

St Clare's Catholic Primary School

Hawthorn Road, Lache, Chester, CH4 8HX

Inspection dates

12–13 September 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not yet good because

- Pupils' overall achievement is not yet good. In English and mathematics, pupils' attainment by the end of Year 6 is below the national average, particularly in writing. Not enough pupils reach the higher levels of attainment from their previous starting points.
- The quality of teaching overall is not yet good. Pupils, especially the most able, are not always challenged to achieve to the best of their ability.
- Not all lessons sustain pupils' readiness to learn and so the behaviour of some pupils requires improvement. The pace of lessons is not consistently good, and time is not always used effectively.
- Pupils are not always aware of their learning targets or of what they need to do to improve.
- In some lessons, there are too few opportunities for pupils to find things out for themselves and to learn independently.
- Marking does not always offer pupils enough feedback to ensure that they improve.
- Senior leaders do not monitor the quality of teaching closely enough in order to be clear about what each individual teacher needs to do to improve their practice. They are yet to ensure that teaching and achievement are consistently good.
- Senior leaders and governors are yet to ensure that performance management targets for staff are challenging and closely aligned to ensuring pupils achieve well.
- Attendance is below the national average and requires improvement.

The school has the following strengths

- Children's learning gets off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Mathematics and reading have improved over the last academic year; there is a positive ethos in the school and staff are keen to ensure that the school continually improves.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, especially when using the internet, and are confident in reporting concerns to adults.
- The overwhelming majority of parents are supportive of the school. They say the school keeps their children safe.

Information about this inspection

- Eight lessons, as well as small group activities, parts of lessons, and phonics (the links between letters and the sounds they make) were observed.
- The inspector listened to pupils read from Years 2 and 4, held discussions with a group of pupils from across the school and scrutinised pupils' books.
- The inspector took account of 13 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the school's own surveys of parents' views. Questionnaires completed by 12 members of staff were taken into account, as well as a telephone conversation with a parent.
- A telephone discussion took place with a representative from the local authority school improvement service.
- A meeting was held with four governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body.
- Various school documents were examined. These included monitoring records of the quality of teaching, external school evaluation reports, the school development plan, school data on pupils' progress, minutes of the governing body meetings, records of pupils' attendance, behaviour records and safeguarding documentation.

