

St Finbar's Catholic Primary School

South Hill Road, Liverpool, Merseyside, L8 9RY

Inspection dates 23–24 September 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Early years provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- The management of subjects, other than English and mathematics is weak.
- Insufficient use is being made of out of classroom experiences to enhance learning back in the classroom.
- Learning behaviour requires improvement. Too many pupils are still too reliant on adults to provide answers.
- The progress pupils make is inconsistent across classes, including the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Boys struggle with their writing and the most able do not always attain as well as they should.
- Allocation of funding for disadvantaged pupils is not always spent wisely and is sometimes insufficiently focused.
- Current monitoring of teaching and learning is not yet sufficiently robust and focused on outcomes for pupils.
- The appraisal of the teacher performance is too complex and is not sufficiently linked to improvements in outcomes for pupils.
- The quality of teaching is not yet good and is inconsistent across the school.
- Teaching is often weaker across foundation subjects because teachers lack the basic subject knowledge or confidence to teach all of these subjects well.
- Teacher expectations of what pupils can achieve are not always high enough.
- The outside environment is in need of improvement.

The school has the following strengths

- Year 6 has been a success story in 2014 with standards improving significantly, especially in reading and mathematics.
- Parental confidence in the school is being restored and the number of parents beginning to work with the school is growing.
- The general behaviour of pupils around the school and in lessons is good and has improved.
- Attendance has improved and is now broadly in line with the national average.
- The quality of marking has improved and is embedded well in English and mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- Her Majesty's Inspector observed nine lessons or part lessons, all of which were undertaken jointly with the interim headteacher and/or the deputy headteacher. All classes in the school were observed.
- Her Majesty's Inspector looked at examples of pupils' work. He talked to pupils about the books they enjoyed and those they were currently reading.
- Meetings were held with four groups of pupils and Her Majesty's Inspector spoke to them about their work and their impressions of the school. In addition, he talked to pupils during lessons and at break times and visited the dining room at lunchtime.
- There were insufficient responses to the online questionnaire for parents (Parent View) to provide evidence for the inspection but the school's own recent survey of parents' views was taken into account. In addition, Her Majesty's Inspector talked to a small group of parents at the start of the inspection.
- Meetings were held with two governors, representatives of the local authority and the diocese as well as with a range of school staff including several subject leaders.
- Her Majesty's Inspector took account of the reported findings from three previous visits to the school as well as detailed monitoring reports provided by the local authority. He also observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation including safeguarding documents, records of current standards and progress, records relating to the management of teachers' performance, the school's strategic plan and documents relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance. In addition, information relating to pupil premium and sports funding was scrutinised as well as a number of subject leader files and governors' reports.

