

St Elizabeth's Catholic Primary School

Webster Street, Litherland, Liverpool, L21 8JH

Inspection dates 7–8 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils achieve well, often from a very low start. Standards have risen steadily over the last few years to just above average. This is because of strong teaching and particularly good-quality support for those pupils who need to catch up or who find learning hard.
- Reading and writing are taught well from the Nursery onwards: boys and girls enjoy reading and rise to challenges in writing, taking pride in their work.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and when moving around this spacious school. They are well-mannered, helpful and willing to learn.
- School leaders make very effective use of the government's additional funding to ensure that pupils with specific personal and learning needs feel safe and are keen to learn. As a result, these pupils thrive and do really well.
- Staff, parents and governors rightly value how the headteacher 'leads with compassion' and ensures a calm and friendly school. Staff and governors have worked successfully with the local authority to improve teaching and achievement. Governors and staff are committed to 'providing the best so that pupils achieve their very best'.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough has been done to challenge all pupils, especially the more able, and help them to excel. Sometimes teachers tend to tell the pupils what to do, and how to do it, rather than help pupils to tackle a task independently.
- The Nursery and Reception rooms are not as vibrant, eye-catching and thought-provoking as areas in other parts of the school.
- Plans are yet to be implemented to link subjects through topics which provide a purpose for pupils to practise their reading, writing and mathematical skills.
- The school's leaders and governors are not able to check critically how well their decisions and actions help to raise standards because improvement plans do not identify specific intentions.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 22 lessons, three of which were joint observations with the headteacher. Three observations were of the teaching of phonics (the links between letters and sounds) and guided reading. One observation was of targeted support in English for a group of pupils in order to accelerate their progress.
- Meetings were held with the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body, the headteacher and other senior leaders, members of the school's English and mathematics working parties, the special educational needs coordinator and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors also met with a group of Year 6 pupils, pupils on the school council and the link teacher to Sefton Children's University.
- Inspectors attended an assembly and spoke with parents there and to some who collected their children at the end of the school day.
- Inspectors looked at work completed by former and current pupils and heard three Year 1 pupils read.
- Two inspectors and the headteacher and deputy headteacher looked at the work from this term of a representative sample of pupils in Years 1, 3 and 5.
- The headteacher and one inspector undertook a learning walk which involved visiting all the classes.
- Inspectors took account of the five responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), the responses to the school's questionnaire for parents, issued in July 2012, and responses to the questionnaire completed by 20 members of staff.

They observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, the improvement plan, data concerning children's progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils' progress at Key Stages 1 and 2, planning and monitoring documents, the minutes of the meetings of the governing body and records relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Sonja Øyen, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Adrian Martin