Inspection team

Lenford White, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Clare's is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is above average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus, or with a statement of special educational needs, is average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives additional funding through the pupil premium is almost twice the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and children that are looked after.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well below the national average, and few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The school offers a breakfast club, which is managed by the governing body.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Since the last inspection, the school has undergone significant staffing changes, including the appointment of two new teachers. The previous headteacher left the school in July 2013, following a long period of absence. An acting headteacher took up his position at the beginning of this academic year. The school's senior leadership team has been restructured, as has the governing body. Significant refurbishment has taken place throughout the school and a new outdoor play area has been developed for Reception and Key Stage 1 children.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is good or better by ensuring that teachers:
 - regularly provide a high level of challenge to pupils' reasoning and thinking through a better match of tasks and questions to all groups of pupils, especially the most able
 - provide opportunities for pupils to reflect and comment on what teachers have to say about their work
 - set a consistently good pace to learning, and make more effective use of time, in order to sustain pupils' readiness to learn and ensure their behaviour is consistently good
 - have consistently high expectations as to what pupils are capable of achieving
 - plan lessons which provide as many opportunities as possible for pupils to work independently and find things out for themselves.
- Raise pupils' attainment and accelerate their progress across the school to at least a good rate, especially in writing, by:
 - ensuring that pupils reach higher levels of attainment, through a clearer understanding of the next steps in their learning, and more effective reference to their targets
 - ensuring that all pupils understand how to improve the quality of their work through better feedback from teachers' marking, and better opportunities to respond to the advice they are given
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to use and apply their writing skills across all curriculum subjects.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders regularly monitor the quality of teaching and have a clear view of what each individual teacher needs to do in order to improve their practice
 - reviewing the school's procedures for performance management, ensuring that all school staff are set precise and challenging targets which are clearly linked to raising levels of achievement for all pupils
 - strengthening practices aimed at improving attendance, including working more closely with parents.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Although achievement is starting to improve, overall it requires improvement. In recent years, by the end of Year 2 and Year 6, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has declined and in 2012 was well below average. Standards improved, however, over the last academic year. This is due to some improvements in the quality of teaching and more effectively targeted pupil support.
- More pupils are now starting to make better progress through Key Stages 1 and 2. Although standards by the end of Year 6 remained below average in 2013, these pupils made the progress expected nationally from their below-average starting points. Even so, not enough pupils reach the higher levels of attainment and achieve to the best of their ability, particularly the most-able pupils.
- When children join the Reception class, most are displaying knowledge, skills and understanding which are below that typical for their age, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. Most children make good progress through Reception and so by the time they join Year 1, their skills are closer to those expected in most areas of learning.
- Pupils' attainment in reading and mathematics is stronger than in writing. Reading has improved and is now the strongest subject in Key Stage 2. In Year 6 in 2013, for example, pupils' attainment in reading was above average. This reflects the school's enhanced focus on teaching phonics (the sounds that letters make) and improved skills of teachers and teaching assistants. Pupils' attainment in mathematics is also better than in previous years. Although some pupils make good progress, such as in Years 3 and 4, the quality of teaching is still not always good enough to ensure pupils make consistently good progress.
- Although there has been some recent improvement in writing across the school, attainment in writing lags behind that of reading and mathematics. Pupils are not yet clear enough about how to improve the quality of their work. They are not given enough opportunities to respond to teachers' marking or to practise their writing skills as part of work across the curriculum subjects.
- Small numbers of pupils in some year groups means that meaningful comparisons between different year groups or groups of pupils and with nationally published results are difficult. Overall, however, inspection evidence reveals that there are no significant variations between the achievements of different groups of pupils over time. Pupils, including disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and those known to be eligible for the pupil premium funding, make the same expected rate of progress as their peers. The pupil premium funding is used to provide, for example, one-to-one tuition in literacy and numeracy, and to ensure that all pupils can participate in school visits and after-school activities.
- The school is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination. It has a small, but increasing number of children who speak English as an additional language. All are supported in developing their language skills by a well-trained multilingual teaching assistant.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although the quality of teaching has improved over the last academic year, and the majority of teaching observed during the inspection was good, overall, teaching requires improvement. Over time, teaching does not enable pupils to make consistently good progress. Teachers' expectations as to what pupils are capable of learning are not always high enough; as a result, not all pupils achieve to the best of their ability.
- The school benefits from working with the local authority and a consultant specialising in mathematics. This is improving the quality of teaching and helping to speed up pupils' progress. In mathematics lessons, pupils are provided with good opportunities to complete tasks that allow them to apply their skills to real-life situations, such as calculating the weekly cost of household

shopping and recording and ordering pupils' jumping times. However, not all lessons provide pupils with tasks nor do teachers always ask pupils questions that offer a high enough level of challenge, especially for the most able. Some pupils reported that they sometimes found their work too easy.

