum is of good quality. It is clearly focused on the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics with a strong emphasis on reading in the early years. Staff are successfully developing links across subjects in order to make learning more meaningful and pupils say this is working. The school provides many opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through a rich programme of visits and visitors and extra-curricular activities. In particular, it has broadened pupils' cultural development recently through its international links with schools abroad in response to a recommendation within the previous inspection report. The school has many effective partnerships with networks of schools and agencies, especially with the High School on the same campus. The 'Our Star' breakfast and after-school clubs are very well led and managed. The dedicated and creative staff

provide well for the young children attending from the Early Years Foundation Stage and fully meet the requirements of the Childcare Register for the older ones.

## 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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

**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.**



23 April 2012

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School, Ellesmere Port, CH65 7AQ**

You may remember when inspectors visited your school recently to see how well you were learning. I am writing to you to tell you our findings. On behalf of the inspection team, a big thank you to all of you for your friendliness and helpfulness during the inspection. We very much enjoyed our two days in the school.

We judged Our Lady's to be a good school. You are making good progress in your learning, particularly in the all-important skills of reading, writing and mathematics. You are also learning to apply these skills well when you do work in topics and in other subjects. As well as your work in lessons, we looked at the wider opportunities you have to develop as young citizens, by caring for each other and people who are less fortunate than you. We saw that you are developing well as mature, responsible young people and that you thoroughly enjoy school outside the classroom too.

We were highly impressed by your behaviour and by your enthusiasm for learning. We could see how much you appreciate your teachers and all the support staff, including your learning mentors. You and your parents clearly think Mrs Brickland has made a great start to her new role as headteacher. We recognise this and gave her just a few pointers to help her in the management of the school.

We were so impressed by your enthusiasm for learning that we suggest that you should be given more independence and responsibility in lessons. We have asked your teachers to plan more lessons with you, and for you to be less dependent on your teacher telling you what to do, especially for those of you for whom learning comes quite easily. For the youngest children in the Nursery and Reception classes to be more independent, we suggest they need more freedom to learn outdoors.

We could not recommend any of these things if it were not for your excellent behaviour and attitudes. If you want your school to be the best you must continue to work as hard and, hopefully, enjoy school as much as you do now.

Yours sincerely

Brian Padgett  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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