Inspection team

Leszek Iwaskow, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized primary school. It has an Early Years Foundation unit which provides for both Nursery and Reception children.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from a minority ethnic background or who speak English as an additional language is below the national average, although this is increasing.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, for which the school receives additional funding (pupil premium), is very high.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is lower than average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is high.
- An increasing proportion of pupils join and leave the school at other than the usual times.
- The school has a breakfast club which is managed by the governing body.
- The school has experienced a number of staffing changes and a significant number of staff absences since the last inspection. Staffing instability has now been largely resolved. The acting deputy headteacher post has been made permanent and a new lead for early years took up her responsibility in September 2014. The substantive headteacher has been absent since January 2014 and in the interim two acting headteachers have provided leadership for the school, ably supported by the current deputy headteacher.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the impact of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the monitoring of teaching is more rigorous and accurate in order to enable school leaders to have a clearer picture of how well pupils are learning as well as informing the performance management and the professional development of staff
 - the performance management of teachers is sharper, more focused and provides greater accountability
 - middle leaders develop their expertise so they can support teachers to build up their confidence and subject knowledge in order to enable them to deliver quality lessons across a full range of subjects
 - the outdoor environment around the school, including in the early years, is improved to enhance pupils' enjoyment and increase learning opportunities.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it becomes consistently good over time by:
 - raising teacher expectations to ensure high quality outcomes which stretch all pupils, including the more able, so that they make more than expected progress across the full range of subjects and especially in the quality of their writing
 - providing training to refine and develop basic techniques and teaching skills such as questioning to ensure teachers access learning for pupils better
 - providing bespoke training for teaching assistants, including those in the early years, to enable them to support and monitor pupils more effectively
 - ensuring that more opportunities are provided for pupils to think for themselves so they do not become over-reliant on adults to provide the answers, solutions or make corrections
 - ensuring that better use is made of the increasing number of outside enrichment opportunities to improve and support learning back in the classroom.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The leadership and management of the school require improvement because, in the long-term absence of the substantive headteacher, temporary arrangements remain regarding the leadership of the school. In addition, middle leadership continues to be a work in progress and is in need of further development.
- Most staffing issues, which have plagued the school in the past, have now been resolved. Improved stability has ensured that the atmosphere around the school is calm, purposeful and more conducive to learning.
- The local authority, in partnership with the diocese, has ensured that, in the absence of the substantive headteacher, the leadership of the school has not been affected adversely. The deputy headteacher has maintained continuity and has formed effective partnerships with both interim headteachers to ensure that improvements continue to be implemented.
- There have been significant changes made since the last inspection. Management systems have been overhauled with regular monitoring of teaching and scrutinies of pupils' work and teachers' planning now an established part of everyday routines. However, these need to become more robust and focused more on outcomes for pupils rather than on compliance – a question of not 'has it been done' but 'has it been done well.'
- The implementation of the new national curriculum has necessitated the restructuring of subject responsibilities and most subjects are now being taught more discretely. However, teachers are not always confident or have the subject knowledge to teach all these subjects confidently or in sufficient depth.
- Whereas the management of English and mathematics is well established and has been seen to have had an impact on raising standards, leadership of other subjects is less strong. In particular, although they are able to organise what is taught, there is a lack of clarity from subject leaders about how they can support and develop colleagues to improve their teaching of science, geography and history. As a result, the quality of teaching across the curriculum remains fragile and inconsistent.
- The model for appraising the performance of teachers is too complex and is not sufficiently linked to improvements in outcomes for pupils. This was not helped by the fact that, until recently, there was a legacy of inaccurate assessment which complicated the process of assessing the progress that pupils had made. Appraisal is currently being reviewed to focus more sharply on clear targets linked to specific improvements in the classroom.
- The school recognises the value and need to broaden the experiences of the pupils and has committed to ensuring that each class engages in a wide range of visits both locally and around the region. Additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils has been used to promote equality of opportunity by helping all pupils to participate in these activities. Pupils and parents commented very positively about this. However, although these visits to Eureka, Southport, Chester zoo etc. are valuable in their own right, currently very little use is being made to utilise these experiences in lessons in the classroom apart from a limited attempt to improve writing.
- The school prepares pupils for life in modern Britain reasonably well. Christian values are promoted through displays around the school and in assemblies. Key moral issues such as forgiveness, freedom, friendship, mercy, respect and responsibility are some of the messages delivered through religious education. The school raises awareness of, and is involved in, supporting a range of charities including responding to disasters worldwide. The Remembrance Day assembly was linked to the centenary celebrations of the outbreak of the First World War. The role of the British armed forces was commemorated by inviting any serving family member to attend in uniform as part of these celebrations.
- Currently, the school has no links with schools in diversely contrasting localities or with schools abroad. This limits pupils understanding of cultural diversity.
- Primary sports funding has been used to enhance the range of sporting activities available to pupils during and after school. Pupils now engage more regularly in competitive sports against schools in the local area. They were enthusiastic about the quality of the coaching from sports specialists. However, opportunities are being wasted to develop teachers' expertise as they frequently use this time for administrative tasks, planning or marking.
- Parental confidence in the school is being restored. A negative attitude has now been reversed and parents were positive that the school is improving. Pupils also expressed similar views.
- Parents are also beginning to work more closely with the school and, although still small, the numbers becoming involved are growing. A parents and teachers' association has been established and volunteers hold coffee mornings to encourage greater parental involvement. They also support and have recently

become involved in supporting individual pupils with their reading in school.