- Marking is improving. More teachers are now providing better opportunities for pupils to reflect, and comment, on what they have to say about their work. However, examples of this are too few, and do not always require pupils to think deeply about their work.
- In good lessons, teachers set a consistent pace to learning and make effective use of time in order to sustain pupils' readiness to learn. This was evident in a fast-moving mathematics lesson in Years 1 and 2, where five groups of pupils were engaged in different tasks focusing on adding numbers. However, not all teaching makes the best use of time available and, as a result, pupils' progress at a steady rather than good rate. Sometimes this also means that some pupils fail to keep focused or concentrate fully on their work.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children are taught well and, as a result, make good progress. Teachers provide children with exciting activities that stimulate them so they are attentive and enjoy learning. Children confidently engage in role play and work cooperatively to find their own solutions to problems. Opportunities for older pupils, particularly in Key Stage 2, to work independently and find out things for themselves, however, are underdeveloped.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Although many pupils behave well in lessons and around school, and show good attitudes to learning, overall, behaviour and safety requires improvement.
- Attendance is below average. Staff work closely with the local authority education welfare officer. There are a number of initiatives aimed at improving attendance, such as raffle prize-draws and celebrating whole-class and individual attendance during assemblies. Up to one third of all pupils attend the school's new breakfast club, and this is beginning to improve overall attendance. However, these initiatives are yet to have a significant impact on improving overall attendance. Not enough is yet done to promote better attendance in partnership with parents.
- In some lessons, pupils do not always listen carefully enough to their teacher or to the views of their classmates, such as when they volunteer to share their ideas in lessons. Expectations of them to work at a good pace are not always high enough.
- Where teaching is good, pupils behave well. This was most evident in a very large Year 3 and 4 class during an art lesson. On realising that some pupils were having difficulty cutting shapes out of thick card, the teacher called the class to order; pupils listened in total silence as their teacher explained the best method to use for cutting out their shapes.
- The vast majority of parents who completed Parent View and the school's own surveys on pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning say that their children are safe at school, where they form good friendship networks.
- Pupils are adamant that there is very little prejudice-based bullying in school, and say that if it occurs, it is always dealt with. Some pupils reported that they had been bullied in the past, but said that this stopped when teachers were informed and parents were involved. The school's own records of behaviour confirm that bullying is rare.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe while using the internet, and not to give out personal details to strangers. They can clearly define cyber-bullying and know that this can occur on the internet, and on hand-held devices such as mobile phones.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, instability in the school's leadership and changes of staffing, roles and responsibilities have hampered efforts to improve the school at a good rate. Nevertheless, the recent trend of declining standards has now been reversed and the pace of improvements,

including in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement, is starting to accelerate.

- The school is very appreciative of the support that it has received through the local authority school improvement service and a specialist mathematics consultant. This support has helped to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school.
- The acting headteacher, senior leaders and the governing body have accurately identified the school's strengths and areas for further development. Raising standards further by improving the quality of teaching is their main priority and it is showing signs of success. Even so, leaders do not yet monitor the quality of teaching closely enough in order to be fully clear about what each individual teacher needs to do to improve their practice. As a result, teaching is not yet consistently good.
- The overwhelming majority of staff who completed the inspection questionnaire said that they are proud to work at the school and are keen to support the school in improving further.
- Systems to monitor the quality of teaching and manage the performance of staff are now developing but are not yet effective. Targets for individual staff performance are not precise or challenging enough and decisions to reward teachers do not yet link closely enough with how well pupils are achieving.
- Revisions to the curriculum are helping pupils to make better progress. Daily phonics sessions, for example, have improved standards of reading in Year 2 and are helping pupils in other year groups who have fallen behind, such as in Years 3 and 4, to catch up. In mathematics, good opportunities for pupils to use and apply their skills through solving problems are helping to raise achievement. In writing, however, there are not yet enough opportunities for pupils to practise their skills, such as when they undertake work in other curriculum subjects. The quality of the school's personal, social, health and education curriculum is good. This successfully supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Leaders have carefully planned how to spend the new government funding for physical education and sport so that it both further enhances the quality of physical education teaching at the school and ensures more pupils participate in sporting activities. In addition to this, the school aims to further develop the high quality of its gymnastics, for which it has a good local and regional reputation.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors know that pupils' overall achievement is improving and are now clearer about what the school needs to do to ensure continuous improvement. They are now challenging leaders more effectively and have a better understanding of the school's strengths, areas for development and quality of teaching. Governors ensure that they keep themselves abreast of new developments. They carry out skills audits and ensure that they are well prepared to undertake any specific areas of responsibility, such as overseeing special educational needs and mathematics.
 - Governors are aware of how much money the school receives from the pupil premium funding and how this is spent. Their knowledge about how well this impacts on raising the achievement of eligible pupils, however, is still developing. Governors are improving their practices to ensure that pay awards are linked closely to how well teachers help pupils to achieve. They ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.

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	111311
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	426301

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	129
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fiona Arnott
Headteacher	Philip Sharp
Date of previous school inspection	18 October 2010
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