

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Hunter Road, Cannock, Staffordshire, WS11 0AE

Inspection dates 4–5 June 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 is a caring school where everyone is looked after very well and warmly valued as an individual.
- The school has made considerable improvement during the last year because the staff are working well together as a team to improve what is provided for all pupils.
- Pupils of different abilities and from all backgrounds make good overall progress.
- Pupils do particularly well in reading; many read confidently and accurately.
- Pupils' behaviour is consistently good. They get on well together and they are keen, enthusiastic learners.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their friends safe.
- Teaching is consistently good. Staff have strong working relationships with the pupils and praise the efforts they make.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is particularly effective and ensures that the youngest children get off to a strong start to their education.
- Senior staff have improved the use of the information they gather about pupils' progress to identify what additional support pupils may need.
- Governance is good. Governors are supportive and understand data on pupils' performance. This helps them to hold staff to account for pupils' achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The progress pupils make in writing, especially for the boys, is not as strong as in other subjects.
- The marking of pupils' work does not always help them improve.
- Checks leaders make on the quality of teaching and learning are not always rigorous enough to identify specific areas for improvement.
- Subject leaders are not always clear about what needs to be done to bring about improvement in their areas of responsibility.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in parts of 16 lessons. Some of these were joint lesson observations with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the Early Years Foundation Stage staff, the special educational needs coordinator, and the literacy and numeracy leaders. Discussions also took place with groups of pupils, governors, and an educational consultant who works with the school. A telephone discussion was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the views of 77 parents to the online questionnaire (Parent View). They also considered the views expressed by parents at the start of both inspection days. Inspectors also reviewed the 15 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including data on pupils' progress and planning, and monitoring information. Inspectors listened to pupils reading and scrutinised samples of pupils' recent work. They also considered in detail records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Sue Hall, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Stephen Hopkins

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school with around 5% more boys than girls.
- Around a quarter of the pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which is slightly below the national average. In this school, the pupil premium provides additional funding for those who are known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs identified at school action is below the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is in line with the national average.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the rate of progress made and raise pupils' achievement further by:
 - ensuring that boys make as much progress as the girls, especially in their writing
 - enabling pupils, particularly boys, to develop a greater enjoyment of writing through increasing their skills in writing imaginatively, in depth and detail
 - ensuring that the marking of pupils' work clearly identifies areas for improvement, is understood by the pupils and is referred to in follow-up activities.
- Ensure that subject leaders and senior staff rigorously check the progress pupils make and use such information to identify specifically what improvement is required and where it is needed.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Children join the Nursery with skills and experiences that are broadly typical for their age. Most transfer into the Reception class and make good overall progress during their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage; sometimes children's progress is outstanding.
- Good progress continues and is now evident through the school, following a period of slower progress and gradually declining standards since the previous inspection. This is due to leaders' successful focus on improving the checking and tracking of progress for all pupils.
- Pupils' progress in phonics (the sounds letters make) has accelerated particularly rapidly due to the strong focus recently on this cornerstone of early reading and writing. Checks in 2013 at the end of Year 1 of pupils' phonic understanding had indicated that these skills were below average but there is no evidence of this now.
- Pupils across the school read well. Although standards have been much the same as most pupils in the country by the time they are aged eleven, many pupils say that they really enjoy reading and talk happily about their favourite books and authors. They read regularly in school and are well supported in their reading at home. Consequently, standards are rising.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics. Most have a secure understanding of numbers. For example, pupils in Year 6 carried out an investigation into the cost of setting up a theme park. They used their reasoning skills and strategic thinking to work out the levels of profit to be made. This approach was just right for these pupils. It held their interest and made pupils of all abilities, including the more able, think hard.
- The progress of pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium funding is also accelerating. Last year their attainment was about six months behind their classmates in mathematics, two terms behind in writing and a year behind in reading. In this year, the school has appointed extra teaching staff to support these pupils in a range of additional activities; as a result, the gap between them and other groups of pupils is narrowing.
- Additional funding for primary school sport is making a positive impact on standards with the take-up of extra-curricular activities increasing well.
- Less-able pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress because work is well matched to their specific learning needs. They receive effective additional support and make good overall progress.
- Pupils' writing skills have been below those in other areas, particularly for the boys. Discussions with pupils indicate they do not find writing particularly interesting, even though the school has provided activities aimed at motivating them more. Their work shows that many write and spell accurately, with good understanding of punctuation and grammatical concepts, but there is little depth, detail and imagination evident in their independent writing. This does not enable them to reach the higher levels in writing.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The school has developed a stronger focus on improving teaching and learning recently, with particular impact during the current year. Lesson observations, assessments of pupils' progress

and samples of work indicate that teaching is now typically good.

- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, activities are very well planned to cover all the main areas of learning. The classroom and outdoor areas are bright, lively and interesting, successfully promoting in children enthusiasm and a quest for learning.
- Across the school, staff have strong working relationships with pupils that motivate them to try hard. This was seen particularly in Year 3 where the very effective encouragement of pupils by teaching and support staff led to disabled pupils and those who special educational needs making particularly good progress. This resulted in them becoming keen to demonstrate to the class how, in a physical education lesson, they had increased the length of their standing jumps.
- The school has extended its support for groups of pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, and those entitled to pupil premium funding. This is helping to ensure that they reach their potential. Additional activities are supported through the work of an extra teacher. This well-focused work is helping to close the residual gaps in achievement between different groups of pupils.
- Staff have good expectations of what the pupils will achieve. Staff usually explain things well to pupils. Very occasionally, including in Year 4 and Year 5, some pupils are unsure what they have to do next and this is not speedily addressed by staff.
- The planning of activities is usually effective with linked tasks for pupils of different abilities. This ensures that most are challenged well. Very occasionally more-able pupils, for example in Year 2, are not challenged as fully as they could be. Sometimes, planning for writing is not good enough to inspire pupils to write well.
- The work of teaching assistants is generally good and some is very effective, as seen in Nursery activities and Year 3 physical education sessions. In other lessons, support staff occasionally either do too much or too little to effectively move pupils' learning forwards.
- The school has worked with some success during the current year to improve the guidance teachers give to pupils through written marking, with variable success. The marking scheme is complex, not easily understood by the pupils and not well suited to the needs of the younger ones. Sometimes areas for improvement or corrections are identified, but these are rarely re-visited by the pupils who therefore do not learn from their mistakes.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Observations and discussions indicate that they typically behave well in a range of activities. Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school and think they have lots of friends here. Parents note with pleasure how many of the older pupils get on well with the younger ones and act as good role models for them.
- Pupils are polite to each other and the adults around them. They enjoy working with a partner and in small groups. Because they have strong working relationships with teachers and support staff, pupils enjoy most activities.
- Pupils are enthusiastic and eager to learn. Most try hard with their work, as reflected in the neat presentation of work by the oldest pupils. Across the school, many are willing to take part in

discussions and share their ideas. However, a few pupils in most year groups wait for others to contribute their ideas. Very occasionally, in discussions with a partner, some pupils sit quietly and offer little. This does not help them develop their vocabulary prior to writing activities.

- Attendance has improved in the last year, particularly for those pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding. Attendance over the school is now above the national average. Most pupils arrive punctually at the start of the school day.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils understand the types of bullying that children of their age may encounter. They can explain the nature of cyber-bullying and what actions they should take to ensure their own well-being. This includes safety issues related to traffic concerns outside the school gates.
- While a very small number of parents who responded to the online questionnaire believe there is some bullying in school, discussion with pupils and staff in different roles, observations of activities and scrutiny of records indicate that little occurs. Should there be very occasional squabbles or concerns, pupils are confident they are dealt with well by staff.

The leadership and management are good

- Since the previous inspection, the school recognised that pupils were not making as much progress as expected. Improvement from this time has been good, especially during the last year.
- Senior staff work well with external consultants. There have been some changes of staff and roles within school. This has ensured a new and effective focus on what leads to good achievement for pupils in different years.
- The headteacher is leading the use of assessment information effectively. The progress pupils make is carefully tracked and the use of this information in planning is improving, as demonstrated by increases in pupils' achievement. There are regular reviews of individual, group and class progress which is well linked to professional development opportunities for all staff, including work with other schools.
- The school ensures that additional funding, such as for sports, pupil premium and disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, is used appropriately for the pupils it is intended and is resulting in the required improvements.
- All of the parents spoken to during the inspection were positive about the quality of care and education their children receive. They are confident they are well looked after, safe and happy.
- The school provides an effective range of activities to promote learning in all subjects. This is particularly good in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. There is a strong moral foundation to the school which is reflected in its caring character.
- The local authority supports the school effectively. It helped identify initial concerns in the progress pupils were making. While opportunities to work with the local authority are decreasing, the school works well with other bodies to ensure it succeeds.

- Procedures to safeguard pupils meet current requirements. Staff ensure that pupils have equal access to activities by providing additional support enabling them to take part in activities including educational visits. The school carefully monitors traffic concerns outside school.
- The school is effective in fostering positive relationships and tackles discrimination appropriately. The school has maintained its long-standing pastoral strengths alongside a better focus on achievement. With the many improvements made and a shared determination to continue to develop, the school demonstrates that it has the capacity to improve further.
- Staff performance is managed well and linked appropriately to pay awards. The process of monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning includes lesson observations, the scrutiny of data and sampling of pupils' work. However, sometimes, staff are slow to spot aspects that require improvement and need adjustment. Subject leaders in particular, are not always clear about exactly what needs to be improved in their area of responsibility, such as writing.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is good and has improved in the past year. The newly elected Chair of the Governing Body is providing a strong and effective steer to its work, ensuring that governors are more aware of what the data tell them about achievement. This is enabling governors to develop their ability to act as a critical friend and hold the school to account for the progress made.
 - Governors ensure that additional funding, including that for primary school sport and for those entitled to the pupil premium, is used appropriately and is making an impact. They are informed about the quality of teaching and learning and support the headteacher in managing teachers' performance and pay-related issues.
 - Governors carefully monitor pupils' safety and security.

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	124349
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	444046

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	230
Appropriate authority	Governing Body
Chair	Carl Beardon
Headteacher	Stephen Breeze
Date of previous school inspection	30 June 2010
Telephone number	01543 510380
Fax number	N/A
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