- Policies and procedures for safeguarding are robust, meet statutory requirements and are managed effectively. The knowledge and skills of staff and governors are kept up to date through regular training.
- The local authority has provided very good support. It has been instrumental in ensuring that the school has survived a period of significant staffing turbulence by providing additional support as well as seconding teachers and senior staff to enable the school to continue to provide a reasonable education for the pupils in its care. It has kept an eye on the improvements being made through regular monitoring and reviews, and continues to have a strong and regular presence in the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have continued to provide strong support for school leaders especially in dealing with the staffing problems which have afflicted the school until recently. The quality of governance has improved with the co-option of additional governors with educational expertise. Training has also been provided to develop the skills and knowledge of other governors to enable them to fulfil their roles appropriately. Governors are involved in discussing staff pay progression, spending on disadvantaged pupils and use of sports funding, but there is less evidence that they have understood or questioned it in depth or have followed up issues with sufficient rigour. There is more rigorous challenge and monitoring of data and progress in the regular Project meetings which are attended by governors, local authority representatives and school leaders. Governors ensure that the statutory requirements for securing safeguarding are being met.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The general behaviour of pupils around the school and in lessons is good. This aspect of behaviour has improved. Parents are particularly pleased. Pupils also recognise that few lessons are now disrupted by silly behaviour and there is less fidgeting in the lower school where this had been endemic in the past, especially in lessons taken by supply teachers. Records provided by the school show a marked reduction over the last year in the number of behaviour incidents recorded.
- Recent stability in staffing has made a difference and pupils have become familiar with rules and routines which are being applied more consistently across the school.
- Learning behaviour, however, still requires improvement. A dependency culture is still proving difficult to shift. Too many pupils are still too reliant on adults to provide answers, solutions and make corrections. This attitude still persists in far too many lessons and prevents pupils from learning and developing a clear understanding of basic concepts; for example in mathematics, where pupils were observed making basic errors in problem solving because they did not clearly understand the underlying process and misconceptions were not being corrected quickly enough.
- Pupils respect and are kind to each other. They identified that, although bullying and name-calling exists, it is much reduced and any incidents are quickly dealt with by adults.
- A good level of care is taken to support the small number of pupils with challenging behaviour or facing particular difficulties outside school. Outbursts are dealt with sensitively with minimum disruption to lessons or other activities around the school.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. The school closely monitors those pupils who may be at risk and liaison with child agencies and the police are regular and robust. As a result, pupils feel cared for and safe. They are aware of how to deal with the dangers they face in their lives, including those connected to the internet and cyber-bullying.
- The school has worked very hard to improve attendance which is now broadly in line with the national average. Persistent absenteeism has also been reduced. The school continues to persevere in its work with parents and their children to develop good attendance habits.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although the amount of inadequate teaching has been mainly eradicated, the quality of teaching is still inconsistent across the school and therefore requires improvement.
- Teaching and related outcomes for pupils are frequently better in mathematics and English lessons where teachers have received regular training, are clear about outcomes and are more confident in how to teach the subject content.
- Across the other subjects of the curriculum, teaching is often weaker because teachers lack the basic subject knowledge to teach all of these subjects well. Teachers' confidence to teach subjects like history,

science or design and technology remains fragile.

