

St Mark's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104469
Local authority	Knowsley
Inspection number	377086
Inspection dates	2–3 May 2012
Lead inspector	James Kidd

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	173
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ann Farrell
Headteacher	Richard Coakley
Date of previous school inspection	24 March 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

James Kidd
Lenford White

Additional Inspector
Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 15 lessons or part-lessons, taught by eight members of staff. They held meetings with three groups of pupils, parents and carers, two members of the governing body, the learning mentor, academic and pastoral staff and the senior leadership team. They observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' workbooks, internal and external pupils' progress data, school development planning and documentation in relation to safeguarding and child protection. Inspectors also scrutinised 82 questionnaires returned by parents and carers as well as those completed by pupils and staff.

Information about the school

This is a much smaller than average-sized primary school but numbers are increasing over time. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is high, at more than half the pupil population. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus and those with a statement of special educational needs is above average. Most pupils are of White British heritage and there are very few pupils with English as an additional language. More pupils than usual join or leave the school other than at the usual times. The school meets the current floor standards, which set the government's minimum expectations for attainment and progress. A new headteacher has been appointed since the previous inspection.

St Mark's is a nationally accredited Healthy School and holds the Activemark award for its work in physical education. It was awarded Training Partner School status from Liverpool Hope University in 2011. The Hollies Road Playgroup shares the school site. This receives a separate inspection and the report is available on the Ofsted website.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- This continues to be a good school. It places great emphasis on promoting pupils' personal, social, emotional and academic development and the care, guidance and support they receive from teaching and pastoral staff are excellent. The school is not outstanding because teaching and achievement over time are good and attainment in writing is not as high as in mathematics.
- From well-below expected skills on entry to the nursery, pupils achieve well across the school to reach broadly average attainment by the end of Year 6. Attainment in mathematics has improved markedly since the previous inspection but, although accelerating, pupils' achievement in writing is not quite as good. In addition, below average numbers of pupils reach the higher National Curriculum levels in both English and mathematics.
- The quality of teaching is consistently good across the school and there are examples of outstanding practice. In the nursery and reception, for example, teachers ensure that children have many opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. However, across the rest of the school, levels of challenge for more-able pupils are not always high enough.
- Pupils feel safe, behave exceptionally well and their engagement in lessons cannot be faulted. They are very proud of their school and believe, in their words, 'We should always look after others and make sure everyone is happy.' Parents and carers are similarly positive about the school and all who returned the questionnaires are of the view that the school meets their children's particular needs.
- The headteacher and senior leaders lead by example and are supported by talented and committed staff and a well-informed governing body, which supports and challenges the school in equal measure. As a result of perceptive leadership of teaching and effective management of performance, the school

has developed well since the previous inspection and has a good capacity to sustain its improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to accelerate pupils' progress and raise their attainment in writing by:
 - giving them more opportunities to practise and reinforce their writing skills in all subjects
 - ensuring pupils have sufficient opportunities to share their ideas before they put pen to paper
 - sharing good practice in the teaching of writing across the school.

- Ensure that the challenge for more-able pupils in all lessons, and in both Key Stages 1 and 2, encourages and enables more of them to reach the higher National Curriculum levels in both English and mathematics.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils enter school in the morning with smiles on their faces, looking forward to the day ahead. They greet their teachers, teaching assistants and friends warmly and are always willing to show visitors the work they have completed at home. They enjoy learning and support their peers quite naturally when they are finding things difficult. They are delighted when their classmates do well and burst into applause to congratulate them. Parents and carers have a high regard for how the school helps their children to succeed and comment, 'Our children love coming to school, enjoy their lessons and enjoy learning.' All parents and carers who returned the questionnaires are unerringly accurate in their view that their children make good progress in their studies.

Children enter the Nursery class with skills which are well below those expected for their age. As a result of good teaching, vibrant indoor and outdoor areas and exceptional support from teaching assistants, they make good progress in all areas of learning across both nursery and reception. Their personal development is promoted particularly well and children play and share happily together. They enter Year 1 with below average attainment, but having made good progress in communication, language, literacy and calculation. They enjoy talking to visitors, explaining what they are doing and showing them the setting.

All groups of pupils continue to make good progress in both Key Stages 1 and 2 and they reach broadly average attainment by the time they leave Year 6. Attainment in mathematics has improved markedly since the previous inspection. Progress and attainment in writing are beginning to improve but they still lag behind those in mathematics. Indeed, although achievement in both English and mathematics are good overall, there are too few pupils reaching the higher Levels 3 and 5 by the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Pupils enjoy reading and many are now reading independently at home. Attainment in this area is below average by the end of Year

2 but in line with that expected nationally by the end of Year 6. Pupils are beginning to recognise and to pronounce complex words with accuracy, and expression and intonation are improving apace.

Sharply-focused individual and small-group support ensures that disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and those whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable learn well and make the same good progress as their peers. Indeed, Year 6 pupils with a statement of special educational needs achieved outstandingly well in 2011.

Quality of teaching

Parents and carers justifiably believe that the quality of teaching is good and they comment, 'Staff work hard here to gain the children's interest and enhance their learning.' Teachers have secure subject and specialist knowledge and, along with the talented team of teaching assistants, ensure that activities motivate pupils to want to learn and meet their individual needs closely. Assessment is good and staff know pupils well. Marking is regular, detailed and gives pupils accurate advice on how they can improve their work. As a result, pupils are well aware of their targets and can give visitors extended comment on the progress they are making.

