

St Mary's Catholic Junior School

Barn Way, Newton-le-Willows, Merseyside, WA12 9QQ

Inspection dates 30 April 2014–1 May 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.

- Pupils make good progress and achieve well, especially in reading and mathematics and in information and communication technology (ICT).
- Pupils enjoy learning and are keen to give of their best.
- The school prepares pupils well for future success.
- Teaching is good with some that is outstanding. Pupils learn well because they respect their teachers and find the work they are given interesting and enjoyable.
- Pupils are proud of their school. The vast majority of them behave well. They are courteous and polite to each other, the adults working with them, and visitors.
- Pupils feel safe in school. The school provides strong support for their personal development and welfare.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. It is enriched by a wide range of additional activities with a strong emphasis on sports and music.
- The school is led and managed well. Leaders know where the school is successful and where it could do better.
- Leaders and managers continue to have a sharp and effective focus on improving the quality of teaching, which is bringing about improvements to pupils' achievement, especially in writing.
- The governing body knows the school well. It is supportive and holds leaders and managers rigorously to account.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching does not always challenge pupils, particularly the most able, to do as well as they can. As a result a minority do not reach the standards of which they are capable.
- Marking is not always sharp enough to show pupils what they need to do to improve.
- The targets set for pupils' progress are not always as challenging as they could be.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 14 lessons taught by 10 teachers. Two of the observations were carried out jointly with the executive headteacher and head of school. An inspector listened to a group of pupils read. Inspectors also visited small group sessions providing support for students of different abilities.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a range of documentation, including the school's view of its own performance, safeguarding and child-protection arrangements, behaviour and attendance, the quality of teaching and minutes of the governing body meetings. A sample of pupils' work in books was also examined.
- Inspectors held a series of formal and informal discussions with pupils to discuss their experience of school, and particularly their learning, behaviour and safety. Discussions were also held with the senior and middle leaders.
- The lead inspector spoke with three members of the governing body, including the Chair and vice chair. An inspector also spoke to a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 48 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) as well as a summary of parental responses to a questionnaire sent out by the school before the inspection. An inspector also spoke to five parents at the start of the second day of the inspection. Inspectors also considered 12 questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

Stephen Wall, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Emily Wheeldon

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mary's is similar in size to the average-sized primary school.
- Nearly all pupils are White British. None speaks English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is broadly average. The pupil premium provides additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Since September 2011 the school has worked in close partnership with its nearby infant school, St Mary's Infant School. The executive headteacher leads both schools. Both the infant and junior schools are managed by separate heads of school.
- The infant school and junior schools have separate governing bodies.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enable a higher proportion of pupils to make good progress by ensuring that:
 - all work is appropriately challenging for pupils of different abilities, especially for the most able
 - marking is of consistently high quality in showing pupils what they need to do to improve their work.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management on raising achievement further by making the targets for pupils' progress more challenging.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- In recent years attainment at the end of Year 6 has been consistently above average, especially in reading and mathematics.
- Information provided by the school, confirmed by inspection evidence from lesson observations, discussions with pupils and scrutiny of work, show that the school's actions to improve pupils' writing skills is paying dividends. Current attainment in writing is now also securely above average.
- Nearly all pupils make the progress expected of them from their individual starting points. The proportion making better progress than this is above the national figures, especially in reading and mathematics, and growing rapidly and securely in writing.
- The majority of the most able pupils achieve well. In 2013 the proportion attaining the higher level in national tests was above the national average in reading and mathematics and just above average in writing. School data for pupils currently in Years 5 and 6, again confirmed by inspection evidence, show that the proportion attaining the higher level in writing is set to be above the 2013 average and as high as in reading and mathematics.
- A minority of pupils including some of the most able do not reach the standards they should because they are not always given work that challenges them to give of their best.
- The proportion and ability profile of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals varies considerably from one year group to another. Consequently, attainment also varies significantly from one year to the next. In 2013 at the end of Year 6 the attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals was above the national average for similar pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. In comparison to their classmates it was, on average, approximately one-third of a National Curriculum level lower. Current school data for the Year 6 cohort show that the gap is set to narrow.
- Pupils who are disabled or with a statement of special educational needs achieve well from their individual starting points because of the school's strong and successful commitment to making sure that all pupils have equal opportunities to succeed.
- The school caters well for the development of pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills. Pupils of all ages read regularly in school and most read regularly at home. The school's sharp focus on improving writing skills is paying dividends. Pupils enjoy writing. They use an extensive range of vocabulary and write creatively in a range of styles. Pupils have good basic number skills and well-developed mental-arithmetic skills, which they practise at the start of nearly every mathematics lesson.
- Pupils show impressive skills in using and applying ICT skills because teaching makes very effective use of the good school facilities to incorporate ICT into learning at every opportunity.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching throughout the school is consistently good with some that is outstanding.
- Teachers know the pupils in their classes well and develop strong and caring relationships with them.
- Pupils work hard and enjoy their learning. They are keen to do well.
- Lessons are planned well to include a good variety of activities that stimulate pupils' interest. Learning is driven forward at a good pace. Pupils work very effectively in small groups and pairs where they enjoy sharing their learning and ideas.
- Sometimes activities are not matched closely enough to the range of abilities in each class. Some pupils, especially the most able, find the work a little too easy and this slows the progress of which they are capable.
- When teaching gets the level of challenge right, pupils learn at a fast pace and enjoy rising to the challenge. For example, in a Year 6 mathematics lesson preparing for the approaching

national tests, a range of challenging activities really stimulated pupils' interest and challenged them to apply what they already knew and could do to tackle a series of problems both mentally and on paper. Pupils' concentration on the tasks in hand was total and they demonstrated that, not just in the lesson, but over time, they had acquired an outstanding grasp of basic mathematical skills and how to use them.

