

Stella Maris School

St John's Road, Heaton Mersey, Stockport, Cheshire, SK4 3BR

Inspection dates	4–6 March 2014	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This school is good because

- Good leadership and management have made several very important improvements since the previous inspection, for example, behaviour is notably better as is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The new headteacher and her team work extremely hard to ensure that pupils' behaviour is exemplary at all times and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding.
- Outstanding provision for welfare, health and safety ensures that pupils routinely enjoy healthy lifestyles and confidently adopt practices that ensure their safety.
- Teachers' high expectations and stimulating presentation of work engages pupils well in learning and ensures that all groups achieve well including in English and mathematics. The teaching of communication, reading and writing skills is a towering strength of the school.
- The imaginative curriculum meets pupils' interests well, including in music, sports and French.

It is not yet outstanding because

- Teachers do not always plan and communicate the learning outcomes they expect from pupils of all abilities in each lesson.
- Although pupils achieve well in mathematics, there are not enough opportunities across the curriculum for them to practise and improve these skills so that they reach higher standards and achieve as well as they can.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed eight lessons taught by six different teachers. The inspector scrutinised pupils' work and held meetings with the headteacher, staff and pupils.
- The school's documentation was checked including schemes of work, teachers' planning, records of pupils' progress, self-evaluation and those regarding welfare, health, safety and safeguarding.
- Seventeen responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) were considered. Questionnaire responses from six staff were also analysed.

Inspection team

Saleem Hussain, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school opened in 1979. It is a charitable trust, founded by Stockport Convent and has a Catholic foundation. The school accepts pupils of all faiths. It is located in the conservation area of Heaton Mersey, to the north of Stockport in Cheshire.
- A new headteacher was appointed in September 2013.
- The school is registered as an independent, primary, day school for up to 71 boys and girls aged from three to 11 years.
- There are four mixed-aged classes, including an Early Years Foundations Stage class for children aged from three to 5 years. Government nursery funding is received for 10 children. After-school care is provided on site until 5.30 pm each day.
- Currently, there are 47 pupils on roll including five children in the Early Years Foundation Stage who are part-time. There are ten children altogether in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- A small proportion of pupils have special educational needs. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage with around a third from minority ethnic groups.
- The school aims to: 'welcome children into a caring, happy, secure environment; where teaching provides new and stimulating experiences; where low pupil-teacher ratios and treating every child as an individual results in high levels of achievement and where pupils accomplish their full potential in moral, physical and academic areas'.
- The school uses no alternative provision.
- The school was last inspected in March 2011 when the overall quality of education was judged as good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the quality of teaching improves to outstanding by requiring teachers to always plan and communicate the learning outcomes they expect from pupils of all abilities in each lesson.
- Ensure that there are more opportunities for pupils to practise and increase their mathematical skills across the curriculum to enable them to reach higher standards.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Good

Achievement is good because teaching and the curriculum are good and help all pupils to make good progress. Taking account of their different starting points, pupils make sustained progress and develop their knowledge and understanding well in most subjects over time. All groups of pupils achieve equally well including pupils with special educational needs and those from different ethnic minorities. The most able pupils attain standards well above the national average. School records indicate that a few pupils in different year groups are not yet reaching the standards expected for their age. Classroom support and interventions are effective in these cases so that gaps between their standards and of all pupils are closing. Achievement in English is good and most pupils reach high standards because of the school's relentless attention to developing speaking, listening, reading and writing across the curriculum. For example, teachers provide opportunities to consolidate reading skills in many lessons. External specialists such as speech/elocution and drama teachers work with pupils regularly. Basic skills in mathematics are taught effectively although standards could be higher if pupils had more chances to use and develop their mathematical skills further. Work seen in information and communication technology (ICT) illustrates that pupils are developing their computer skills positively from an early age. It is clear that pupils develop and apply a wide range of skills so that they are well prepared for the next stage in their education. The school prepares older pupils well for sitting entrance examinations for secondary schools.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress in developing all of the key skills they need. Children's personal and social development is excellent. They develop very positive attitudes towards learning and play together happily.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

Pupils' behaviour, attitudes and personal development are outstanding. Pupils mature very quickly into caring, thoughtful and extremely well mannered young citizens. They are remarkably articulate. Attendance and punctuality are very good, reflecting pupils' enjoyment of school life. The school is an orderly community and behaviour is exemplary at all times. Pupils engage in lessons whole-heartedly. They concentrate and persevere very well. These factors make an excellent contribution to learning and help pupils to achieve well. Relationships between pupils including different racial and ethnic groups are excellent. School records and discussions with pupils indicate that incidents of serious misbehaviour are extremely rare. Pupils say that they feel safe and there is no bullying in school. They have a very good awareness of different forms of bullying and try to take steps to prevent it from occurring.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Work in personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) lessons, assemblies and religious education enables pupils to develop extremely good personal qualities from an early age. There are many opportunities for pupils to develop their self-confidence. Prayers are often led by pupils. Pupils frequently make presentations in front of others and also benefit from many high quality responsibilities in school, which they accept very willingly. Some of the older pupils act as 'buddies' and regularly help younger ones, for example by listening to them read. Pupils have a very clear sense of right and wrong. They are taught to respect the civil and criminal law. Older pupils recently considered anti-social behaviour in a legal context along with the role of the police in enforcing laws. In a discussion with pupils around diversity and equality, pupils expressed highly laudable, well-reasoned points of view about why people of different religious beliefs should be able to wear religious clothing in everyday life, provided that it was safe and lawful to do so.

