

St Austin's Catholic Primary School

Heath Street, St Helen's, Merseyside, WA9 5NJ

Inspection dates 2–3 April 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.

- This happy and caring school successfully carries out its motto, 'Growing in faith together.'
- Pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics is good.
- Children get off to a good start in their learning because the quality of leadership in the Early Years Foundation Stage is excellent.
- All groups of pupils in the school achieve well because teaching is good and sometimes outstanding.
- Partnerships with local and international schools provide excellent opportunities for staff to share their expertise and learn from each other.
- Pupils behave well, feel safe and enjoy school. They are polite and welcoming. They develop into thoughtful, responsible young people.
- Pupils' safety is good. The school looks after pupils well and teaches them how to stay safe.
- Pupils are provided with a wealth of activities which extend their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well.
- Clear vision and well-planned actions from the headteacher and the governing body have provided pupils with excellent learning opportunities in the new school building.
- Middle and senior leaders' roles are an active and successful force in driving improvements.
- Governors have developed their role well and provide effective levels of support and challenge for the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils' progress sometimes slows, especially for the most able, when teaching does not provide work that challenges them hard enough.
- Senior leaders do not make the best use of the information they have about how well different groups of pupils, such as the most able, learn, to check that every pupil achieves their very best.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 15 lessons or parts of lessons, one of which was observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, staff, members of the governing body, a group of parents, a representative of the local authority and groups of pupils.
- Inspectors examined the school's documentation relating to pupils' progress, school self-evaluation and policies relating to safeguarding. They carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work in their books.
- The inspectors listened to pupils in Years 1, 2 and 6 read and spoke informally to pupils during playtimes and lunchtimes.
- They took account of the 41 parent responses received at the time of the inspection from the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the schools' own parental questionnaire.
- Inspectors took account of the 14 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Clare Henderson, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Robert Birtwell	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- 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 below average.
- The school did not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress, in 2013.
- The school has a breakfast club, which is managed by the school.
- The school has a wide range of awards including International Schools Award, Primary Geography Quality Mark (Silver) and Eco School Status.
- The headteacher is a local leader of education.
- The new school building was completed in 2010.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the rate of progress for pupils in writing and mathematics, especially for the most able, by ensuring that:
 - teachers consistently provide the most able pupils with work which is hard enough for them to achieve their very best
 - senior leaders make better use of the information they have about how well different groups of pupils learn to check they all achieve their very best.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are below those expected for their age. They make good and, for some, outstanding progress in the Nursery and Reception classes because they have excellent opportunities to develop their literacy, mathematics, physical development and knowledge of the world through exciting, imaginative play. As a result, children are well prepared for Year 1.
- Since the last inspection, standards at the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics have improved and, in 2013, were above average in writing and broadly average in reading and mathematics. Inspection evidence shows pupils currently in Years 1 and 2 are achieving well and have made good progress from their individual starting points.
- Standards by the end of Year 6 were broadly average overall in 2011 and just above average in 2012 and represented good progress for pupils.
- In 2013, standards dipped to below average in reading, writing and mathematics. There were a number of factors that caused this, including the impact of particular behavioural, and other, needs within the year group. However, current data for Key Stage 2 pupils and the standard of work seen in pupils' books presents a very positive picture and shows clearly that the 2013 results were a one year dip. Currently, across Key Stage 2, all groups of pupils are making good progress.
- School records and pupils' work in their books show that standards are currently above average for pupils in Year 6, with a good proportion securely on course to make and exceed the progress expected of them in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils' achievement is best in reading. This is because there is a strong focus in all year groups on developing pupils' phonics (the sounds that letters make), grammar and spelling skills thoroughly. As a result, pupils read fluently and accurately.
- Pupils' strong reading skills are used well to extend their writing. For instance, they recently applied them to compile and publish a book, entitled 'We are writers'. However, progress in writing is not as strong as in reading because writing tasks are not always demanding enough for the most able pupils, in all year groups, to achieve their very best.
- Although pupils' achievement in mathematics is good, not enough pupils, particularly the most able, achieve as well as they could. The school is beginning to address this with daily mental mathematics, problem-solving and additional booster classes. However, the full effect of this work on pupils' achievement is not fully evident.
- While standards reached by pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in Year 6 in 2013 were above those of their classmates in writing by half a term, they were below in reading and mathematics by half a term. School information shows this gap is rapidly closing. Extra support, where needed, enables pupils currently supported by the pupil premium funding to progress at the same rate or, for some, faster than their classmates.
- Those pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs achieve well and make similar progress to that of their classmates. This reflects the school's commitment to equal opportunities for all pupils.

The quality of teaching is good

- A scrutiny of work in pupils' books, the classroom displays, topic books and the school's records of the checks made on teaching, indicate that teaching is typically good and an increasing proportion is outstanding. This contributes well to pupils' good achievement.
- Pupils say teachers and teaching assistants are, 'friendly and help you to learn a lot of interesting things'. They particularly like the exciting topics they study, such as writing about 'how to train a dragon' as part of their Chinese topic. Furthermore, as part of their enterprise work, they designed a new ride for a local theme park. They are very proud that their design won and are eager to try it out on their next visit to the park.

