

St Mark's Catholic Primary School

Fir Avenue, Halewood, Liverpool, Merseyside, L26 0XR

Inspection dates 20–21 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- St Mark's is a happy school where pupils' achievement improves because of leaders' determination to make a difference and because of committed and effective teaching.
- All the children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They make good progress because of good teaching and care for their personal development.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs is good because of effective teaching and good quality support.
- At Key Stage 2, achievement is improving strongly because of high expectations and challenge.
- Pupils enjoy reading, writing and mathematics because learning is made interesting and enjoyable by knowledgeable and passionate staff.
- The behaviour and safety of pupils are good. Pupils are made to feel valuable and unique and treat others as they want to be treated themselves.
- Good leadership is rooted in raising pupils' standards and improving the quality of teaching. Staff want the best for pupils and their parents appreciate this.
- Leaders and governors have continued to provide the good education for pupils described at the previous inspection. The school is constantly improving.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Achievement at Key Stage 1 requires improvement. This is beginning to happen because of effective leadership and management but tracking systems are not used quickly or effectively enough to tackle any gaps in pupils' knowledge or understanding.
- Although the achievement of the most able pupils is improving, these pupils are not consistently stretched to achieve their potential because work is still sometimes too easy for them.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors and the headteacher observed a wide range of lessons over the two days of the inspection.
- Discussions were held with governors, a representative of the local authority, members of staff, parents and pupils.
- The inspectors held conversations with parents, reviewed the responses of 19 parents to the online questionnaire, Parent View and examined the findings of the school's own survey, conducted last October.
- The inspectors looked at a range of documents, including information on pupils' progress, pupils' work, records of governing body meetings, the school's own views about its effectiveness and records relating to pupils' behaviour and safety.

Inspection team

Marie Cordey, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Steven Ellis

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized primary school. A significant number of pupils have joined the school across different year groups at other than the usual times.
- The vast majority of pupils are from White British families.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are supported by Pupil Premium is well above average. (Pupil Premium is funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and for children looked after by the local authority.)
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2.
- The early years provision consists of part-time nursery classes in the morning and afternoon and a full-time Reception class. The school runs a daily breakfast club and shares its site with a playgroup. The playgroup is inspected separately and its report may be found on the Ofsted website, www.ofsted.gov.uk.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics, particularly in Key Stage 1 and for the most able pupils across the school, by:
 - improving the quality of planning to focus specifically on pupils' different starting points and levels of understanding, particularly in providing work that is challenging enough for the most able pupils
 - ensuring that guidance for improvement is followed by pupils and that any misunderstandings are identified and acted upon.
- Further improve leadership and management by:
 - monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of the curriculum to avoid unnecessary repetition of learning, especially in mathematics and reading, to ensure that pupils build on their learning and move forward in their knowledge and understanding
 - using tracking systems effectively and swiftly to identify and act on any gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher make it their business to know the individual characters of each pupil. They are well supported by middle leaders who share the ambitions for each pupil expressed by senior leaders. Good behaviour and teaching characterise the school. Leaders know their school and are clear about what is done well and precisely what is needed to make it better.
- Pupils are set challenging targets so that they are well-prepared for their future. The effective promotion of equality of opportunity is reflected in the good progress made by different groups of pupils. Leaders' clear direction for the achievement of more able pupils is having an impact, particularly in the numbers of pupils achieving at the higher levels in Year 6. However, this impact is not yet seen consistently across the school because sometimes the work set for these pupils still lacks challenge. Pupils who come in to school at other than the usual times are welcomed and helped to become part of the school.
- Staff have clear targets for their performance in order to reach the next salary level. These are centred on how well their teaching is reflected in pupils' progress. Regular and robust checks on the quality of teaching include clear guidance and support, as well as recognition of the strengths in teaching. Staff training is closely linked to the school's priorities for improvement.
- The curriculum is rich and enjoyable. A recent and further emphasis on pupils' learning in writing, reading and mathematics is beginning to improve pupils' punctuation, spelling and grammar and their mathematical understanding. Leaders recognise that this requires vigilant monitoring to avoid unnecessary repetition of learning, for example of basic sums, and to clear up any gaps in knowledge and understanding. At the same time, some pupils have not grasped the basics of reading, particularly in their comprehension skills, and this affects their ability to identify and explain what is happening in a text.
- Literacy and numeracy skills are deliberately part of what pupils learn in other subjects as well as in English and mathematics. This stresses the importance of reading, writing and mathematics in all their learning as well as in preparing them well for their future learning. Pupils are taught to use specialist vocabulary from the outset and are keen to demonstrate their knowledge of sophisticated language in lessons and to visitors. Current favourites include 'articulation' and 'evaluation'.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. Pupils pray, reflect and thoughtfully comment on the importance of equality and fairness. Leaders promote positive relationships and discrimination is not tolerated. They are taught to respect and appreciate people from different backgrounds and cultures and to value the rich and diverse culture and traditions of Britain. They have a sense of fair play and learn about democracy and British values to prepare them well for life in modern Britain.
- The school receives good support from the local authority that is testing and challenging and is helping it improve performance.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is very aware and knowledgeable about the school's effectiveness. Governors are not reticent about challenging aspects of the school's performance and closely question improvement plans and the effectiveness of teaching. Regular and rigorous training helps them to perform their roles well, especially in questioning pupils' progress and monitoring their performance. For example, the governing body suggested further evidence checks on improvement. Governors ensure that safeguarding requirements are met and that safety arrangements are in place including regular safety checks of the building, for example. Finances are managed effectively to support positive outcomes for pupils. Sports premium funding is used very well to promote pupils' physical skills as well as their knowledge and awareness of living a healthy life. Pupil premium funding is used to good effect to narrow the gaps in performance of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school. Governors take time to consider whether staff should be given salary increases, depending on how they improve pupils' achievement and their personal development.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils thrive because they know that they are valued as individuals. Pupils comment on how they make good friends in school and that they make 'friends for life'.
- Pupils become more confident and independent because they are praised and carefully taught about the school's expectations of their behaviour. Pupils are thoughtful and considerate young people. They are