Social skills development is excellent. Pupils work with their peers very constructively. They make a

good contribution to the school and wider community. Pupils show great concern for those in the community who are less fortunate than themselves. They actively support many charities and good causes by fundraising. Music is a strong feature of the school and pupils regularly sing in the community. The school provides pupils with a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England. For example, pupils learn about the monarchy and parliament. The proprietor has ensured that partisan political views are not promoted in school. Pupils develop a very good knowledge of their own and other cultures. Religious education includes much work around all of the major world faiths. Discussions with pupils indicate that they are taught to respect fundamental British values and develop high levels of tolerance for different cultures, beliefs and lifestyles.

Quality of teaching

Good

The quality of teaching is good, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Consequently, all groups of pupils including those with special educational needs, ethnic minorities and the most able make good progress and achieve well over time. Teachers motivate pupils effectively and keep them well engaged in lessons through the use of praise, encouragement and reward for effort. Teachers possess good subject knowledge which they use effectively to plan interesting activities. They have high expectations for all pupils regardless of their ability. Skilful questioning and prompting in lessons ensure that all pupils work hard, use their initiative and learn to think for themselves. Pupils are often provided with opportunities to work collaboratively and to evaluate each other's work. This approach is very successful in developing social skills. Classroom resources are used well to support learning. Basic skills in literacy and numeracy are taught well. Lesson planning in all subjects is generally good and meets regulatory requirements. However, teachers do not always plan and communicate the learning outcomes they expect from pupils of all abilities in lessons. As a result, pupils do not achieve as well as they can over time because they are not always aware of what teachers expect of them. Assessment is good. Teachers evaluate pupils' learning and progress regularly and accurately. Marking is good. This tells pupils how well they are doing and also how to improve.

Quality of curriculum

Good

The curriculum and other activities are good, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This ensures that pupils enjoy their learning and their needs and interests are met well. Provision for PSHCE is outstanding and this makes an excellent contribution to personal development including raising awareness of how to lead healthy and safe lifestyles. The curriculum is well planned and enables pupils to gain good experiences in all the required areas of learning. Linguistic experiences include French. Basic skills in communication, reading, writing and ICT are nurtured from an early age so that pupils realise the importance of these skills for their future economic well-being. However, although the teaching of basic skills in mathematics is good, leaders acknowledge that more opportunities are required for pupils to practise their skills across the curriculum in order to raise standards to higher levels. School trips and visitors to school enrich learning. Pupils enjoy a good number of educational visits each year. Visitors have included a charity for the homeless where a member of staff recently explained to pupils how poverty can lead to homelessness. Visitors such as health practitioners give talks to pupils about the world of work. Lunchtime is a lively time of day with pupils enjoying activities such as drama and cooking. After-school clubs include homework, dance and sports.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Outstanding

Provision for pupils' welfare, health, safety and safeguarding is outstanding. All of the regulations in these regards are met. Parents and carers are very confident in the school's procedures. All of the required policies are fully in place. Pupils are exceptionally well cared for. Staff are very highly committed to the well-being of pupils and treasure them as individuals. Arrangements for staff recruitment are of a very high standard. The school carries out all of the required checks to ensure

that all adults in school are suitable to work with children. Checks are recorded as required on a single central register. The designated officer for child protection and all other staff are fully trained regarding child protection. Six staff are fully trained in administering first aid including in paediatric procedures. Risk assessments are carried out regarding the premises, practical lessons and educational visits. Risks to safety are clearly identified and there is much guidance for staff on how to manage potential issues. Fire risk assessments and drills are carried out regularly. The school's policy to promote outstanding behaviour is very effective. Pupils commented that they like the house points and weekly merit badges very much. The school's anti-bullying policy is also very effective.

Leadership and management

Good

Leadership and management are good. The effectiveness of the school's leadership can be seen in pupils' good achievement, outstanding behaviour and personal development, strong teaching, a good curriculum, outstanding provision to ensure pupils' well-being and improvements since the previous inspection. The many improvements include the use of assessment information to shape teaching and provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety. The school attaches a high priority to developing basic skills in English and mathematics. This is reflected in pupils' achievement in these areas. Representative views from pupils include 'I am so lucky to be in this wonderful school'. The new headteacher leads by example and, along with other leaders and all staff, has high ambitions for the school. Self-evaluation is accurate and effective. The leadership of teaching is good. Teachers are pleased with the arrangements for professional development including those at the early stages of their careers.

The school acknowledges that the headteacher's near full-time teaching commitment has limited the monitoring of teaching activities across the school. Plans are now being made to develop senior management roles within the school and also to monitor teaching more frequently and help to raise the quality of teaching to outstanding.

The proprietor has ensured that all of the independent school standards and the statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage are met. Leaders' demonstrate a good knowledge of the learning, development and welfare requirements for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They check the effectiveness of provision regularly to ensure that children's learning, social, physical and economic well-being needs are met. The school has made significant improvements to provision since the previous inspection, most notably regarding indoor and outdoor learning resources.

The school's premises and accommodation are very well maintained. All of the requirements regarding the provision of information for parents, carers and others and for the complaints procedures are met. Parents and carers are very pleased with the quality of education provided. They are welcomed as partners in the education of their children and there are good opportunities for them to become involved in school life.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	106154
Inspection number	441512
DfE registration number	356/6016

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Primary
School status	Independent
Age range of pupils	3–11 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Number of part time pupils	5
Proprietor	Trustees of Stella Maris School
Chair	Dr John Swarbrick
Headteacher	Mrs Norah Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	9 -10 March 2011
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,661
Telephone number	0161 432 0532
Fax number	0161 432 9440
Email address	office@stellamarisschool.co.uk

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