In the best lessons, in a Year 4/5 literacy session where teaching was outstanding for example, relationships are strong, challenge is realistic and staff and pupils themselves demonstrate high expectations of what can be achieved. In this lesson, pupils wrote accurate play scripts, based on their study of 'The Highwayman' poem, and then acted out their work at the end of the lesson. Comprehensive support from teaching assistants ensured that disabled pupils and those with special educational needs were able to access everything the lesson had to offer; pupils approached the teacher when they were leaving for lunch to show her the new words they had learned and the accuracy in their spelling of them. Very well-planned individual and small group work are strong features of all lessons and pupils, often with quite complex needs, are fully involved in the activities.

The school recognises, however, that when pupils are preparing for writing assignments, they do not always have enough opportunity to discuss their ideas, with their teachers and with their peers, before they begin to work. In a minority of lessons, the challenge for more-able pupils is not high enough to require them to think more deeply about their work and thus enable them to aim for the higher National Curriculum levels.

Teaching has a good impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Paired and group work, for example, develops pupils' social skills well. In addition, their spiritual and moral development is promoted strongly when they are asked in lessons, 'How can we show others that we care for them?' and 'What makes us feel joyful?'

Behaviour and safety of pupils

All parents and carers who returned the inspection questionnaires spoke accurately and with one voice about the outstanding care and support their children receive.

One represented many with the words, 'The school is dedicated to raising the self-esteem of all the children, to promoting their feelings of self-worth and introduces them to a new world where learning can make a huge difference to their future.' Pupils share these views. They feel safe in school, are proactive in their support for their peers and younger children, and know how to ensure that they remain secure. They understand, for example, the importance of using the internet safely. They value the visits from the fire service and the police when they learn about keeping themselves safe. They also have an impressive appreciation of and respect for the beliefs of others and, as two boys said, 'We feel joyful when we see others smile and also when we see disabled people having the same fun that we have!' Pupils have a strong awareness of the dangers of bullying in all its forms, cyber and prejudiced-based bullying for example, and are quite adamant that such behaviour is very rare in their school, and is dealt with swiftly and effectively if it ever occurs. Pupils, parents, carers and staff have the highest regard for the most effective work of the learning mentor. This professional has a seminal impact on the lives of pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable and her work with families is a byword in the local community.

The school's key emphasis on fostering pupils' welfare and emotional development has a profound impact as early as in the Nursery and Reception classes, where children often behave with a maturity which belies their years. Indeed, behaviour across the school is typically excellent and pupils' engagement in their learning in lessons is a joy to behold. The 'Good to be Green' initiative has a positive impact on their demeanour. Pupils treat each other, the staff and visitors with the utmost dignity and they demonstrate the highest levels of respect for the school building and its environs. They have a high regard for their school and, although attendance is broadly average, it has improved year-on-year since the previous inspection.

Leadership and management

The dedicated headteacher provides principled leadership and is supported well by a proactive senior team. Members of the governing body have a keen understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and hold the leadership to account with rigour. The sharing of responsibility among all staff is the order of the day and, as a result, there is an agreed vision for how the school is to move forward. Staff of all levels of experience and responsibility speak positively of the way in which the leadership supports them through well-founded professional development: the courses they attend are linked inextricably to whole-school priorities and, therefore, to the personal and academic needs of the pupils in their charge. The school recognises that attainment in writing is not high enough and is committed to the sharing of good practice in the teaching of this subject across the school.

The curriculum is broad and balanced, is complemented by an international dimension and has a good impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There are, however, insufficient opportunities for pupils to practise their writing in all the subjects they study. There is a wide range of well-attended enrichment and extra-curricular activities and parents and carers speak highly of how the school helps them to extend their children's learning at home. Following a study of the Titanic disaster, for example, pupils asked their parents and carers if they could go to Liverpool to see 'The Giants.' The curriculum in the Early Years

Foundation Stage offers a good balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities.

The inclusion of all pupils in everything it does is the overriding aim of the school. It therefore, promotes equality of opportunity well and rejects all forms of discrimination. Child protection and safeguarding policies and practice fully meet current government requirements and are reviewed on a regular basis.

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).

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.



4 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's Catholic Primary School, Liverpool, L26 0XR

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. We would like to say a special 'thank you' to those of you who came to talk to us on both days. We enjoyed listening to your views. Here is the letter I promised to write to you, about what we think about your school.

St Mark's is a good school and you told us many times that you are very proud of it. Your behaviour is excellent and you do so much to support each other and to look after younger children. You feel secure in school and have an impressive understanding of how to keep yourselves safe. You say that bullying is very rare in school and also that the adults who work with you are always there if you need them. You are right that the teachers, teaching assistants and the learning mentor look after you exceptionally well. The teaching you receive is good and sometimes outstanding and you make good progress in your studies, particularly in mathematics.

Your headteacher and all the other staff are always thinking of ways to make St Mark's even better. We would like to help them do this! We have asked them, therefore, to help you improve your writing by giving you more chances to practise it in all your lessons and to share your ideas before you begin your work. We have also asked your teachers to make sure that those of you, who sometimes find the work easy, are given assignments which make you think more and which help you to reach the highest levels you can.

Thank you again for kindness and your courtesy to us. We enjoyed watching you learn. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

James Kidd
Lead Inspector

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