aware of different types of bullying and know whom to turn to if they are worried. Incidents of poor behaviour are rare.

- Pupils enjoy learning and look forward to coming to school. They listen carefully to their teachers and work hard. Occasionally, they are less diligent when explanations are unclear or when the work set is not challenging enough.
- Pupils enter the hall for assembly in an orderly line and listen attentively. They are encouraged to think and reflect about other people as well as enjoying themselves, for example when thinking about the best ways for staff to be healthy.
- Pupils are keen to engage in conversation with people of all ages. They welcomed the chance to talk to and read to inspectors for instance and did not hold back in expressing their positive views of their school.
- Work to improve pupils' attendance has been successful in reducing absence and improving punctuality. Leaders have worked closely with families to improve their children's attendance.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say they feel safe and their parents agree. Governors, leaders and staff ensure that safety arrangements are effective.
- Training in safeguarding and pupils' safety are undertaken regularly by all staff and governors.
- Pupils are knowledgeable about how to live healthily. They are very keen on exercise and encourage their parents to make sure they are provided with healthy foods to bring in to school.
- The learning mentors play a key role in effectively improving pupils' attendance, especially those whose attendance is low.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects and plan work carefully, both to interest pupils and help them to learn quickly. Pupils gain in knowledge and are curious about learning as a result.
- Teachers make a point of making learning relevant to pupils. In mathematics, for example, pupils calculate, estimate and plan, a budget to buy something that they want. Stories that interest pupils are used to guide them to other books and to extend their knowledge, skill and love of reading. Pupils' writing skills are improving because of teaching that concentrates on linking letters and sounds and practice in handwriting.
- Work is planned to match the different abilities and needs of pupils and so groups of pupils, such as disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs, make good progress along with other pupils. Increasingly, more able pupils are challenged to achieve the higher levels and this is particularly evident in Key Stage 2. It is beginning to have an impact in Key Stage 1 although it is too early to see the full effect.
- Support staff work effectively with teachers to support and nurture pupils with special educational needs and, consequently, these pupils make good progress. Occasionally, support staff are too quick to provide answers that pupils could work out for themselves.
- Marking is helpful and detailed. Typically, most pupils act on improvement points made by their teacher. When this does not happen and marking is not used to plan future lessons, misunderstandings are not cleared up and some pupils lose ground. It can lead to repetition of work - basic sums for instance - when some pupils are ready to move on and some are not entirely sure of what exactly is required from them. Nevertheless, most pupils learn well and improve because of good quality marking.
- Pupils know how well they are doing as well as what their targets for improvement are. They are confident about their work and keen to reach the next level because they are proud of their work and enthusiastic to improve further.
- Parents also know how well their children are doing through homework, descriptions of what pupils are learning on the school's website and regular learning workshops for parents. They consider that the quality of teaching and learning in the school is good.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- From their, typically lower than average starting points, pupils make good progress so that, by the end of Year 6, they reach standards that are in line with national averages. They are well-prepared for secondary school because of their good experiences of learning and their strong personal development.

