

Blackbrook St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Chain Lane, St Helens, Merseyside, WA11 9QY

Inspection dates 23–24 January 2013

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.

- Achievement has improved since the previous inspection. Pupils of all abilities now make good progress from low, and sometimes very low, starting points. Attainment by the end of Year 6 is at nationally expected levels.
- Most teaching is now good or better. This is because leaders regularly and carefully check the quality of teaching to make sure it is helping pupils to progress as well as possible.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. This inspires pupils to try their best to succeed.
- Pupils are proud of their school. This is reflected in their good behaviour and above-average attendance. They feel safe, are well cared for and are eager to learn.
- The headteacher provides clear and purposeful leadership. She is well supported by the governors and senior leaders and has created a strong sense of teamwork between all staff in the school.
- Pupils who are disabled or those with special educational needs achieve well because of the carefully targeted support they receive.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is mainly good, rather than outstanding, and it requires improvement in a minority of lessons.
- Pupils' achievement is good rather than outstanding.
- Marking does not always give pupils enough guidance about how to improve their work.
- There are not enough opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in interesting topic work that brings subjects together.
- Sometimes pupils do not have enough time in lessons to act on their teachers' marking or to think about and practise what they have learned.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 26 lessons and made a number of short visits to classrooms to observe teaching and learning. One of these was a joint observation with the headteacher. The inspectors also looked at examples of pupils' work. They listened to pupils read in Years 1, 2 and 6 and observed the teaching of early reading skills in the school.
- Meetings were held with two groups of pupils and inspectors spoke to pupils about their work. Inspectors held meetings with a group of parents, the Chair, the vice-chair and one other member of the Governing Body, two representatives of the local authority and members of staff.
- In the course of the inspection, inspectors took account of 30 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), the school's analysis of questionnaires completed by parents and 23 staff questionnaires.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including a summary of the school's self-evaluation, its long-term plan and its analysis of current data.

Inspection team

Lyn Pender, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Rebecca Lawton

Additional Inspector

Jeremy Barnes

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much larger than the average-sized primary school. Numbers have continued to rise since the previous inspection.
- Significant building work and changes to the learning environment have taken place since the previous inspection. These will continue in the future until the school community is housed in a single building rather than the current split-site arrangement.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is much smaller than average.
- An above-average proportion of pupils are supported at school action. A lower-than-average number of pupils are supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium funding is in line with the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school participates in the Children's University and awards held include the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good and so that more lessons are outstanding, in order to raise pupils' achievement from good to outstanding, by:
 - sharing the excellent practice that exists in the school
 - ensuring that marking consistently shows pupils the next steps to take to improve their work and that pupils are given the opportunity to act on this guidance
 - ensuring that pupils have the opportunity to think about their learning and practise new skills in their independent work in lessons.
- Continue to develop the curriculum so it fully engages pupils' interest and provides frequent opportunities for them to develop their skills in numeracy, literacy and communication in work across the subject areas.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils **is good**

- Most children enter the school with skill levels lower than those expected for their age and much lower in communication and language development. They settle well and make good progress in the Reception classes because teachers provide an exciting range of activities which encourage them to become interested and independent learners. As a result, pupils enter Year 1 with skills close to what might be expected for their age.
- Pupils progress well in Years 1 and 2. The number of pupils on track to reach the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 1 is average but is continuing to rise.
- Standards in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6 are broadly in line with the national average. Pupils make at least the progress expected for their age and many more are doing better because of good teaching.
- Carefully targeted teaching and support help disabled pupils and those with special educational needs do as well as other pupils given their starting points.
- The attainment of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are known to be entitled to the pupil premium funding is broadly average and they achieve at least as well as other pupils in the school and similar pupils in other schools.
- Pupils say how much they enjoy reading. They especially like the new books which have been added to the library this year. The 'Reading Through The Rainbow' challenge introduced by school leaders has encouraged pupils to read more regularly at home. Early reading skills are developed well through careful teaching of letters and the sounds they make. By the end of Year 2 and Year 6 reading standards are broadly average.
- Parents agree that their children make good progress and say that the skills and commitment of teachers and support staff are instrumental in this.