- Teaching assistants take an active part in lessons in supporting pupils' learning, especially those who find work more difficult than others.
- Homework is set regularly to reinforce learning. Pupils say that this helps them learn and do not resent having to do it. However, some parents feel that their children do not receive enough.
- Teachers mark pupils' written work regularly. While marking is regular, its quality in showing pupils clearly what they need to do to improve further is somewhat inconsistent.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good and the school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils are very polite to each other, the adults working with them and to visitors.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They wear their school uniform correctly and take good care of the school's surroundings and buildings.
- In lessons and around school, pupils behave well and with commendable respect for others.
- Pupils say that behaviour is generally good in lessons and that there is little disruption to learning.
- Occasionally, when pupils find work too easy or too hard in lessons, a few become inattentive but this rarely causes any major disruption to learning.
- Pupils say that bullying or name calling of any kind is rare. If it happens, they also say that teachers are quick to deal with it. As one pupil put, 'We're like a big family here and bullying is not part of the school.' School records confirm that bullying is the exception rather than the rule.
- Pupils say that they feel very safe in school and that teachers, 'are kind and are always helpful'.
- Pupils talk knowledgeably about potentially unsafe situations and how to deal with or avoid them. They are fully aware of the risks presented by using the internet and social networking sites.
- The school knows all of its pupils as individuals. It provides strong support for those whose circumstances make them vulnerable and for those with special educational needs to make sure that they are happy in school and do as well as they can.
- Attendance is average and improving. Leaders and managers, including the governing body, do all they can to emphasise and promote the importance of good attendance to parents.
- The majority of parents are satisfied with the standard of behaviour and safety at the school.

The leadership and management are good

- Since the appointment of an executive headteacher, a much closer partnership with the partner infant school has been developed successfully. There is now greater continuity of learning approaches for pupils between the two schools because policies, schemes of work and a rigorous, shared monitoring of standards in both schools have been established.
- Working very closely together, the executive headteacher and the head of school share an accurate view of what the school does well and what it needs to do to improve further. Plans for further improvement are detailed and appropriate.
- Leaders check regularly and accurately on the quality of teaching. They take appropriate action to improve its quality by providing regularly opportunities for staff training, increasingly involving the staff from the infant school and junior school together to promote common approaches and a shared focus on quality to ensure that relative weaknesses are tackled effectively.
- To reflect the growing partnership work with the infant school, the responsibilities of middle managers in the junior school have been re-structured recently to provide a sharper focus on

effective liaison and continuity between the two schools. Middle managers are enthusiastic and clear about their responsibilities and what is expected of them in their roles.

- The school tracks the progress of individual pupils rigorously and tackles any signs of underachievement promptly. However, the targets for the progress that pupils are expected to make are generally not as high as they could be. This is a contributing factor in the lack of challenge evident in some lesson planning and why even more pupils do not make good progress, particularly the most able
- The performance of staff is managed well. The links between salary increases and pupils' progress are firmly set and effective.
- The curriculum meets pupils' needs. It provides pupils with a good range of opportunities for writing and for pupils to apply their basic mathematical skills to solving problems. The teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) is now taught across both the infant and junior school in a common way to ensure continuity; it results in pupils acquiring good reading skills.
- Extra funding for sports is used very effectively to improve pupils' adoption of healthy lifestyles by extending the range of sporting activities to include, for example, cricket and judo.
- Other activities such as trips out broaden pupils' horizons and stimulate their interest in the world around them. Older pupils enjoy taking on a range of responsibilities by, for example, becoming school councillors. Music is very much at the heart of the school and widens pupils' cultural and artistic enjoyment and appreciation. These activities play an important part in the strong development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.
- Policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils are fully and actively in place.
- In recognition that this is a good and improving school, the local authority provides light touch support.
- The majority of parents are strongly supportive of the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is supportive and knowledgeable. They hold the school rigorously to account. They use external and school data about the school's performance effectively to understand how well the school is doing in comparison to other schools both locally and nationally. Detailed reports from the executive headteacher and head of school, in addition to visits to classrooms, ensure that the governing body has an accurate view of the quality of teaching. Similarly, the governing body understands how the performance of staff is managed and ensures a strong link between staff performance and salary increases. The governing body has a firm grasp on the school's finances, including the use of pupil premium funding and extra sports funding.

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	104816
Local authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	443143

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	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	238
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John O'Connell
Executive Headteacher	Gerard Southworth
Date of previous school inspection	25 May 2010
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