

St Helen's Catholic Junior School Academy

Sawyers Hall Lane, Brentwood, CM15 9BY

Inspection dates

3–4 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	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 make good progress during their time at school and attain above-average standards in English and mathematics.
- The new procedures for tracking pupils' progress are very good. They help the school to quickly identify any pupil who might fall behind so that additional support can be provided to get them back on track.
- Teaching is good, with some examples of outstanding teaching practice. Most teachers plan interesting activities so that pupils of all abilities learn well.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.
- The school organises a wide, interesting range of visitors, outside visits and extra activities which greatly increase pupils' enjoyment and experience of school.
- Pupils behave well. They feel very safe, are polite, attend regularly and are very proud of their school.
- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors provide clear, effective leadership. Other leaders now play a greater part in the leadership and management of the school. This is helping to maintain and improve the good standards of teaching and learning.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teachers ensure that all pupils are fully involved in the lesson, which limits learning.
- There are not enough opportunities for teachers to share the best practice in teaching and learning in the school.
- Teachers are not setting challenging enough progress targets for themselves or the pupils.
- Performance targets set by leaders for individual teachers do not always address weaknesses identified in lesson observations.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 16 lessons, of which three were joint observations with the headteacher.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, senior leaders, staff and groups of pupils.
- Inspectors took account of the 65 responses to the Parent View online questionnaire and the 22 responses from the staff questionnaire distributed for the inspection.
- Inspectors examined a range of evidence, including the school's self-evaluation form, the school development plan, the system to track pupils' progress, and records relating to behaviour and attendance. They also looked at records of lesson observations by senior staff, information related to teachers' performance, safeguarding documentation and a sample of pupils' work.

Inspection team

Stephen Walker, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Matthew Klimcke	Additional Inspector
Linda Baily	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Helen's Catholic Junior School Academy converted to become an academy in August 2011 and is run by the governors of the school. When its predecessor school, St Helen's Catholic Junior School, was last inspected by Ofsted in 2009, it was judged as outstanding.
- The school is larger than the average-sized junior school and is situated on the outskirts of Brentwood. The school was rebuilt in 1974 and replaced the original buildings which were sited in the centre of the town.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds, although over a quarter of the pupils are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- A smaller-than-average proportion of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care, pupils with a parent in the armed forces and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is below average. So, too, is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The headteacher has been acting as the executive headteacher for a local primary school for the past year in her capacity as a National Leader of Education.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more of it is outstanding, and it is never less than consistently good, and so that pupils achieve even better by:
 - encouraging pupils to be more actively involved throughout all lessons so that they understand the work, concentrate well and all make at least good progress
 - finding more opportunities to improve teaching through coaching and sharing good practice
 - ensuring that teachers set challenging targets for more of the pupils to exceed expected progress
 - making sure that targets set for teachers are more sharply focused on supporting pupils to make better-than-expected progress, and address weaknesses identified in their teaching.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils join the school at the start of Year 3 with broadly average attainment. Early, detailed assessment of pupils' skills, together with careful tracking of their progress shows that they make good progress throughout their time at school. Attainment at the end of Year 6 is above average. Most pupils make the progress they should and an increasing number exceed expectations in English and mathematics. The progress of pupils from minority ethnic groups is as good as that of other pupils.
- Observations of lessons and examination of pupils' work in books show the good progress that pupils are making. Standards of work of the majority of pupils are above average, particularly in Years 5 and 6. Over half the pupils are now gaining the higher Level 5 in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6.
- Pupils make good progress in reading, so that attainment is above the national average by the end of Key Stage 2. There is an impressive range of suitable books for all abilities and the school is effectively developing 'reading for enjoyment' so that all pupils are encouraged to read regularly at home and in school. The encouragement of writing across all subjects is supporting the improvement in writing skills for both boys and girls.
- Similarly, high-quality teaching ensures that pupils make good progress in mathematics and attain above-average standards. There is a well thought-out course on key skills and problem solving which has led to considerable improvements across the school. Teachers are now able to identify very accurately the weaker key skill areas for individual pupils so that they can quickly provide additional teaching and support.
- The new systems to track pupils' progress are used quickly to spot any pupils who are at risk of underachieving. Leaders make sure that extra support is provided for them and enables them to achieve well. Records show that most pupils are making the progress they should and an increasing number of pupils are exceeding expectations in each year group.
- Most disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress, in line with their peers, due to highly effective work from teaching assistants who provide additional support in the class and in small withdrawal groups. The extra support for these pupils helps them overcome their particular difficulties and make good progress.
- Recent testing in Year 6 suggests that most pupils are on track to make at least the expected two levels of progress in English and mathematics from their Year 3 starting points and nearly half the pupils are on track to make at least three levels of progress. The school aims to make sure that all pupils make at least expected progress from their starting points, but the targets set for pupils are not always high enough to ensure that pupils are aiming for better-than-expected progress.
- The school is using additional funding effectively to narrow the gap between the attainment of pupils eligible for the pupil premium, almost all of whom are those known to be eligible for free school meals, and other pupils in the school. Money is allocated for counselling, enrichment activities and additional help in reading, writing and mathematics. Records show that, in Year 6, the gap between these pupils' attainment and that of other pupils is narrowing, particularly in mathematics. Pupils in receipt of the pupil premium are still about two terms behind their classmates in English, but this is an improvement on 2012, when pupils known to be eligible for