- Younger pupils excitedly told inspectors about their road safety project in which they tested how much time the local pedestrian lights gave you to cross the road. On discovering it only provided eight seconds, they wrote to the local council and said, 'This is not enough time for the older people to get across safely.'
- Such exciting work captures pupils' imagination and helps them to become caring citizens while providing exciting opportunities for them to apply and extend their reading, writing, mathematical, scientific and information and communication technology skills very well within real-life situations.
- When pupils learn exceptionally well, it is because adults frequently check their understanding through high-quality marking and regular verbal feedback. In addition, they set extremely high expectations and pupils are fully engrossed in their learning. For instance, in one lesson, pupils had to think hard and reason how to measure the area of unfamiliar shapes. On another occasion, pupils reconstructed a cinema in the school hall plotting the coordinates of their own and their classmates' seats. At such times, they are encouraged not to be afraid of making a mistake and, as a result, become confident and successful learners.
- When pupils' learning slows, the work set is not always hard enough, particularly in writing and mathematics and especially for the most able, to enable them to achieve their very best.
- Children learn well in the Early Years Foundation Stage because adults listen to and follow children's interests. Children were fully engrossed in finding where a 'naughty elf' had hidden letters of the alphabet. Such activities advance children's speaking and social skills well.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is extended exceptionally well. Assemblies and topics about religions other than their own extend their knowledge and understanding of the need to welcome and respect the views of others.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are keen to get on in lessons so that very little learning time is lost. There are strong levels of mutual respect between adults and pupils.
- Pupils are proud of their school and take on a wide range of responsibilities, such as peer listeners or eco and school councillors, with maturity. Pupils' enthusiasm for school is reflected in their rapidly improved attendance rates, which are now broadly average.
- The school has clear expectations of behaviour, which most pupils willingly follow. Pupils say that occasionally a few pupils do not listen to adults straight away but, overall, they say behaviour is good.
- Pupils know about different forms of bullying and understand how thoughtless words can upset people. They take this seriously, producing an anti-bullying video to express their views. Discrimination in any form is not tolerated and school records show that incidents of bullying are very rare. On the few occasions when incidents have occurred, they have been well managed.
- Most parents who responded to Parent View and to the school's own survey indicate that they are positive about the behaviour and safety of pupils and feel that the school deals effectively with any incidents of bullying that may arise. School records and the views of the pupils support this view.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and trust adults to look after them. They appreciate their new school building and particularly like having two playgrounds, a climbing wall, sports facilities and a stage area for dancing and drama activities.
- Pupils know how they can help to keep themselves safe. Their understanding of e-safety is impressive and they sensibly and maturely discuss the risks associated with using the internet, for example, they know how to ignore any requests for personal information.
- The breakfast club provides a positive and sociable start to the school day for those pupils who attend. Pupils behave well during the club and relationships are good.

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leaders and the governors lead the school well. They constantly check to make sure their plans for improvement are working and enjoy the support of staff who say we are, 'like a family, looking out for each other's needs'. As a result, a culture of good teaching, behaviour and achievement for all groups of pupils flourishes.
- Leaders, including those at the middle level, are fully involved in checking the quality of teaching and that individual pupils are achieving as well as they can in all the subjects they study. However, they do not use the information about how well different groups of pupils, such as the most able, learn well enough in order to have a clear picture of whether all groups achieve their very best.
- Systems for managing teachers' performance are robust. Teachers' targets are based on pupils' progress and are well linked to training and to teachers' salary progression.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage is exceptionally well led and managed. As a result, children get off to a flying start to their learning.
- The school provides pupils with an excellent range of topics, visits, clubs and experiences which they enjoy and through which gain a great deal of new knowledge. The wide range of awards gained by the school to extend pupils' global and ecological understanding is testament to this work.
- Parents say they are well informed about the work of the school and that staff are approachable.
- The local authority provides light touch support for this good school.
- The primary school sport funding has increased pupils' participation in physical education and sport and is contributing well to developing better physical well-being for pupils. The impact of this spending is checked regularly by the governing body .
- Arrangements for safeguarding pupils and child protection procedures meet statutory requirements.
- The strong partnerships which exist with the parish, local and international schools and the headteacher, a local leader in education, provide excellent opportunities for staff to share their expertise and learn from each other.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are ambitious to see the school improve further. Many are frequent visitors to the school, so they have first-hand experience of the life of the school, including the quality of teaching. They understand how teachers' performance is managed. They have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They contribute well to identifying priorities for improvement and to making sure that these plans are effective. They have a good understanding of how well the school is doing compared to others nationally. This means they are able to hold school leaders to account to improve the school further. Governors oversee the school's budget well and understand how extra funding, for example, from the pupil premium and primary school sport fund, is spent, and with what effect. They have a good range of skills and are keen to extend their expertise, and many have undertaken further training.

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	104806
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	439510

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	240
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Bielby
Headteacher	Patsy Wade
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2009
Telephone number	01744 678000
Fax number	01744 678005
Email address	patsy.wade@sthelens.org.uk

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