

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Birkenhead

Woodchurch Road, Prenton, Merseyside, CH43 5UT

Inspection dates 21–22 January 2014

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		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement.

- Not enough pupils make sufficiently rapid progress in Key Stage 1. Too few pupils, including the most able, do well enough in writing in Key Stage 2.
- Teaching has not been good enough to ensure pupils make consistently good progress between Years 1 and 6.
- Marking does not consistently tell pupils what they must do to improve their work or closely link with pupils' learning targets.
- Some teachers do not expect enough of pupils and what they can achieve, particularly the most able, nor how pupils present their work.
- Planned actions to raise pupils' achievement and improve teaching are not rigorous enough and do not focus sufficiently on the standards pupils reach.
- School leaders' assessment of the school's performance is not thorough enough.
- The checks made on pupils' progress in subjects other than English and mathematics are not effective enough.
- Subject leaders are not given sufficient time and opportunity to check standards in their areas of responsibility.

The school has the following strengths

- Overall achievement in reading is outstanding. Pupils have a genuine love of reading and they read with confidence.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are very good. Pupils feel safe and well cared for by all adults in the school.
- Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage because teaching is consistently good.
- The newly appointed headteacher has given high priority to improving the quality of teaching in order to raise standards. This drive for improvement is being well supported by the staff.
- Pupils develop good attitudes to learning.
- The school provides a wide range of opportunities to develop pupils' artistic, musical and sporting interests and talents.
- Governance is good and well-led.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 21 lessons and two assemblies. They also listened to pupils read.
- Meetings were held with two groups of pupils, a small group of parents, members of the governing body, members of the school staff and senior leaders. A meeting was also held with a representative of the local authority and a telephone conversation took place between an inspector and the school's Education Quality School Improvement Associate.
- Inspectors also talked to pupils in their classes and on the playground.
- Inspectors took account of 89 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View).
- A range of documents was considered, including the school's own analysis of how well it is doing, the school improvement plan, information about pupils' progress checks on the quality of teaching, minutes of governing body meetings, headteacher's reports and records relating to attendance, behaviour incidents and safeguarding.
- Inspectors also examined work in pupils' books. They observed the behaviour of pupils in their classrooms and around the school.

Inspection team

Peter Martin, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Michelle Ravey

Additional Inspector

Anthony Buckley

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Joseph's is an above-average-sized primary school catering for pupils from age three to 11.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action is above that found in most schools. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium is lower than the national average. (This is the additional funding provided by the government for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children who are looked after.)
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups, including those who are learning English as an additional language, is much smaller than that found nationally.
- There have been significant changes in the school leadership since the last inspection. The headteacher at the time of the last inspection left to take up a post with the local authority in July 2012. The deputy headteacher took on the role of acting headteacher and a senior teacher became acting deputy headteacher. The acting headteacher then retired in July 2013 and a new headteacher was appointed who took up his post in September 2013. The governing body is seeking to make a permanent appointment of a deputy headteacher.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching in order to raise standards, particularly in writing, so that more pupils make more rapid progress by:
 - ensuring there is more consistent progress across year groups by sharing the best practice in the school
 - improving marking so that it consistently tells pupils how to improve their work and is more closely linked to their pupil targets
 - giving pupils time to correct their work and learn from their mistakes
 - setting consistent expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensuring that pupils, particularly the most able, are appropriately challenged and that they always present their work to the best of their ability.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that planned actions to raise pupils' achievement in school improvement plans and in the arrangements to improve teachers' performance management are clear and measurable
 - ensuring information about the school's performance is used more rigorously to provide school with an accurate view of how well it is doing
 - providing middle and subject leaders with the time and opportunity to check standards in their areas of responsibility more effectively.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because the progress made by pupils between Year 1 and Year 6 is uneven. Achievement in writing is too slow across both key stages and not enough pupils achieve the higher levels in Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Children enter nursery with skills and abilities which are well below those typical for their age. They make a good start in nursery and, because of well-planned activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage, they make good progress and the majority enter Key Stage 1 with skills and abilities which are broadly typical for their age. A small proportion does even better than this.
- In Key Stage 1 pupils make slower but steady progress and the majority make the progress expected of them. However, not enough of them make more rapid progress, particularly in writing, that would enable them to achieve the higher levels. Attainment in Key Stage 1 has been broadly at the national average, apart from a dip year in 2011, for the past five years.
- Progress in Key Stage 2 is mixed. After a dip in 2012, attainment returned to the levels of previous years. The proportion of pupils making the expected progress is in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion exceeding the expected progress is broadly in line for reading and mathematics but below in writing.
- The school's own information also shows that the progress made across the key stages is variable and for a significant proportion of classes, overall progress requires improvement.
- In 2011, the school focused on the teaching of reading and as a consequence, standards have risen over the past two years. In 2013, attainment was above the national average. Overall achievement in reading is outstanding and is a real strength of the school. Pupils read with confidence and enjoyment. However, progress in writing has been slower and attainment in both key stages and for most pupil groups is below the national average.
- The teaching of phonics (the linking of letters to their sounds) is good. The proportion of pupils achieving the required standard for Year 1 pupils, has been above the national average for the past two years. This is helping pupils to develop as confident readers.
- Last year the school focused on its approach to the teaching of mathematics. This resulted in a big improvement in pupils' attainment. In 2013, attainment above the national average which represents good progress for the pupils from their starting points.
- Well-targeted use of the pupil-premium funding has resulted in those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, making progress as good as that of other pupils in the school. The proportion of those pupils making the expected progress or exceeding it is in line with that seen nationally, except in writing. By the end of Key Stage 2 the gap between these and other pupils in the school has closed and in 2013, the attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals was in line with that of their peers in mathematics, one term behind in writing and two terms behind in reading.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs or disability is well managed. Well-targeted additional support is ensuring that they also are making good progress.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Much of the teaching seen during the inspection was good and only a small number of lessons required improvement. However, the quality of teaching in reading, writing and mathematics is uneven between Year 1 and Year 6 and requires improvement because it has not resulted in sustained good progress for pupils, particularly in writing.
- There has been a strong focus placed on improving the quality of teaching since the appointment of the new headteacher. An effective programme of lesson observations supported by additional training for teachers, with a sharp focus on the teaching of writing and the sharing of the best practice in the school, have resulted in an improving picture of teaching as shown by the progress made by pupils as seen in their books. However, it is too early to gauge the full