Additional Inspector

Christine Addison

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than most primaries. The number on roll has fallen slightly in the last few years to 325 and, with spare places, pupils moving into the area join classes at all times during the year.
- The Nursery has places for 30 children in the morning and the afternoon sessions. A few children attend all day.
- There are two classes for each year apart from Years 3 and 4 where there is a class of mixed-age pupils as well as a class of Year 3 pupils and a class of Year 4 pupils.
- Nearly one in four pupils is identified as having special educational needs, predominantly behavioural, social and emotional needs, and speech and communication needs. The proportions supported at school action and school action plus are above average. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs is well below average.
- Pupils come from a range of social and cultural backgrounds. Just under half are eligible for additional funding from the government (pupil premium); this is double the national average.
- The school runs a breakfast club. Lunchtime and after-school clubs offer pupils the opportunity to gain awards and become a graduate of Sefton Children's University.
- The deputy headteacher, appointed from within the school, took up the post in September 2012.
- In 2012 the school met the floor standards, measures set by the government for the attainment of pupils at the end of Year 6 and for their progress during Key Stage 2.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality of teaching and accelerate pupils' learning, especially that of the more able pupils, by:
 - sharing best practice so as to increase the challenge for pupils, particularly through asking probing questions, encouraging pupils to explain their thinking and improve their work
 - raising staff's expectations of what pupils can achieve independently
 - ensuring all staff a) make clear exactly what pupils need to do to succeed in a task and b) use class and group discussions during and at the end of sessions to help pupils to review how well they have done.
- Implement plans to use themes and topics to link subjects so that
 - pupils learn through experiences that they find meaningful and memorable in order to develop and refine their skills and knowledge, especially in communication, literacy and numeracy
 - there is more pizzazz in how space, resources and displays are used, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage, to arouse children's curiosity and to get them talking and thinking.
- Sharpen the quality of governors' and leaders' reviews of how well the school is doing by clarifying the links between planned actions and the expected impact for pupils.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Standards have risen steadily in the last three years. In 2012 the school gained its best results in national tests and the assessments for pupils in Years 2 and 6. Standards are now broadly average at the end of Key Stage 1 and just above at Key Stage 2.
- Not only are most pupils reaching the level expected for their age, but a growing proportion are doing even better. Half of the previous Year 6 pupils have gone on to secondary school a year ahead in reading, and one in three in writing; better than in most schools nationally. Such success is the result of focused teaching and targeted support in reading, handwriting, spelling and writing. Boys' performance in reading and writing has risen markedly because the books and writing tasks catch their interest. Younger pupils are developing secure phonic knowledge and confidence in reading and writing. Year 1 pupils sounded out words they did not know and chatted about the storyline, and Year 2 pupils drew well on their knowledge of sounds and letters when writing rhymes about autumn.
- Pupils' confidence in handling number, especially mentally, is strengthening because of short daily sessions in all classes in aspects of number, such as times tables. Achievement and standards are rising also as a result of consistent teaching in ways to calculate and to solve problems. School leaders know they need to ratchet up the challenge for the more able mathematicians, especially in using and applying mathematical knowledge in other subjects. As in 2011–12, the school is working with a local high school to help Year 6 pupils to excel.
- All pupils achieve well and parents are generally very pleased with their children's progress. Many children start in the Nursery with poor speech and often little experience in getting on with others. They make good progress in personal and social skills because the staff encourage good manners, the following of routines and taking care of own needs. When children move into Year 1 they have started to take off in reading, writing and number.
- The school shines in how it gets over and round barriers to pupils' learning, whether the problems be social, emotional, physical or mental. It makes very effective use of its pupil premium funding to widen experiences for vulnerable individuals and for groups, and indeed for the school as a whole, particularly in building self-confidence and social skills. All pupils move on in their learning because staff understand and cater well for individual needs by tailoring tasks and providing additional resources. When a pupil appears to be making slower progress than expected, the school is quick to put support in place to enable catch-up. As a result, all pupils make at least expected progress, most make good progress and some make outstanding progress.
- The positive impact of the wide range of support shows in the narrowing gap in performance between those pupils eligible for pupil premium and those not. At Key Stage 1, for example, the gap is far narrower than in most schools, especially in reading.

The quality of teaching is good

- Pupils learn well primarily because a key strength of the teaching throughout the school is the warm, caring relationship between pupils and adults. The staff know each pupil really well. Classrooms are well organised, routines are consistent, learning materials are to hand and, consequently, pupils are at ease, feel secure and engage happily in learning.
- In the Nursery and Reception classes the staff use the outdoor space well to foster learning, especially physical skills. Children had much fun sitting in and jumping over cardboard boxes, with some getting markedly more confident in one-footed leaps. However, the unit as a whole is rather bland with little enrichment to prompt and foster children's curiosity and engagement in current themes.
- Throughout the school, teachers and assistants are effective partners in supporting pupils with particular needs and in managing pupils' behaviour in a positive way. Lessons run smoothly: adults are quick to praise as well as to notice and deal with any concerns.

- Teaching and support assistants are skilful in how they, often unobtrusively, work with pupils to keep them on track. For example, for pupils who find it really hard to concentrate, quiet questioning and prompting ensure that they play a full part in the lesson.
- The teaching of reading, writing and mathematics is good. Teachers are consistent in their approach and confident in what works well. This is because they have seen pupils' progress accelerate as a result of all staff acting on guidance from the school's English and mathematics working parties. Homework tasks, such as reading, learning spellings and number facts, build on learning in class.
- Whole-school themes, often carefully chosen with boys in mind, motivate pupils to read and write. The current display of recipes for witches' potions shows clearly how pupils from Nursery to Year 6 drew on their imagination, understood the format of a recipe and took pride in presenting their versions.
- Not all staff are equally adept at questioning pupils about their learning. In an English lesson probing questions from the teacher, such as 'Can we be more specific?' and 'What do you notice about ..?' prompted Year 6 pupils to think and identify exactly what made a good written argument. Similarly, searching questions from the teacher led to Year 1 pupils making simple hypotheses about sources of light. In other lessons teachers often asked questions that merely tested pupils' knowledge and did not tease out detail or their thinking.
- Teachers regularly check how well pupils are learning. In lessons teachers refer to pupils' targets and pupils know what is expected of them. In the most effective sessions the pupils know exactly what counts as success and can say whether these features have been met or not. As some teachers miss chances to identify and emphasise the features of successful learning, pupils' learning is not always reinforced as well as it could be.
- Teachers mark pupils' work with care and give clear feedback, especially in identifying what would improve pupils' writing next time.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils, staff and parents are in agreement that behaviour is good overall. Pupils know how they are expected to behave and value Golden Time as a reward for good behaviour. Their politeness and respect for others reflect the school's ethos of love and care for one another. Pupils are proud of their school. Attendance has improved to just below average.
- In a school assembly the theme of 'always behave well and do your best' was linked to Ofsted inspections. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 acted as 'inspectors' to point out what they knew pupils should not do and then showed examples of outstanding behaviour. During the inspection there were a few occasions in lessons when pupils' behaviour, although never untoward, fell short of their own definition of 'outstanding'. Pupils were keen to learn and worked well in pairs or small groups. Their concentration slipped, and some restlessness set in, when they were unclear as to what they had to do, found the task a little too easy or, in whole-class times, when the teacher's attention was overly given to questioning individuals.
- In discussions with inspectors pupils were extremely positive about school and how they all help one another not to feel different. They enjoy the wide range of activities at lunchtime and after school. They like the daily sessions of silent reading, the chance to learn to play the violin or clarinet, and working on their own ideas.
- Pupils said that they know how to stay safe and do feel safe in all parts of the school. They know that staff keep a close eye on everyone and there is always someone that they can talk to, including Year 6 pupils who act as helpers to the younger pupils. During training to be peer mentors Year 5 pupils were very responsive to points on how to listen to others.
- Pupils talked about some boys sometimes 'being a bit silly' because they found it hard to behave properly. It did not affect learning in class as the staff dealt with it. The school's records show how experiences, such as attendance at clubs which lead to awards from Sefton Children's University, have helped pupils to gain better control of their behaviour along with increased attendance, self-confidence and interest in learning.
- A few parents had concerns about bullying. Pupils mentioned some very occasional name-

