

St Mary's Catholic Infant School

Victoria Road, Newton-le-Willows, Merseyside, WA12 9RX

Inspection dates 30 April – 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.

- Parents and pupils wholeheartedly agree that this happy and welcoming school provides a 'real family feel' for all pupils.
- Pupils, including the most-able, make good and, for some, outstanding progress and achieve well because teaching is good and an increasing proportion is outstanding.
- The results achieved by most pupils are consistently above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they leave in Year 2.
- Pupils enjoy school and get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage because of the outstanding care provided.
- The strong partnership which exists with the junior school provides excellent opportunities for staff to share their expertise and learn from each other.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. They say they 'love school and enjoy learning'.
- Pupils' safety is good. The school looks after pupils well, and teaches them how to stay safe.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social, cultural and physical development is outstanding.
- The executive headteacher and the head of school lead the school extremely well; together with the senior leaders they have successfully improved the proportion of good and outstanding teaching and increased pupils' achievement since the last inspection.
- Governors are both supportive and challenging to school leaders and leave no stone unturned in their drive to improve the school further.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Progress is not as rapid as it could be for all pupils because they do not have enough opportunities to extend their writing skills within the other subjects they study.
- Parents are not fully informed as to how the school deals with bullying.
- Not all the middle leaders are fully involved in checking the quality of teaching and pupils' learning in the subjects they manage.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 15 lessons or parts of lessons, one of which was observed jointly with the head of school.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, staff, members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority as well as with 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 and displays in classrooms.
- The inspectors listened to pupils in Years 1 and 2 read and spoke informally to pupils during playtimes and lunchtimes.
- They took account of the 93 parent responses received at the time of the inspection from the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and the views of the parents to whom the inspectors spoke informally to during the inspection.
- Inspectors took account of the 14 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Clare Henderson, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Geoffrey Yates

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is similar in size to an average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school has a range of awards including Healthy School and Eco-School status.
- The school is in an informal partnership with St Mary's Junior School and shares an executive headteacher whilst retaining a head of school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the rates of progress for all pupils by making sure they have enough opportunities to extend their writing skills within the other subjects they study.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that all middle leaders are fully involved in checking the quality of teaching and pupils' learning in the subjects they manage.
- Fully inform parents as to how the school deals with bullying.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start school with skills which are generally below those typically expected for their age particularly in their speaking, listening and social skills. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation. Recent improvements to the indoor and outdoor classrooms provide increased opportunities for them to develop their reading, writing, mathematics, physical skills and knowledge of the world through imaginative and exciting play. As a result, children are well prepared for Year 1.
- Since the last inspection, including 2013, standards at the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics have been consistently above average and particularly so, for the most able pupils. This represents good, and for some, outstanding progress from their individual starting points.
- The standards reached by the pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in Year 2 in 2013, although similar to the same group of pupils nationally, were below those of their classmates in reading, writing and mathematics by about one term. School information shows this gap is rapidly closing. Extra support, where needed, enables the pupils currently supported by the pupil premium funding to progress at the same good rate as that of their classmates.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are fully included and supported in all activities and make similar good progress to that of other pupils. This reflects the school's commitment to equal opportunities for all pupils.
- Pupils' work in their books and school records show that standards are currently above average for pupils in Years 1 and 2 and, particularly for the most able pupils, with a good proportion securely on course to make and exceed the progress expected of them in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils learn to read successfully. They understand and use phonics (the sounds that letters make) well when reading and writing. Pupils thoroughly enjoy reading and talk enthusiastically about their favourite books and authors.
- The very well attended 'Shares' project, a reading workshop for parents, highlights the importance of reading and strengthens the home-school partnership very well. As a result, most pupils read at least four books a week in school and/or at home. Because of this, they read with fluency, expression and understanding and apply and extend their reading skills very effectively within other subjects.
- Similarly, mathematics skills are extended well in other subjects, for instance, science investigation projects. This is because the school maintains a strong focus on developing pupils' problem-solving skills from their very first days in school.
- Although pupils extend their writing skills well in their literacy work, they do not have enough opportunities to extend these skills fully by writing at length or for different audiences in the other subjects they study. Consequently, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could in writing.

The quality of teaching is good

- Classroom displays, work in topic books, a scrutiny of work in pupils' writing and mathematics 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, and their parents overwhelmingly agree, that teachers and support staff; 'are kind and help you to learn lots of interesting things'. Pupils particularly enjoyed visiting the Lowry Museum, researching, writing and displaying what they had found out about the artist Lowry and his work. They enthusiastically told inspectors that on their visit they were artists, too, as they practised their drawing skills and shared facts they had learnt about the artist with each other on their return to school. Such work extends their reading, research and observational drawing

skills, as well as extending their knowledge and understanding of the world very well.

