

St Mary Magdalen's Catholic Primary School

Buller Avenue, Penwortham, Preston, Lancashire, PR1 9QQ

Inspection dates 7–8 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher is supported well by other leaders and provides strong leadership. She is ambitious for the school and its pupils and knows what still needs to improve to return the school to its previously outstanding performance.
- Leaders, managers and governors have taken appropriate action to make sure that, although the rate of pupils' progress has slowed in recent years, teaching and achievement are now improving rapidly.
- Pupils enjoy coming to this happy and caring school. They feel safe and well looked after, and know that they are valued as individuals. Parents appreciate the support that both they and their children receive.
- Children get off to a good start in the Reception class. They are eager and inquisitive as they explore the well planned activities, both indoors and in the outdoor environment.
- Pupils continue to achieve well as they move through school. They usually reach standards at the end of both Key Stages 1 and 2 which are above average, and often significantly so, in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teachers have good relationships with pupils. They plan pupils' work carefully so that it builds on what they already know and can do, so it is matched well to their different abilities.
- Teaching assistants play a valuable role in helping pupils who need additional support to make good progress.
- Pupils behave well. They are friendly and welcoming and are clearly proud of their school. They work hard and show high levels of care and respect for one another. Their attendance is consistently high.
- Governors involve themselves effectively in the life of the school and therefore know it well. They provide good support and challenge to senior leaders. The school is therefore well placed to improve further.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers' marking does not always show pupils how to make their work better, nor do pupils always respond to, and act on, advice given.
- When leaders set teachers' performance targets, these are not linked precisely to improving pupils' achievement.
- Pupils do not make such good progress in mathematics as they do in reading and writing. They do not all develop a secure enough understanding of number and mathematical vocabulary, to enable them to apply their skills in solving problems.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all classes, including one observation carried out jointly with the headteacher. They observed the teaching of early reading skills and listened to pupils reading. They observed teaching in small support groups. They looked at examples of pupils' work to gain a view of teaching over time.
- Inspectors held meetings with pupils, staff, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke to a group of parents before school. They took account of 63 responses to the Ofsted on-line questionnaire (Parent View), and 18 responses to inspection questionnaires returned by staff.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including the school's most recent data on pupils' attainment and progress across the school, the school's own view of its effectiveness and its plans for improvement, and information relating to checks on the quality of teaching.
- Inspectors looked at arrangements for safeguarding pupils and at records relating to behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Christine Potter, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Melvyn Hemmings