impact this is having on pupils' achievement.

- Although there is good practice evident across the whole school there is a lack of consistency in some key areas. Marking of pupils' work is generally up-to-date but it varies in quality from year to year and even across year groups. It does not always tell pupils how to improve their work. Pupils are not routinely given the time and opportunity to correct their work and learn from their mistakes or to reflect on and respond to their teachers' marking.
- Pupils do not always present their work to the best of their ability. This is because teachers do not expect enough of pupils.
- Pupils' targets are not used consistently. In some classes they are used very effectively. Pupils are reminded of their targets before they began their task and then asked to assess for themselves how successful they had been in achieving them by the end of the lesson. Where marking is most effective, there is a clear link between the pupils' targets and the marking of their work.
- Teachers generally display good subject knowledge. They plan well to provide lessons which pupils find interesting and help them move on in their learning. However, the work provided for some pupils, particularly the most able, does not always challenge them sufficiently.
- Generally, time is not wasted in lessons and this means pupils made good progress. However, in some lessons pupils are made to wait while other classmates finish the task before they can move on to the next activity. This results in wasted time and a slowing down of the pace of learning.
- Good use of praise and encouragement for pupils is a common feature of lessons. This makes pupils feel valued and eager to contribute to the lesson. Most lessons are linked well to what the pupils had learnt previously. Instructions are clear and pupils knew what they are learning and what they have to do. Teachers check on pupils' progress during the lesson to ensure that they are on task and making progress, or to question them further to develop their thinking and assess their understanding.
- In lessons when the learning is good, pupils are given the opportunity to think and work things out for themselves. In an outstanding lesson in Year 3, pupils devised their own investigations on magnets. Pupils worked with each other well and showed good negotiating skills. Little time was wasted and pupils were highly motivated to learn. Pupils told inspectors they enjoyed their learning most when 'it was interactive'. They said their teachers made lessons fun, 'They do games and you don't know you are learning.' They are keen to tell their parents what they have been learning about when they get home.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. There is an exciting range of activities for the children to choose and a good balance between activities led by an adult and activities pupils can choose for themselves. This ensures that they learn key skills while learning to explore and find things out for themselves. In one activity, children were listening to the story '*The Three Billy Goats Gruff*'. The children were asked to take on the role of the characters. This really brought the story to life. The children were completely engrossed in the story; their joy of learning was clear to see.
- The teaching of phonics is well organised and very effective. Sessions are lively and pupils make good progress. This is helping them to read and spell well.
- Teaching assistants are used effectively and make a big contribution to the learning of pupils.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour in school is good. Pupils are courteous, polite and friendly. They open doors for adults unbidden, greet people cheerfully and are generally well-behaved in class, around the school and on the playground.
- Behaviour in a large majority of lessons is good and as a result, lessons run smoothly without disruption to learning. This is because teachers set consistently high expectations of behaviour and pupils are eager to learn and cooperate with their teachers. However, in the few lessons which required improvement, these expectations were not always fully maintained resulting in

some minor chattiness and inattentiveness by some pupils when the teacher was talking.

