

St Ambrose Catholic Primary School

Alderfield Drive, Liverpool, Merseyside, L24 7SF

Inspection dates 21–22 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- A dip in the performance of girls in reading and writing in 2013 meant that the school did not meet its floor standards. However, in the current Year 6 both girls and boys are progressing well and standards are broadly average as in 2011 and 2012.
- Across the school all groups of pupils, including those pupils eligible for free school meals are achieving well in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs receive very effective support from teachers and teaching assistants and make the same good progress as their classmates.
- The quality of teaching is good overall and is often outstanding. Well-planned lessons enable pupils to make good and sometimes excellent progress. Marking is outstanding and ensures pupils know how to improve their work.
- Pupils are very proud of their school. They say, 'Our teachers and all the grown-ups are kind, look after us and make sure we are safe.' Pupils' conduct and engagement in learning are good and, on occasions, outstanding.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage is good and children enjoy the many and varied activities in both Nursery and Reception. They achieve well in all areas of learning.
- The committed and well-informed headteacher is supported well by talented and industrious senior leaders. All members of the senior team lead by example, are highly regarded by the staff and are ensuring that the school improves.
- Governors have an accurate understanding of school performance in all areas of its life. They hold senior leaders to account with rigour.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Partnerships with other schools, particularly in relation to sharing good teaching practice are not fully developed.
- Comments in the Early Years Foundation Stage 'Learning Journeys' are sometimes not specific enough about how well individual children are progressing.
- On occasions, the excellent attendance of individual pupils is not rewarded rapidly and effectively enough.
- Strategies established by the newly restructured senior leadership team for checking the quality of teaching are not yet fully embedded.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 16 part-lessons. They also visited a reading club, a booster class after school and the singing group at lunchtime.
- Inspectors spoke to two groups of pupils from Year 1 to Year 6, including members of the school council. They met with eight members of the governing body, including the Chair, and also a representative of the local authority. They also had discussions with the special educational needs coordinator and the learning mentor. In addition, they had meetings with subject and phase coordinators and members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors took account of the 12 responses to the parent questionnaire (Parent View) and they also spoke informally with parents at the end of the school day. They also considered the views expressed by 32 teaching and non-teaching staff in the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed the school at work and looked at pupil progress and attainment data, school improvement planning, and the strategies used to enable the school to gain an accurate view of how well it is doing. In addition, they considered documentation on the spending of pupil premium funding, Primary School Sports funding, child protection, safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