- Teacher expectations of what pupils can achieve are not always high enough. The work set by staff does not always ensure that enough pupils, especially the most able, achieve as well as they should. This is especially noticeable in subjects other than English and mathematics where the same task is often set for all the pupils in the class. On the positive side the over-reliance on worksheets has been much reduced.
- Lessons are planned well, but at times a rigid adherence to the planned activities by some teachers does not fully allow them to adapt to fully meet the needs of pupils as the lesson develops.
- Where learning is good, pupils make progress because teachers clearly model what is expected and pupils are secure and understand what they are doing. However, at times teachers do not make best use of the opportunities to question pupils fully. Questioning can at times be functional rather than probing. Teachers do not always ask those extra questions which confirm that pupils are secure in what they are doing.
- The teaching of reading and phonics has improved. Reading now has a much higher profile around the school and pupils enjoy reading. Sessions are well organised and pupils have become familiar with routines. Pupils are now reading regularly and books are changed frequently. Regular spelling sessions and tests have been introduced and these are beginning to have an impact in raising standards.
- The quality of marking has improved and is embedded in English and mathematics but still tends to be cursory in other subjects. Pupils commented positively about the comments they received and that these help them to improve their work. They also enjoyed the opportunity to respond.
- The majority of teaching assistants are more secure in working with small groups or with individual pupils on focused intervention. Investment in an extensive programme of training has helped. However, their ability to work in classrooms is more limited. They do not always challenge pupils enough. There was also a tendency to guide the pupils they were working with to the correct answer or response rather than encourage them to think and work it out for themselves.
- The learning environment in classrooms and around the school is much improved. Displays are colourful, informative, support learning and are changed regularly. However, the outside environment is in need of improvement. There are few organised activities or resources which pupils can use at break times and lunchtimes to enjoy and provide additional learning opportunities.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Although results have improved, with those in Year 6 this year being the best there have been for some time, the pattern across the school remains patchy. There is still a legacy of underachievement over a number of years with many pupils' learning having been hampered in the past by poor teaching and frequent changes of teacher.
- Pupils' abilities to read and spell using the sounds that letters make (phonics) at Year 1 remain below those levels expected for their ages, although improved teaching is now beginning to have an impact.
- At Year 2, standards remain below national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics but the rate of progress is improving and is beginning slowly to close this gap.
- Year 6 has been a success story this last year with standards improving significantly, especially in reading and mathematics, and these are now slightly above the national average. Pupils have also improved in writing, but this is still an area in need of further development as it remains below the national average.
- Boys, in particular, struggle with their writing right across the school and the most able pupils do not always attain as well as they should.
- Funding to support disadvantaged pupils has had a mixed impact across the school due to the turbulence experienced by many classes in recent years. In those classes where pupils have made good progress, such as Year 6, there has been a heavy dependence on an intensive intervention programme which has had to be initiated to make up for the legacy of poor teaching previously. Inconsistencies are still apparent across the school.
- In 2014, in Year 6, the in-school and national gap in reading and mathematics between disadvantaged pupils and their peers was negligible. In writing this gap was wider and they remained approximately two terms behind non-disadvantaged pupils both in the school and nationally. However, overall progress was good, although less marked in their writing. Across the school this gap is more noticeable, especially across Key Stage 1.
- The progress made by disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs follows a similar pattern, with at least good progress being made across Key Stage 2 and weaker progress lower down the school.
- A legacy of inaccurate assessment has complicated the process of assessing the progress that pupils have

made. In the past, assessments have been inflated, especially on entry into the school. A great deal of work has gone into ensuring that current assessments are more accurate.

- Teaching is getting better and improved monitoring is enabling earlier identification of need. Faster progress is beginning to be made by more pupils who are being helped to overcome previous underachievement, although inconsistencies still remain across classes. Currently, the progress pupils make in subjects other than English and mathematics is weaker because of less secure teaching in these subjects.

The early years provision

requires improvement

- Children enter the Nursery and Reception classes with skills which are often below and sometimes significantly below those typical for their age.
- Staffing issues have severely affected the Early Years Foundation Stage unit in the past. As a result, until recently, the progress made by these children has been poor. Now that staffing is settled, new resources have been purchased and reorganisation has taken place progress is accelerating. The impact of this improved provision has not yet had time to impact sufficiently on outcomes. Currently, many of those pupils who have entered Year 1 this year remain ill-prepared for formal learning, especially in their ability to write.
- The new lead teacher in the early years took up her post in September 2014 and has already begun to make an impact building on the work started by her predecessor over the summer term. She is well aware of the current shortcomings and has a range of strategies to address these. This includes the need to provide further training for support staff to give them greater confidence to enable them to work with the children more effectively.
- The reorganisation of the early years in the summer term has improved the quality of the inside environment and the resources available. This has resulted in the children engaging more in their learning. The atmosphere is now more purposeful than previously. Personal development has been enhanced. Children were observed working collaboratively on a range of tasks. Many were mark making, some were even shaping letters and beginning to form identifiable words.
- Outdoor provision is not being fully utilised and the current layout is not conducive to learning. Few resources are available to stimulate writing or the use of number and the sensory area is unwelcoming. Children do get regular opportunities to develop their physical skills through den building and water and sand play. Clear routines are being established from the outset.
- Systems to assess and monitor how well children are improving their skills have not been accurate in the past. New systems are in their infancy and are more robust but staff require further training to ensure that they are able to monitor children with greater accuracy.

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	104640
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	441685

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	158
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Janette Cook-Hannah
Headteacher	Carroll Hamilton
Date of previous school inspection	6 February 2013
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