

St Helen's Catholic Primary School

Knowle Close, Brixton, London, SW9 0TQ

Inspection dates 15–16 July 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 from the Nursery through to Year 6.
- Pupils' achievement has improved strongly throughout the school over the last year. All groups of pupils have made good progress.
- The headteacher inspires all staff to aim high and work together for the good of the school.
- The quality of teaching is consistently good. It is stimulating and challenging.
- Pupils behave well and are polite and respectful. Those from different backgrounds and heritages get on well together.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development successfully. They develop strong values.
- The school keeps pupils safe and teaches them effectively how to keep themselves safe.
- The Nursery and Reception classes give children a good start. They learn well through carefully planned play activities.
- The school successfully promotes reading. Pupils throughout the school do better in reading now than in the past.
- The school is well led. Leaders, including middle leaders, and governors know their school well. Their plans cover the right priorities.
- Leaders have improved ways of checking pupils' progress. As a result, no group falls behind.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Marking does not always help pupils understand how to improve.
- Parents and carers do not always receive sufficient information about what their children are learning. Consequently, they cannot always effectively support their children.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 20 lessons across a range of subjects. Most were observed jointly with the headteacher and two other senior leaders.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and looked at samples of their work.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, teachers with responsibilities for specific subjects, a representative of the local authority, and groups of pupils. A meeting was held with the Chair, Vice-Chair and one other member of the Governing Body.
- Inspectors took account of the views of staff in 27 questionnaires.
- Inspectors spoke to 20 parents and carers during the inspection. There were five responses to the online survey Parent View. The number of responses was too low to be published on the Parent View website.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents. These included the school's own views of how well it is doing, its plans for the future, and the governing body minutes.
- Inspectors considered a range of evidence on pupils' attainment and progress. Inspectors also examined safeguarding information, and records relating to behaviour and safety.

Inspection team

Natalia Power, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Ann Pratt	Additional Inspector
Peter Thrussell	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Helen's is an average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which in this school provides additional funding mainly for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is higher than the national average.
- Almost all pupils are from minority ethnic heritages, and this proportion is much higher than average. The two largest groups are Black African and White groups other than British. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is much higher than average.
- The proportion of pupils who receive extra help in class (school action) is lower than average. The proportion who need more help than this (school action plus) or who have a statement of special educational needs is higher than average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The headteacher took up his appointment in September 2013. There is currently an acting deputy headteacher. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed for September 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that marking across all subjects is consistent and helps pupils to understand how to improve their learning.
- Provide more information for parents and carers about what their children are learning, so that they can support them more fully.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils achieve well. They make good progress throughout their time at school, and no group falls behind. This demonstrates the school's commitment to equality for all. Achievement is not outstanding, because progress overall is not exceptional.
- Children get off to a very good start in the Nursery. They arrive with social, language and number skills that vary, but overall are well below those expected for their age. Because of the good teaching and care that they receive from all the adults, they make good progress in their learning.
- New children who come into the Reception Year are visited at home to make sure they settle in smoothly. They soon catch up with those who have built up good learning and social skills in the Nursery.
- Pupils make good progress at all stages of their time at the school. The headteacher, in his first year in post, has significantly improved the consistency of teaching. As a result, pupils' achievement is now solidly good throughout the school.
- Pupils leave school as confident, articulate learners. Their results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 6 are in line with national averages in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The most-able pupils have done particularly well in the 2014 tests, both in Year 2 and in Year 6. Proportions gaining the top grades are higher than at any time over the past three years. This reflects the ambition of leaders, and the high expectations that teachers have of their pupils.
- Pupils from a wide range of different backgrounds, and those who speak English as an additional language, make good progress. This is because the school identifies their needs early and provides effective support.
- The school gives effective additional support to disabled pupils and those who have a range of special educational needs. Therefore, these pupils make similar good progress to the others in the school.
- The school has dramatically improved pupils' reading skills in the past year. Pupils' scores in the Year 1 check of their ability to read sounds and letters (phonics) shot up, after two years of being low. In 2014, almost two thirds of Year 6 pupils gained the higher Level 5 in reading. Pupils who read aloud to the inspectors clearly enjoyed reading and made sensible choices of books they selected for themselves.
- The school has taken effective action to improve the learning of pupils supported by additional funding, so that these pupils consistently make similar progress to all others in the school in reading, writing and mathematics. There is no appreciable difference in the attainment of those who are eligible for the additional funding, and those who are not.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is consistently good throughout the school, and this secures good learning and progress.
- Pupils are encouraged to think for themselves. In the lessons observed, skilled questioning and brief, but focused, discussions with one another helped pupils to learn particularly well.
- There are good relationships in the classroom, and pupils want to do well.
- Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. This helps pupils who are learning English as an additional language, and those who struggle with their work, to make similar progress to others.
- Classrooms are well organised, and there are helpful and attractive displays on the walls, so that pupils can quickly see for themselves how to spell important words and how to do sums. Pupils' work is displayed well to celebrate their achievements.
- Pupils' learning and progress are not outstanding, because marking does not always provide

guidance in all subjects on how pupils can improve their learning.