free school meals were around a year behind their classmates in English and in mathematics.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching in most classes is good, with examples of some outstanding teaching. As a result, most pupils make good progress in all year groups. There is good teaching of basic skills in the daily periods of literacy and numeracy. The vast majority of parents and carers feel that their children are taught well, and pupils agree.
- Teachers plan lessons that usually involve a range of interesting activities so that pupils are normally enthusiastic about their work and concentrate well. Displays in classrooms are attractive, support learning and often celebrate pupils' work.
- Pupils learn well because the activities chosen by teachers are normally well matched to pupils' different abilities. Teachers are conscientious in their planning of lessons to make sure that the tasks are achievable but sufficiently challenging, so that each pupil learns well. Teaching assistants are used well to support pupils who require additional help with their work.
- There are good examples of marking in all age groups which commend good work but also show pupils how to remedy any weaknesses. Some teachers encourage pupils to assess each other's work, which helps them to improve it and gain a greater appreciation of how external tests are marked.
- Teachers generally use questioning well to engage pupils, check understanding and challenge them to develop their understanding further. Supportive questioning enables all pupils to make contributions to class discussions, and a number of teachers are very skilled at getting pupils to explain their understanding of concepts to the rest of the class.
- Some outstanding teaching is seen in a number of classes, when teachers challenge pupils with high-quality questioning and tasks, regularly check pupils' understanding and encourage them to take greater responsibility for their own learning. For example, Year 3 pupils were set the challenging task of working in pairs to select the correct mathematical method to solve word problems in their numeracy work. Pupils made rapid progress as they were all fully engaged in the lesson and shared their enjoyment in the learning.
- Some teaching requires improvement. In these lessons, teachers do not fully engage pupils' interest or encourage them to be actively involved in the learning. Some teachers do not consistently check that all pupils are clear about the tasks set and what they have to do to succeed. Not all teachers provide enough opportunities for the pupils to work independently or in groups to develop their understanding on their own.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school, and this contributes to a calm and orderly atmosphere. There are very clear expectations of behaviour and consistent systems to deal quickly with any misbehaviour.
 - Pupils respond well to the strong tradition in the school of caring for one another. The regular assemblies greatly support the positive atmosphere in the school because they interest the pupils and help them to develop a sense of commitment to others. Pupils are considerate, polite
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and courteous to staff and each other, and this contributes well to their learning.