- Relationships are very good throughout the school. Pupils and teachers talk to each other nicely and with mutual respect. Pupils like their teachers, they think they are 'really good' and reasonable. 'They don't just tell you you shouldn't do something, they explain the reason why.'
- Pupils, parents and teachers are all agreed that it is a happy school and that behaviour is good. Pupils said that there used to be bullying a few years ago but that it is 'much better now'. They insisted that there was very little bullying in the school now and that on the rare occasions that incidents happen they are dealt with quickly and effectively.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying including, for example, cyber-bullying. The school promotes this understanding through events such as its anti-bullying week, its assemblies and religious education programme.
- Detailed records of incidents, actions and follow up involving parents are kept by the school. These confirm that behaviour is managed well in the school. There have been no exclusions from the school in the past three years.
- The large majority of parents are very happy with the behaviour of the pupils and have confidence in the staff of the school.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is also good. Effective procedures and policies to ensure the safety of pupils are all in place.
- Pupils, parents and staff are all told inspectors agree that this is a happy school where the pupils feel safe and very well cared for by all the adults. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They are, for example, very aware of the dangers they can face when using the Internet. This is as a result of good teaching and events and activities, such as road safety talks, stranger danger and bikeability training.
- Attendance is good and has never been less than the national average for the past three years. It is currently above the national average.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The new headteacher has only been in post since September and not yet been able to fully implement plans for the checking and evaluation of the performance of the school. Further recruitment of a permanent deputy headteacher and the expansion of the school's leadership team are planned but not yet in place.
- Since taking up his appointment the headteacher has placed a strong emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and raising standards. This has been embraced by the teaching staff. He is clear what he wants and this is understood by all in the school.
- The headteacher has won the confidence of parents and staff. Parents feel listened to and can see the improvements made since he started in the school. They appreciate that the headteacher routinely meets and greets parents and pupils in the morning.
- Parents say that communications between school and home are much improved. The school has an informative website and a 'Meet the Teacher' event was introduced early in the autumn term. The curriculum was explained to parents who were also then given the opportunity to raise any concerns they had with their child's class teacher. Parents were very appreciative of this initiative.
- Checking the quality of lessons is linked to effective, well-targeted training opportunities for teachers and has been at the forefront of the early ways to bring about an improvement in standards.
- Arrangements to check the performance of teachers are in place and a clear link between teachers' performance and pay progression is established. However, objectives set for teachers to improve their performance tend to be too broad and generalised and do not provide clear and measurable targets for pupils' progress.
- The school has a comprehensive system to check on pupils' progress and identify any pupils who are falling behind. This enables the school to plan additional support for pupils or groups of pupils. Consequently, groups such as those eligible for the pupil premium are making progress

that is at least as good as that of other pupils in the school. However, senior leaders are not using the data well enough to evaluate the school's overall performance.

- School self-evaluation has tended to be focused on attainment at the end of each key stage. The information is not being used as effectively as possible to evaluate standards and progress of pupils throughout the school. Hence, school self-evaluation is not as accurate as it could be.
- The plans for bringing about school improvement, established since September, building on the previous plan that was in place, have focused on the key priorities for raising standards. Although appropriate actions have been planned to bring about improvement, the targets set for achieving them are too general and do not enable school leaders and governors to measure their success in achieving them.
- The school provides a rich and varied range of subjects which stimulate pupils' interests. Pupils are given opportunities to develop their musical and artistic talents, such as through ukulele lessons. A visiting artist has helped pupils create three-dimensional portraits of figures from Tudor times. Visits to places such as Liverpool Science Museum further enrich the learning of pupils and the Year 6 pupils look forward to their residential stay at an outdoor adventure centre.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is a strong element of the life of the school. Pupils are taught to have respect for one another and to value each other's feelings. They learn Spanish throughout the school and find out about other cultures and other religions. This helps pupils to develop an understanding and respect for other people's beliefs and cultures.
- The additional sports funding provided by the government has enabled the school to create links with Tranmere Rovers and Bebington Sports College. Year 6 pupils enjoyed an education day at the football club where they participated in sports activity and learnt how sport can help them live healthy lives. Sports specialists provide coaching for the pupils and in-service training for the teachers. Regular after-school sports clubs contribute to pupils' health and well-being.
- The local authority has provided the school with light-touch support in the past.
- Equal opportunities are at the heart of the school's work. The school ensures that no pupil is denied the opportunities the school provides.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The school has an able governing body which is well-led and highly committed to the school. Governors check teachers' performance and pupils' achievement paying particular attention to the progress made by pupils eligible for pupil premium funding. They ensure that there is a strong link between teachers' performance and pay progression. They are fully aware of the school's priorities and check for themselves how well the school is doing. They recruit people to the governing body that can contribute key skills and seek further training to enable them to carry out their duties more effectively. School finances are managed efficiently.

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	105092
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	440427

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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	464
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Annette Roberts, JP
Headteacher	Paul Davenport
Date of previous school inspection	28 September 2010
Telephone number	0151 6526781
Fax number	0151 6701843
Email address	schooloffice@stjosephs-birkenhead.wirral.sch.uk

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