- Tasks are stimulating and promote good learning. For example, pupils in one Year 3 class walked silently round the school, listening to sounds around them. This inspired them to use such effective descriptive words as 'crackled', 'squealed' and 'clicked'.
- Teachers set tasks for the most-able pupils that challenge and enthuse them. As a result, they make very good progress. In one Year 6 lesson on poetic language, for example, pupils were expected to aim high. Their responses were sophisticated, one pupil writing: 'The darkness devoured the gloomy cave.'
- Children in the Nursery and Reception classes are given activities that promote their reading, writing and number skills well, in both the indoor and outdoor play areas. For example, children in the Nursery acted out a café scene, and this encouraged them to begin writing their own 'menus'. A group of children in the Reception class, reading 'The Hungry Hedgehog' with their teacher, showed they could explain the pictures in their own words. One comment was: 'Cat is saying, "Stop eating my food!"'.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They have positive attitudes to learning, and teachers rarely have to bring them to order. Pupils are quiet and attentive in lessons, although not always excited by their learning tasks.
- Pupils are polite and respectful to visitors. Pupils throughout the school are considerate of others. The older pupils told inspectors they enjoy looking after the younger ones.
- Pupils play happily together in the playground, cooperating well in playground games. They told inspectors that the good behaviour seen during the inspection was typical. Adults quickly sort out any worries pupils share with them.
- Inspectors' discussions with pupils, and records of behaviour incidents, confirm that instances of unkindness are few and far between.
- The school fosters good relations among its pupils, and there is no discrimination towards minorities. Pupils from a wide range of backgrounds and heritages get on very well together. There are no incidents of racist behaviour.
- This good behaviour reflects the school's successful promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They are taught to have strong values in a supportive Christian context. In one class assembly, for example, Year 2 pupils looked back on the year, remembering previous shared assemblies and outings. This enabled them to feel part of the school's close family.
- Children in the Nursery and Reception classes enjoy their learning indoors and outdoors. They have many opportunities to develop their social skills in sharing and taking turns. For example, children taking part in a scooter race waited patiently for the announcement 'ready, steady, go', and then rode their scooters fast but carefully.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils told inspectors they feel safe. Parents and carers who spoke to inspectors agreed that the school is safe.
- Pupils learn about different types of bullying, such as racist and cyber-bullying. They told inspectors that there is no bullying in the school, and inspectors' own evidence confirmed this.
- Pupils are taught to keep themselves safe. They understand the risks involved in using computers, and from strangers and road traffic. The school prepares carefully before taking them out on educational visits.
- Pupils show their enjoyment of school through their attendance, which has been above average for a number of years, and is on a rising trend.

The leadership and management are good

- The new headteacher has been in post for a full year, and there has been marked

improvement in the achievement of all groups of pupils. The strong 'can do' mood is reflected in the very positive staff questionnaires.

- The headteacher has improved ways of checking pupils' progress. He has taken quick and effective action to provide support for anyone in danger of falling behind. As a result, pupils' overall achievement has risen sharply over the past year.
- Middle and senior leaders check pupils' progress regularly and carefully to make sure that all are receiving the right support to meet their needs.
- Other important areas of the school's work have also improved considerably. For example, the Nursery and Reception classes had been judged satisfactory in the previous inspection, while other aspects had been judged as good. Leaders have acted quickly to improve early years provision, drawing on the expertise of the local authority, and children now learn well in attractive and stimulating play areas.
- Following a period of changes in staffing, leaders have created a stable and supportive team that provides a caring environment for all pupils. As a consequence, pupils feel secure, behave well, and are ready to learn.
- Leaders know their school well and are accurate in pinpointing its strengths and identifying what remains to be done. Their plans for the future are detailed and cover the right priorities. The school is well placed to continue its journey of improvement.
- There is a good link between pupils' progress and the quality of the teaching. This is because leaders at all levels, including middle leaders, share in supporting teachers, so they are able to do their best. Leaders focus sharply on how well pupils are learning, and this ensures that all make good progress.
- The local authority knows the school well and, based on its own observations, accurately judges it to be good. It provides valuable support to the school.
- Communication between school and home is not yet strong enough. Parents and carers told inspectors that they were anxious to help their children learn and were prepared to offer support to the school. They are not always able to help their children, however, as they do not always know what they are learning at school.
- The additional funding the school receives for sport has been used appropriately to promote wider participation in a range of activities, such as cricket, basketball and gymnastics. Part of the funding is used to enable visiting coaches to train staff to ensure long-term advantages to the pupils.
- The subjects pupils learn have a good focus on the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics, and this prepares pupils well for the next stage of schooling. Pupils report that they enjoy the range of clubs, trips and visits outside the school.
- Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet current requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body takes an active interest in the school, with governors visiting it regularly to learn about its work for themselves. They know that the school has improved in important areas since their appointment of the headteacher.
 - Governors understand how well the pupils achieve in relation to those in other schools. They know how well the pupils in the school perform through the headteacher's detailed reports and their own monitoring. They have an accurate understanding of the link between teachers' pay and the progress made by pupils, and this ensures good value for money.
 - The governing body makes sure that the additional funding for the pupil premium and for the promotion of sports is spent wisely, and has a positive impact on the pupils' performance.
 - Governors attend regular training and are knowledgeable about safe recruitment. They ensure they fulfil all statutory requirements, particularly in regard to safeguarding.

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	100623
Local authority	Lambeth
Inspection number	444204

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	271
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Bernard Heaphy
Headteacher	Andrew Rafferty
Date of previous school inspection	26 May 2010
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