The quality of teaching **is good**

- Leaders' focus on improving the quality of teaching means that the quality overall is now good, with some outstanding practice. In a very small number of lessons improvements are still needed. Most parents agree that their children are taught well.
- The most effective teaching has many common features, including:
 - tasks based on what pupils already know, effective questioning to check regularly how pupils are doing and clear explanations to move learning forward
 - effective teamwork between teachers and skilled teaching assistants so that all pupils are given the help and support they need
 - mostly well-planned lessons to ensure that pupils have the opportunity to judge how well they are doing
 - bright and well-organised classrooms where learning is supported by helpful displays and practical resources.
- In an outstanding Early Years Foundation Stage lesson teachers used the snowy weather to capture pupils' imagination and spark their curiosity. They helped children to find out more about ice and water through careful questioning and using a wide range of interesting activities.
- In lessons where teaching is not yet outstanding too little time is given to pupils to allow them to think more deeply about what they are learning or to work independently to practise new skills.
- Pupils who are disabled and those with special educational needs are well supported. Teachers and well-trained teaching assistants provide carefully tailored programmes which are sensitive to pupils' individual needs. The teaching they receive and the progress they make are closely checked by leaders to ensure pupils achieve as well as they are able.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly. Some teachers' marking is of a high quality and enables pupils to be clear about how they can improve their learning, and in the most effective lessons

teachers ensure that pupils have enough time to act upon the advice given. The quality of marking and the use of this feedback need to be developed in a small number of classes in order to become more consistent across the school.

- Governors, school leaders and staff are committed to helping all pupils improve their speaking and listening skills. Every lesson includes time for pupils to talk about their learning. They use this time well to develop reasoning and questioning skills and to improve the ability to communicate with each other and the adults present.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- This is a happy and friendly school. Pupils treat each other and adults with a great deal of respect and behave sensibly in class and around school.
- The vast majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire or spoke to inspectors judged behaviour to be good. Pupils also say that behaviour is good and has continued to improve since the previous inspection. The small amount of boisterous behaviour which sometimes takes place on the playground is dealt with swiftly and the school rules, supported by the rewards and sanctions procedures, are applied fairly and understood by all.
- Pupils feel safe. They have a good understanding of all the different kinds of bullying, including internet bullying, and feel that bullying of any type is rare. If incidents do happen pupils trust the adults to deal with these quickly.
- Pupils enjoy contributing to the life of their school and are keen to take on responsible roles. Some pupils are members of the school council and older pupils in Year 6 act as reading buddies with reception children. They work in the computer suite together and make shared visits to the library. Pupils have very clear ideas about how to make their school even better. They feel listened to and believe their views are acted upon.
- Pupils are prepared well for their future education and are helped to keep safe. They respond well to the strong moral and social guidance they receive through effective personal and social education.
- Following a dip in 2011 the school has successfully worked with pupils and parents to return to the above-average attendance rates reported at the previous inspection.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has a clear vision for improving the school. She is well supported by the deputy headteacher, senior leaders and the governing body, who share this view.
- Good use is made of robust systems to regularly check the quality of the school's work and plan accurately for ongoing improvements. Consequently, the school is aware of the few aspects of teaching and learning requiring further development and is well placed to address them and to continue to improve.
- Training provided for teachers and support staff is based on whole-school needs, as well as individuals' performance in the classroom, and supports improvements in teaching.
- All staff and pupils are involved in helping to move the school forward. Regular opportunities exist to ensure everybody's views are heard. For example, inspectors observed some pupils, who are relatively new to the school, working with staff to improve the way new pupils are helped to settle in.
- The school has recently introduced a whole-school, topic-based approach to the curriculum. Leaders are aware that these changes are at an early stage and that more needs to be done to make sure pupils are given more opportunities to practise their reading, writing and mathematics in other subjects.
- Pupil premium funding is used to good effect. The funding has provided additional teachers to work with pupils and access to a wide range of visits and enrichment activities.
- Parents say that staff are approachable and that they are kept well informed by school leaders.

- The support provided by the local authority has contributed well to the school's improvements since the previous inspection.

- **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body is well led and works effectively with the school. It provides strong support and rigorous challenge for the headteacher and holds leaders to account for the quality of teaching and the standards pupils achieve. Governors ensure that teachers' pay is linked to the effectiveness of teaching in raising standards. Targets set for teachers to achieve this are effective in driving improvements. The governing body is provided with regular, detailed information which enables governors to have a good understanding of the strengths and challenges facing the school. The governing body is careful to ensure school funds are spent well. For example, they are very clear about the use of the pupil premium funding and how this has benefited pupils. Safeguarding procedures are in place and meet requirements. Governors ensure that equal opportunities are promoted well and that discrimination of any kind is not tolerated in school.

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	104802
Local authority	St.Helens
Inspection number	404958

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	405
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Alcock
Headteacher	Julia Ashton
Date of previous school inspection	30 November 2010
Telephone number	01744 678161
Fax number	01744 678164
Email address	blackbrook@sthelens.org.uk

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