- The curriculum is well-planned to improve pupils' achievement in English and mathematics and also in subjects such as science, physical education, drama and history. Pupils' speaking ability is emphasised. As a result, they are keen conversationalists, attentive listeners and good communicators.
- Standards in Key Stage 1 have been below national averages for a number of years and pupils' punctuation, spelling and grammar have been weak. Raising standards has been a priority for school leaders and standards are now improving because of a tailored curriculum and improvements in teaching.
- Gaps in the achievement of disadvantaged pupils have narrowed and, in some cases, these pupils outperform other pupils both in the school and nationally. In 2014, by the end of Year 6, disadvantaged pupils were one term ahead of non-disadvantaged pupils in the school and all pupils nationally. In writing, they were at least two terms ahead of non-disadvantaged pupils both in school and nationally. In mathematics, their attainment was one term behind other pupils in the school but above that of all pupils nationally. The gap in attainment is narrowing in Key Stage 1. The quality of the curriculum and improved teacher planning are improving pupils' progress overall.
- Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because their needs are identified precisely and they are provided with specialist support. Pupils who join school at other than usual times make good progress because they are taught well and because their ability is carefully assessed on entry and appropriate plans to boost their performance are provided if necessary.
- An effective focus on raising standards for more able pupils has resulted in a number of pupils working at Levels 5 and 6 in their subjects in Year 6. A greater proportion of pupils in Key Stage 1 are now attaining the highest levels.

The early years provision is good

- Children's achievement is good. From starting points that are typically below those for their age, they make good progress and the proportion attaining a good level of development is now close to national figures.
- Children are keen to get to school because they know that they are going to enjoy themselves. Although attendance is not statutory because of their age, the vast majority of children come to school regularly and on time.
- Children, including those with special educational needs, make good progress because teaching and support from key workers and staff are effective and well planned. Children become more and more curious about their learning and are keen to take part in the many activities on offer both indoors and outside. Using mathematical language to identify shapes, children became 'Shape Detectives' and search the school to find and identify squares and rectangles. More able children are now being challenged to extend their knowledge and learning, for example through writing at some length for their age and completing more difficult sums.
- An emphasis on children's ability to link letters and sounds, 'phonics', is beginning to improve their reading and writing which have previously lagged behind other areas of learning. Children are able to practise their handwriting and read their favourite books as part of a variety of activities, such as storytelling and letter writing.
- The quality of teaching is good and is based on a good knowledge of how young children learn. Both teachers and support staff plan work that is designed to engage children's curiosity and develop their skills. Teachers skilfully ask questions to encourage children to think for themselves. Children take great pleasure in reading and sharing their reading with each other.
- Children's behaviour and safety are good. They focus and concentrate because they are interested and involved. High expectations of their behaviour lead to children who willingly share and 'take turns'. They concentrate and focus on their work.
- Leadership and management are good. Clear procedures and accurate assessments of children's skills support staff in preparing meaningful and interesting activities to match the skills and interests of individual children.

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	104469
Local authority	Knowsley
Inspection number	456137

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	192
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ann Farrell
Headteacher	Richard Coakley
Date of previous school inspection	2 May 2012
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