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, who are those eligible for the pupil premium, is well below average. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The Reception class provides full-time early years provision.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school has been through a period of instability since the previous inspection. There have been a number of staff changes, including the appointment of a new headteacher in September 2011, after a year during which the school was led by a part time associate headteacher. At the time of the inspection, the deputy headteacher was on maternity leave.
- The school provides a breakfast and after-school club, which is managed by the governing body and was also inspected.
- The school is a strategic partner in the newly formed Lostock Hall Teaching Alliance. The headteacher coordinates professional development for other schools within the WRIST (West Ribble In-Service Training) cluster group of 18 local primary schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the already good teaching, in order to raise achievement further, particularly in mathematics, by:
 - improving marking so that it consistently shows pupils how to make their work better, and ensuring pupils respond to, and act on, this advice
 - ensuring that pupils develop a secure understanding of number and mathematical vocabulary from an early stage, so that they are more able to apply their skills to solving problems
 - making sure that when leaders set teachers' performance targets, these are precisely linked to improving pupils' achievement.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is unwavering in her determination to improve pupils' achievement and to prepare pupils well for the future. She receives strong support from other senior leaders. Although there has been a period of change, during which the rate of pupils' progress slowed, this issue has now been tackled decisively. Leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and what still needs to be done to sustain and develop ongoing improvements. Inspection questionnaires returned by staff indicate that morale is high and that staff share the headteacher's commitment to doing the best for all pupils in their care.
- The local authority is now providing more effective support for this school, which is contributing to the rapid improvements. This has included additional support to improve weaker teaching and specific training for governors to help them understand and question the school's performance data.
- Good systems are in place to check on all aspects of teaching and learning. Middle leaders are playing an increasingly effective role in this. The school has worked hard to ensure that teachers are accurate in their assessment of pupils' attainment. Leaders at all levels provide good support to help other staff improve what they do, including providing opportunities for them to take part in relevant training. However, when leaders set teachers' performance targets, these are not linked precisely to improving pupils' achievement and so teachers are not always clear about exactly what they are aiming for.
- Leaders make sure that the pupil premium is spent on supporting the small number of eligible pupils, enabling them to make progress that is at least as good as other pupils, and ensuring that they are able to join in all aspects of school life. This demonstrates the inclusive values of the school, its commitment to equality of opportunity and the effective steps it takes to tackle discrimination.
- The curriculum is lively and interesting, with a clear focus on developing pupils' basic skills. There are good opportunities for pupils to learn about, and reflect on, their feelings and the world about them, through themes as diverse as space exploration, remembrance and the history of the local area. Pupils talked animatedly about clubs such as Zumba dancing and textiles, and how they learn to play the ukulele. The curriculum therefore contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and to their preparation for life in modern Britain.
- The school makes good use of the primary school sports funding. There is now a broader range of sports on offer to pupils, including very popular lunchtime activities. These have helped to increase pupils' fitness, as well as contributing to their readiness to learn in afternoon lessons. The school is proud that the tag rugby team have just won the school's first trophy 'for years'. Teachers are very positive about the opportunity to work alongside experienced sports coaches in order to improve their own teaching skills in physical education.
- The vast majority of parents are extremely positive in their views about the school, which they say is 'very supportive and friendly' and 'very approachable'. They enjoy being given the opportunity to work alongside their children in class, and to attend workshops in mathematics and phonics which help them to support their children's learning.
- The breakfast and after school clubs are led and managed well and provide a safe and caring environment for pupils. Pupils enjoy attending because the varied activities are planned well to interest pupils and meet their learning and social needs.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is effective. Governors, including the several new members of the governing body, have been keen to improve their skills and understanding of the school in the time since the previous inspection. They are regular visitors to the school and follow closely the progress of pupils in their allocated classes. They make sure that they are kept well informed about all aspects of the school through detailed reports from the headteacher and subject leaders. They have a clear understanding of how good teaching is, and of the school's performance data. While they offer strong support to senior leaders, including the appointment of a 'well-being' governor, they are not afraid to ask challenging questions if they believe pupils are not doing well enough.
 - Governors have a sound grasp of school finances and make sure that resources are used wisely. They ensure that teachers on higher pay scales make a good contribution to the school and that only those teachers who have met their performance management targets receive pay increases. Governors are keenly aware of their statutory responsibilities to make sure that pupils are kept safe, and they ensure that safeguarding requirements are met fully.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are friendly and polite as they move around the school. Inspectors were greeted cheerily wherever they went. Pupils of different ages and backgrounds usually get on well together and they clearly care about and respect one another. They are happy to share ideas as they work together and know that these will be valued. Pupils do say, however, that just occasionally they get cross with each other when they are playing and that this sometimes results in falling out and name calling. However, they also say that everything gets sorted out 'in no time' and that they are 'friends again straightaway'.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to their learning and want to do well. They enjoy their lessons and are very keen to talk about what they are doing and how they are doing it. They work hard and take pride in the way that they present their work. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in their consistently high attendance.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to take on extra responsibilities around school. They delight in helping out, and Year 6 pupils particularly relish the opportunity to be 'buddies' for children in the Reception class. They get to know them through talking to these young children and reading stories to them during the summer term before they start school. These Year 6 pupils continue to 'look out for them' during the year.
- Pupils themselves say that behaviour in school is usually good, and they clearly understand the systems in place to help them to manage their own behaviour. Most parents agree that behaviour is good and say that any misbehaviour is 'nipped in the bud'.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils say that they feel absolutely safe in school, and almost all parents agree that the school keeps their children safe. Pupils know that, if they have any worries at all, they can always talk to an adult. As one pupil said 'It's unbelievable the support you get – there's always someone to help you.' Pupils who may be experiencing particular difficulties are provided with identified 'key workers' on the staff, who they can turn to at any time.
- Incidents of bullying are rare and are dealt with promptly and effectively. Pupils are well aware of the different forms that bullying can take, and, for example, know what steps to take to prevent and deal with cyber-bullying.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe in different situations, such as near roads and railways. They say that they appreciate the regular reminders that they receive about this, which 'shows that they don't just care about us when we're in school - they care about us outside school too.'

The quality of teaching is good

- Progress in pupils' books and the school's assessment information for all year groups indicate that the quality of teaching over time is good.
- The encouragement that pupils receive means that they enjoy learning and are keen to do well. Expectations of what they can achieve in their work are generally high and pupils are helped to believe in themselves. Clear explanations mean that pupils know what they are expected to learn. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their learning and assess their understanding.
- Teachers' marking, however, does not consistently show pupils exactly how to make their work better. Pupils do not have regular opportunities to respond to, and act on, advice given, in order to further extend their learning and progress.
- Planning is thorough and work is usually well matched to what pupils already know and can do, and to their different abilities. For example, some pupils in Year 6 mix paints to reinforce their understanding of ratio in a very practical way, while others are challenged to apply their understanding as they compare lemonade mixes of different strengths and calculate ingredients to make pumpkin pie.
- Activities are chosen to interest pupils and to make their learning relevant to their everyday lives. For example, pupils in Year 5 are able to see why they need to understand how to manipulate negative

numbers as they watch a film clip of a diver.