James Kidd, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Paul Latham

Additional Inspector

Maureen Coleman

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a broadly average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is just above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below that usually found.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium (additional funding for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those from service families and those looked after by the local authority) is high, at nearly twice the national average.
- There are well-below average percentages of pupils from minority ethnic heritages and those who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils of Polish heritage has increased since the previous inspection and the school now employs a native Polish speaker to support these pupils.
- In 2013, the school did not meet the government's current floor standards; these are the minimum expectations for pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school is a nationally accredited Healthy School, has the Basic Skills Quality Mark and also holds ActiveMark for its work in physical education and games.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- There have been several staff changes since the previous inspection, including the appointment of a new headteacher and the establishment of a restructured senior leadership team.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop partnerships with other schools, particularly in relation to sharing good teaching practice.
- Ensure comments in 'Learning Journeys' in the Early Years Foundation Stage are always directly related to the progress made by individual children.
- Review the strategies for rewarding individual pupils' excellent attendance.
- Fully embed the strategies established by the newly restructured senior team, so that all staff get sharper feedback about the quality of their teaching.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Although there are variations from year to year, children enter the Nursery with skills and knowledge which are well below those typical for their age. Children's skills in communication, language and literacy are low. The school did not meet the government's floor targets in 2013 because girls in this cohort did poorly in writing and also the progress made by them in reading was below the national average..
- Following the disappointing results for Year 6 girls in writing in 2013, achievement in this subject is now good. In the current Year 6, for example, both boys and girls write with confidence and present a balanced argument when considering whether graffiti is vandalism or art. Year 6 pupils read confidently and with expression; they are adept at splitting up complex words in order to pronounce them accurately. Inspectors agree with the schools' own data which shows that standards are broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. This represents good progress for the current year 6 pupils.
- Pupils also make good progress and achieve well in the other year groups in Key Stage 2. In Year 3, for example, pupils respond positively to the many games they have in mathematics and the most able are now beginning to solve problems using decimals. In Year 4, pupils display good levels of literacy when they read aloud and also when they explain to their classmates how they have completed their mathematical calculations.
- In Year 5, pupils challenge themselves to complete increasingly complex venn diagrams to explain their knowledge of a range of 3 dimensional shapes. Less-able pupils are adept at using mathematical vocabulary accurately and this contributes to them making good progress in mathematics.
- As a result of good leadership, good teaching and vibrant and well-resourced indoor and outdoor areas, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress in all areas of learning and enter Year 1 with below-average attainment.
- This good progress continues across Key Stage 1, and in Year 1 pupils are answering questions in class with more extended comment than is usually seen at this age. In Year 2, their handwriting is improving apace and the most able are using speech marks, alliteration, and powerful words such as 'bellowed' and 'defeated' accurately and with confidence.
- Good use of pupil premium funding, including the purchase of e-reading tablets, the appointment of a learning mentor and staff training in the latest methods to promote pupils' progress in mathematics, has a profound impact on the achievement of those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals. In 2013, for example, these pupils outperformed their classmates and made better progress than other pupils nationally, particularly in mathematics.
- Early and accurate identification of pupils' learning needs and very effective one-to-one and small group support ensure that disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good and sometimes outstanding progress in their studies. Strong individual support for pupils new to learning English, often of Polish origin, leads to them making the same good progress as their peers.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching failed to motivate the most able girls in the 2013 cohort, with the result that they did not make good progress in reading, or in writing. Girls are now achieving well in reading and writing because teachers are motivating them better with more interesting texts and topics.
- However, the quality of teaching is now good and there are many examples of outstanding practice across the school. Teachers prepare their lessons well which enables pupils now to make good and sometimes outstanding progress in reading, writing and mathematics. All parents spoken to believe that teaching is good.
- Pupils look forward to their lessons, which invariably begin as soon as they enter the classroom.

Pupils enjoy their learning because teachers provide them with a variety of activities which motivate them and which make them want to succeed. Similarly, there are many opportunities for pupils to support each other and to be proud when their classmates succeed. When reading aloud, for example, or when completing mathematical problems on the electronic whiteboard, pupils receive a spontaneous 'well done!' or round of applause from their classmates.

- Literacy is a key element of many lessons, when pupils are required to read their work aloud, explain how they have completed their mathematical calculations or use more powerful vocabulary in their writing. Walls are not only adorned with pupils' work (of which pupils are very proud) but also with examples of words to use which assist with opening paragraphs, drawing conclusions or which link sentences together.
- Pupils make good or even outstanding progress when teachers' questioning encourages them to challenge themselves to higher levels of attainment. In a Year 4 mathematics lesson, for example, pupils were beside themselves with joy when they began to add not just 10 but 100 to larger and larger numbers.
- Similarly, in a Year 6 English lesson, pupils' learning was enhanced when sharp questioning from the teacher required them to think more deeply about how best they could produce a convincing written argument. Some of the most able pupils used words such as 'illicitly' 'intimidated' and 'furthermore' and pupils were delighted at what they had achieved.
- The work of the learning support officers is impressive. They take the initiative, have good relationships with their pupils and encourage them to try their best at all times. As a result, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs learn well and sometimes outstandingly well.
- Where marking is outstanding pupils are thanked for their efforts and receive detailed feedback on how they can improve their work. Pupils often respond to their teachers' comments with, for example, 'Thank you Miss. I'll get onto it right away!'
- On a small number of occasions, pupils' work is not checked often enough in class by the teacher and pupils' progress slows.
- Children's 'Learning Journeys' in the Early Years Foundation Stage enable parents to see the progress their sons and daughters are making. On occasions, however, staff comments are too general and are not related specifically to the individual child.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour and engagement of pupils in learning are good overall and on occasions outstanding. Children's behaviour in both Nursery and Reception is good and they work and play happily together.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils feel safe and all parents spoken to believe their children are safe and happy in school. A minority of parents who completed the online questionnaire do not believe the school deals effectively with bullying. Inspectors found no evidence to support this view.
- The learning mentor is an effective link between school and home and pupils speak highly of her.
- Pupils show real pride in their school, in their classmates and in the adults who work with them. During the inspection there were so many examples of pupils helping each other in lessons, and praising their classmates when they succeeded in their work. Indeed, older pupils enjoy supporting younger ones. Year 5 boys, for example, help in the 'reading buddies' club in Year 1 and Year 6 pupils accompany younger pupils and children in the Early years Foundation Stage to church.
- Pupils feel secure in school because, they say, 'The adults are always there for us and in the playground older pupils make sure we are not lonely.' Pupils have a keen understanding of how to keep themselves safe outside school and also of the dangers of using social media websites.
- They say that bullying does happen, but that it is rare and, in their words, is usually restricted to 'fall-outs between friends.' They go further and say that if bullying does occur it is dealt with and