- The large majority of parents and carers are positive about behaviour in the school. Parents, carers and pupils confirm that bullying is very rare in the school. Pupils say that any unkind behaviour, such as name-calling or teasing, is dealt with quickly and effectively. They are aware of the different forms of possible bullying such as cyber-bullying and prejudice-based bullying related to sex, gender, race and disability.
- There is a good level of supervision at break and lunchtime which provides a clear framework for expected behaviour. Pupils are developing their skills in managing their own behaviour and senior pupils are encouraged to take on responsibilities within the school, such as helping with the school council, clubs and in the playground.
- Pupils feel valued as individuals, even in this larger than average-sized school. Pupils say they feel safe in the school and display a good understanding of the issues relating to safety, such as crossing the road and talking to strangers. Older pupils are aware of the dangers of smoking, alcohol and drugs, although they mentioned that they would appreciate more time to discuss internet safety.
- Attendance is well above average and reflects pupils' enjoyment of school. All pupils adhere to the smart uniform regulations and the vast majority are very proud of their school.
- Pupils respond well to teachers' good use of praise and encouragement which promote high standards of behaviour. However, a few pupils lose concentration in some lessons when the work does not fully engage their interest.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides strong and effective leadership, which ensures the maintenance of good standards in the school. She is well supported by members of the senior leadership team, who have responded well to the opportunities to take on more responsibility while the headteacher has been supporting a local primary school. Staff as a whole work well as a team and are committed to the further improvement and continued success of the school.
 - The school has an accurate understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement. The school development plan sets out clear actions and targets that are focused on improving the quality of teaching and the rate of pupils' progress. There is also a considerable emphasis on the personal development of the pupils so that they become responsible and caring members of society.
 - Professional training for teachers and support staff is effective in helping them to reflect on and improve their practice. Leadership is good throughout the school. For example, the literacy and numeracy leaders are now taking a more active part in running training sessions for the teachers. The newly appointed year leaders are holding regular meetings with teachers to ensure consistent planning across the year groups.
 - Senior leaders carry out regular lesson observations of all teachers, with a strong focus on pupils' progress. However, there has been insufficient action on the areas where individual teachers require more professional support; for example, through additional training or coaching. There are too few opportunities for staff to share good and outstanding practice either within or beyond the school.
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- The system for managing the performance of staff means that teachers are accountable for the progress of their pupils so that salary progression can be linked to pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. However, teachers' targets do not always consistently refer to increasing the proportion of pupils making good or better progress, or to the specific areas for improvement in teaching as identified in leaders' lesson observations.
 - The Diocese of Brentwood adopts a very supportive approach to the school and liaises closely with the governors and headteacher. It has been active in advising on the conversion to academy status and in providing some professional support for teachers through the education adviser.
 - There is an imaginative curriculum which is relevant to pupils' needs and provides a variety of interesting activities. A range of visitors and outside visits provides an effective extension of the work in lessons, as do the large number of additional activities, such as the many opportunities for pupils to take part in music and sport. These greatly increase pupils' enjoyment and experience of school.
 - The broad range of experiences contributes very well to pupils' achievements and to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school has very close links with the local Catholic community as well as a partnership with a school in China. St Helen's welcomes pupils of all abilities and backgrounds, and they are fully integrated into the school.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has a good awareness of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. It has been very active in arranging for the conversion to academy status and ensuring appropriate cover for the headteacher during her work in the partner school. Its members are increasingly involved in monitoring pupils' progress and holding leaders and staff to account. Governors have a regular programme of visits to the school and to lessons so that they can make informed decisions at meetings. The headteacher ensures that governors have a good understanding about pupils' achievement in relation to similar schools. They have a clear understanding of the quality of teaching, what is done to support any individual who needs it and they make confident decisions on salary progression that link this to pupils' progress. The governing body makes sure that the school's procedures for safeguarding meet current national requirements. It has effectively overseen the use of the pupil premium funding and ensured that it is spent only on supporting eligible pupils.
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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	136977
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	412373

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	342
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Bernard Tucker
Headteacher	Mrs Bozena Laraway
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01277 213962
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