- Another group of pupils, as part of their reading and writing work, read a book about Africa. They not only found out facts about Africa but also extended their knowledge of English grammar, punctuation and spelling rules by explaining the meaning of and use of glossaries and captions as they read with enthusiasm and fluency. Adults' excellent subject knowledge and challenging and thought-provoking questions made the pupils think hard and explain their answers fully.
- Such work captures pupils' imagination and provides interesting opportunities for them to advance, very successfully, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as well as their reading and writing skills and deepens their knowledge of the world.
- Although pupils extend their reading, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) skills well, they do not always have enough opportunities to extend their writing skills fully across a number of subjects.
- Pupils' learning is good because adults frequently check pupils' understanding through high-quality reviews of how well pupils learn during lessons and through high-quality marking.
- Children learn well in the Early Years Foundation Stage because the adults plan engaging activities that capture pupils' imagination, appeal to their interests and make them think deeply about the subject. For example, they happily investigated, explained and recorded which and how frequently different birds visited their play area. On another occasion, children were completely enthralled when a surprise parcel containing caterpillars arrived. This led them to think about, discuss and explain how one day the caterpillars would become butterflies.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Most pupils are keen to get on in lessons so that very little learning time is lost. Pupils trust the adults and relationships between the pupils and adults are exemplary. Most pupils work well together, for instance, when finding out what is man-made and what is natural on the Isle of Sturray in their geography topic.
- Pupils are friendly and generally get on well with each other in the playground and dining hall. They understand the school rules and most pupils live out their motto which, they enthusiastically tell inspectors, makes their school special, 'we learn, we love, we follow Jesus'.
- They are very respectful of others and through topics learn about religions and cultures other than their own. For example, a topic about China widened their knowledge and understanding of the food, customs, language and artwork of another country.
- Pupils are proud of their school and take on a wide range of responsibilities such as buddies, eco-councillors and school councillors. They explain that they have to obtain a supporting reference and be interviewed for the positions. This prepares them well for their future lives.
- Pupils take their responsibilities very seriously and are proud of the work the school council has done, for example, to obtain a scooter pod and to improve safety in the school building following their learning walks. Pupils' enthusiasm for school is reflected in their above average attendance rates.
- The school has clear expectations of behaviour which most pupils willingly follow. Pupils say and inspectors observed that occasionally a few pupils do not listen to adults straight away but, overall, behaviour is good. Records of how well pupils behave are well kept by staff and systematically checked by senior leaders.
- Pupils know about different forms of bullying and understand how saying hurtful words can upset people. Discrimination in any form is not tolerated and incidents of bullying are rare. Despite this, a significant proportion of the parents who responded to Parent View indicate that they do not know enough about how the school deals with bullying.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They know how they can help to keep themselves safe. For instance, they understand why they must take care when they use the computer and they

appreciate the need to stay safe on the roads and the benefits of eating healthily.

The leadership and management are good

- The executive headteacher and head of school lead the school very well. Together with the full support of the governing body and all teaching and support staff, they have created a highly committed team who share their values and support them well. As a result, a culture of high expectations, good teaching, behaviour and achievement for all groups of pupils is fully evident.
- Leaders frequently check the quality of teaching, planning and marking. 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. Underperformance in teaching is tackled rigorously. This means that the proportion of good and outstanding teaching is increasing.
- Senior leaders regularly and rigorously check the progress made by all groups of pupils. Teachers are held to account for the progress of the pupils they teach. The school's plan for improvement concentrates on the right areas and, as a result, the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement continue to improve. The plan is based on an honest and accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, middle leaders are not all fully involved in checking the quality of teaching, or that pupils are achieving as well as they can in the subjects they manage and as a result, not all pupils are yet making outstanding progress.
- The school provides pupils with an excellent range of subjects, topics, visits, clubs and experiences. Assemblies and activities, such as raising funds for those less fortunate than themselves, help them to appreciate and care for others very well. As a result, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.
- Parents say they appreciate the wide range of opportunities they are provided with to be involved in their children's education, but that they would like to know more about how the school deals with bullying.
- The local authority provides light touch support for this good school.
- The primary school sport funding is well managed. The funding is extremely well used; one example is that 80 pupils now benefit from after-school sporting activities. This has increased pupils' participation in physical education and is contributing well to developing better physical well-being for pupils.
- The strong partnership which exists with the junior school provides excellent opportunities for staff to share their expertise and learn from each other.
- Arrangements for safeguarding pupils and child protection procedures meet statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body provides strong support to the school and has improved extremely well since the last inspection. They have a very clear knowledge of the quality of teaching and understand how the school makes decisions about targets for teachers to improve their performance and about teachers' salary progression. Governors take a very close interest in the work of the school and are well informed about its strengths and areas for development. They meticulously check the information available on how well pupils are learning and regularly check how well the school is doing with senior leaders. Governors make sure that the school's finances are used well, for instance, to improve facilities in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They ensure that the pupil premium and primary school sport funding are used to close any gaps in pupils' achievement. Governors carry out their statutory duties well, and make sure they meet all legal requirements about keeping pupils and staff safe.

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	104817
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	426219

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	231
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stephen Massey
Headteacher	Gerard Southworth
Date of previous school inspection	22 October 2008
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