stopped quickly by staff.

- Pupils enjoy the many lunchtime and after-school activities such as the singing group. They value the booster classes in literacy and numeracy and are delighted to take the e-reading tablets home so that they can continue to improve their reading.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils have a keen sense of right and wrong, saying 'We should all be good role models for each other.' They value the wall displays which teach them about other cultures and they particularly like the large map near the learning mentor's room which highlights the different languages spoken by pupils in the school.
- Attendance is average and has improved since the previous inspection. The procedures for rewarding the excellent attendance of individual pupils are not developed as well as they could be.

The leadership and management are good

- Although only in post since the previous inspection, the committed headteacher has established several new strategies to ensure that the school improves. She has restructured the senior leadership team, which comprises talented staff, who, along with the headteacher, lead by example and provide good role models for teaching and non-teaching staff.
- Following the dip in girls performance in 2013 leaders have taken swift and successful action to ensure that the teaching motivates them to ensure they achieve well.
- All staff who returned the questionnaires demonstrated a high regard for the senior leadership team. Staff comment, 'Our school is well led and we are proud to be here. It is a community within a community and is a safe haven for all our children and for all our staff.' Staff also believe that performance appraisal arrangements are rigorous but fair and that there are many opportunities for them to attend training to help them improve the impact of their teaching.
- The monitoring of teaching is regular but is not yet fully embedded. Staff receive accurate comments on their strengths and areas for development but this is not yet as sharp as it could be. In addition, partnerships with other schools to discuss educational issues and to share best practice in teaching are not fully developed.
- Middle leaders take their roles seriously and, through 'drop in' sessions, scrutiny of teachers' planning and of pupils' work, have a keen understanding of performance in the subjects for which they are responsible.
- The curriculum meets the needs, interests and aspirations of pupils well and there is a wide range of after-school clubs and extra-curricular activities. School sports funding is used well to strengthen and improve provision in several areas. The school is a Gold member of the Liverpool School Sports Partnership, which provides relevant training to staff and which enables the school to hire a qualified sports coach to work alongside teachers during physical education lessons.
- Safeguarding and child protection policies and practice are fully in place and meet current requirements. Pupils' good personal and the current good academic achievement demonstrates that the school promotes equality of opportunity for all well. It also rejects all forms of discrimination.
- The local authority continues to provide strong support for the school. It finances regular visits from an external School Improvement Partner, provides support for staff in relationship to subject and leadership development and has given data training to governors.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The experienced governing body is well informed about the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Members monitor the spending of pupil premium funding very closely indeed and give accurate comments about the impact of this funding on the achievement of those pupils known to be eligible for support through it.
 - Governors have received both internal and external training on how to ask questions of progress and attainment data and they are fully aware of achievement over time and of the achievement of pupils currently in the school.

- They oversee how the school attempts to improve the quality of teaching and keep a close eye on performance appraisal arrangements and outcomes.
- Several governors spend a considerable time in school, as learning support officers, helping pupils with their reading and supporting disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.
- Governors hold the leadership rigorously to account and ensure that teachers only receive financial reward if they meet their targets for pupils' progress.

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	104672
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	433900

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	266
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father E Cain
Headteacher	Mrs T O'Neill
Date of previous school inspection	14 June 2011
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