- Pupils' understanding is usually checked closely and pupils are able to develop and explain their ideas. Pupils in Year 1, for example, have time to discuss their ideas, make sensible predictions and choose appropriate adjectives in order to write interesting stories. In mathematics, however, checks on pupils' understanding are not always sufficiently rigorous to ensure that they all develop a secure understanding of number and mathematical vocabulary from an early stage.
- Reading is taught well throughout the school. Pupils have many good opportunities to read and think about texts written in a range of different styles and by different authors. They are encouraged successfully to use what they read to improve their own writing skills.
- Teaching assistants work closely with teachers and provide a range of valuable support for pupils of different abilities, both in lessons and in small support groups. They show a good understanding of different pupils' needs and how to help them make good progress in specific aspects of their learning.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils build on the good start that they make in the Reception class and continue to make good progress throughout the school. Standards at the end of both Key Stages 1 and 2 are consistently above average, and often significantly above average, in reading, writing and mathematics. Most pupils reach at least the level expected for their age by the time they leave the school in Year 6.
- Pupils across the school do not make such good progress in mathematics as they do in reading and writing. School leaders have recognised this and have taken appropriate action. There has been a whole-school focus on learning times tables and new software has been introduced for pupils to use both in school and at home. Progress is therefore now improving. However, because pupils do not all develop a secure enough understanding of number and mathematical vocabulary at an early stage, they are not always able to apply their skills to solving problems.
- The most able pupils make good progress and achieve high standards at the end of both Key Stages 1 and 2. They enjoy the extra challenges which they are given. An above-average proportion of pupils reached the highest Level 6 in writing and mathematics in 2014.
- Pupils across the school develop a love of reading from an early age. Phonics (letters and the sounds they make) are taught successfully, through a range of games and activities, such as 'phonics aerobics', which the pupils thoroughly enjoy. Standards in early reading skills have improved rapidly over the past three years, and almost all pupils reached the expected standard in the Year 1 phonic screening check in 2014.
- Pupils have a wide range of opportunities to develop their writing and communication skills in other subjects, such as when they analyse and record what they have found out in scientific investigations. This makes a strong contribution to their good progress in these subjects.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make progress which is similar to, and sometimes better than, their classmates, from their individual starting points. This is because staff know individual pupils well and keep a close eye on how well each pupil is doing. They quickly provide extra help where needed, either in the classroom, or in support groups, which focus clearly on the particular needs of different pupils.
- The school's data show that disadvantaged pupils make progress which is at least as good as that of other pupils in the school. There are too few disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 each year to make any comparison between their attainment and progress and that of other pupils nationally, and also their attainment compared to other pupils in school, statistically reliable.

The early years provision

is good

- Most children start school with skills and understanding that are broadly typical for their age, although this varies from year to year. There is an increasing proportion of children whose skills in language and communication are below those typical, and activities are specifically planned to help these children develop their speaking and listening skills.
- Most of those who are behind at the start soon catch up. All children, whatever their starting points, go on to make good progress in the early years, because the quality of teaching is good. The proportion of children who reach a good level of development at the end of Reception Year is above average. Children become particularly proficient in their use and understanding of technology because of regular

opportunities to use computers and laptops. They are well prepared for Year 1.

- There is good leadership in the early years. Staff are encouraged to attend training to develop their skills and knowledge of the early years. They work together as a strong and effective team, and all contribute well to children's ongoing assessment and planning to meet individual needs. They are always looking for ways to improve what they do.
- Children settle quickly and soon become used to routines, such as taking their name labels to the areas where they want to work. They are confident and enthusiastic as they explore the exciting activities on offer, many of which they help to plan. Activities often combine the development of skills in different areas of learning. For example, a role play area based on a recent popular children's film gives children the chance to talk about differences between clothes for warm and cold weather, and to use coins in order to buy them – as well as giving them the opportunity to play the role of a very grumpy shopkeeper!
- Good use is made of the wider outdoor environment adjacent to the school to extend children's experiences of learning outdoors. Children look eagerly for berries which birds could feed on in the winter (and say how important it is that they must not eat them), as well as making their own bird feeders. They excitedly showed the inspector the 'bug hotel' they had made, as well as the quiet area within the garden where they enjoy stories and prayers.
- Children's good behaviour and attitudes show that they feel safe and secure. Staff supervise and care for them well. Children talk knowledgeably about how to stay safe in different parts of the school, and daily sessions with their key workers give them the opportunity to discuss their feelings in a safe environment.
- Parents are involved well in their children's learning. They have many opportunities to discuss how well their children are doing, and to attend 'stay and play' sessions which help them understand how children learn in the early years. They contribute their own observations to children's assessments.

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	119638
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	453365

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	205
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gerald Collins
Headteacher	Diane Gallagher
Date of previous school inspection	1 April 2009
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