calling, which they knew to be a form of bullying, but commented that this was always sorted out quickly. The evidence from the school's records and from inspectors' observations supports this view.

The leadership and management are good

- Morale is high. The headteacher and staff indicated their pride in working in the school and their determination to continue the journey of improvement. They recognise what has led to their success in raising standards, know where further improvement is needed and have clear plans to bring it about. However, the plans give little indication of the intended benefits in pupils' attainment and progress, thus limiting governors and senior leaders in reviewing critically the impact of the action taken.
- Since the last inspection the headteacher has challenged, encouraged and enabled others to take a lead in driving change. This has been markedly effective in English. By pooling expertise and ideas the three members of the working party have successfully developed the quality of teaching and ensured pupils enjoy reading and writing. Guided by consultants from the local authority, they have worked with staff to ensure accuracy in judging pupils' attainment in writing and in identifying those pupils who are not making enough progress. Teachers are pinpointing concerns early and taking action to help pupils catch up or to receive particular support.
- Good links with local primaries and high schools have enabled staff to share and hear about effective practice. The headteacher and deputy headteacher hold teachers firmly to account for the progress of the children in their classes. They are accurate in their judgements about the quality of teaching, although observations have not always focussed enough on how well pupils learn and what would improve their learning. This is one reason why leadership and management are not outstanding.
- Support from the local authority and from senior leaders has strengthened individuals' teaching. Professional development remains closely linked to the school's priorities for improvement. Staff are well aware of the headteacher's high expectations of those who are close to or at the top of the pay scale and the need for all to show how well they meet the new Teachers' Standards.
- The headteacher gives a strong lead in the safeguarding of pupils. She appreciates the issues facing families and how these often spill into school and affect pupils' learning. She draws on well-established links with a wide range of contacts to tailor help for families and pupils which complements the school's strong internal network of support. This high-quality level of care and concern is a key reason why pupils are ready to learn and move on well.
- The school uses funding from pupil premium in many effective ways; for example, employing an additional teacher has created smaller classes for older pupils, many of whom are identified as having special educational needs and needing additional support. Similarly, appointing two assistants to act as parental advisers has paid off in stronger partnership with families, particularly with those who find it hard to maintain contact with school. It also led to pupils' improved attendance.
- The headteacher accepts that the focus on raising standards in reading, writing and mathematics put the development of a creative curriculum 'on the back burner'. Staff are now looking at how to link subjects to promote pupils' natural curiosity and stimulate their imagination. They are also looking at how best to build on the success of situations and experiences that have motivated pupils to write.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body is very supportive of the school and of the headteacher in her drive to raise standards. It has a good overview of what is working well, where there is still room for improvement and the implications for spending on staffing and other resources. The curriculum committee looks at data about pupils' progress and asks about the factors that account for instances of underachievement. The rigour and depth of critical review have strengthened as a result of the governors' work with the school improvement partner from the local authority in evaluating the headteacher's performance.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	104932
Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	400744

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	325
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father McAllister
Headteacher	Kathy Sullivan
Date of previous school inspection	September 2009
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