

St Monica's Catholic Primary School

Currier Drive, Neath Hill, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, MK14 6HB

Inspection dates 11–12 March 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 Monica's supportive and welcoming culture is accurately reflected in the school motto, 'Let trust, respect and love live here.'
- The headteacher and deputy have established a climate in which staff feel valued and trusted. With strong support and challenge from governors, the school leaders have been effective in improving the quality of teaching, standards and pupils' achievement. Subject leaders have played a significant role in driving improvements in their subjects.
- The local authority has provided effective and well received support to school leaders, teachers and governors.
- The school provides pupils with a broad and balanced range of subjects, enhanced by after-school activities, trips and visitors. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education and for life in modern Britain.
- Teaching is of a good quality. Teachers make learning fun and provide regular and effective written feedback to pupils. Additional support for pupils who need extra help has a positive impact on their progress and attainment.
- Pupils enjoy school and their attendance is above average. They behave well in lessons and around the school. They are polite and relationships with each other and with adults are good.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and well looked after, and parents and inspectors agree with them.
- Pupils are keen to learn and this contributes to the good progress they make in all year groups and subjects. Standards have steadily improved and are now just above the national average in mathematics and reading, and are improving in writing.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make particularly good progress. Their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is above the national average for all pupils by the end of Key Stage 2.
- The quality of early years provision is good. Children are taught well and make good progress across all areas of learning. There is good communication with parents and involvement in their children's learning.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The most-able pupils, particularly in Key Stage 1, are not always challenged enough by activities.
- Writing is improving, but standards are still below those of reading and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 2.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils in all year groups engaged in a range of activities in different subjects. Many observations took place alongside the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils in the playground at break and lunch times and to two groups of pupils. They looked at pupils' written work in all year groups, including records of the learning of children in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- The inspectors listened to pupils reading and talked to them about their reading habits.
- Meetings were held with school staff, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body. The lead inspector met with the school's local authority link adviser.
- Inspectors took account of the 33 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View, and responses to a parent questionnaire undertaken by the school. Inspectors also held informal discussions with around 20 parents at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors looked at a number of school documents including: the school's own evaluation of its performance and its improvement plan, information about pupils' progress and the support given to disadvantaged pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, evidence about the quality of teaching, minutes of the governing body, and records relating to behaviour, safeguarding and attendance.
- Inspectors also took account of the 37 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Helena McVeigh, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Lynn Lowery

Additional Inspector

Gareth O'Shea

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Monica's is larger than the average-sized primary school. There are two forms in each year group from the full-time Reception class to Year 6, along with a part-time Nursery.
- The majority of pupils are of minority ethnic origin, much larger than the national average. The largest ethnic groups are Black African (over one third of all pupils) and White British (one quarter). There are small numbers of pupils from a range of other ethnic backgrounds.
- A much-higher-than-average proportion of pupils speaks English as an additional language, although relatively few pupils are at an early stage of learning English when they join St Monica's.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium (extra government funding for disadvantaged pupils) is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is just below the national average.
- The number of pupils who join and leave the school is above average. For example, in last year's Year 6, nearly a third of pupils had joined the school after the start of Key Stage 2, including two who started in Year 6.
- The school runs a breakfast club each morning from 8.00am.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the most-able pupils, particularly in Key Stage 1, are given work that is sufficiently challenging so that they attain the highest standards and make even more rapid progress.
- Raise standards in writing so that, by the end of Key Stage 2, pupils' attainment and progress are as good as in mathematics and reading, by:
 - implementing the planned approaches to improving writing, including working with other schools in the local cluster to check their assessments of pupils' writing.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have established a welcoming school culture in which expectations of pupils' behaviour are high and teachers are keen to improve their practice. Staff and pupils feel valued. Staff work well as a team and are proud to belong to the school. They made comments such as, 'I love working as a member of a happy team and enjoy my role immensely.' 'I love being part of St Monica's family.' There was total agreement in the staff questionnaires that the school is well led and managed.
- School leaders, with strong support and challenge from governors, have focused on improving teaching and raising standards to good effect. Where teaching has been less than good, teachers have been supported and leaders have not shied away from taking difficult decisions. Staff are given good opportunities to develop their skills further with, for example, a number attending further training to enhance their skills in mathematics.
- Subject leaders have played a key and effective role, particularly in driving improvements in pupils' standards in literacy and numeracy. They have responded well to being given responsibility for tracking performance data, observing lessons and pupils' work, giving staff feedback, and planning the curriculum. The school has made a good start at assessing pupils' attainment under the new National Curriculum arrangements. Subject leaders are all given access to a good range of training opportunities.
- School leaders and governors are aware of what needs to improve and their self-evaluation is accurate. They are taking action to ensure pupils have equal opportunities in all subjects. A range of strategies has been introduced to promote improvement in writing. For example, a new approach to reading and writing across the school is already starting to have a positive impact on standards. St Monica's teachers compare their assessments of pupils' writing to ensure consistency across the school. However, they have not yet checked their assessments with those of teachers in other schools. Senior leaders, with support from the local authority, have arranged to meet with other schools to compare assessments later this year.
- The school's ethos embodies the principle of equality of opportunity, promoting respect and tolerance, and tackling discrimination. The school has, for example, had assemblies on anti-racism, including one in which a Black footballer came to speak to pupils. Each pupil is valued as an individual and staff look after their particular personal and academic needs well. The school has a nurture room where pupils receive one-to-one support, if needed, for their behaviour and emotional needs. A range of additional strategies is organised to help each pupil succeed. As a result, pupils grow in confidence and make good progress.
- School leaders ensure that pupils are kept safe and secure, and parents are very happy with this. They say that their children feel safe. All safeguarding requirements are met.
- School leaders use the pupil premium funds well and the gap between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and others in the school and nationally has been reduced. The funds have been used in a range of ways, including for individual and small group tuition, breakfast club, trips, after-school clubs, and transport to and from school to improve attendance. Leaders and governors have identified strategies in the school improvement plan to close the gap further.
- Sport premium funds are also used effectively. Leaders have hired qualified sports coaches and specialist teachers to work with pupils. Teachers observe and take part in these sessions so they can develop their skills. Year 2 pupils and their teachers and teaching assistants took part with enthusiasm and skill in a dance lesson led by a professional dancer. In addition, sports coaches teach some physical education lessons and school clubs. All Year 3 pupils receive free swimming lessons. As a result of these initiatives, more pupils participate in sports activities and most pupils can swim at least 25 metres by the time they leave St Monica's.
- Pupils benefit from a broad range of subjects, with an appropriate emphasis on literacy and numeracy. They enjoy the topic work and the good range of pre-school, lunchtime and after-school clubs. They enjoy the 'warm-up' sessions at the beginning of the morning and after lunch where they spend a few minutes exercising to 'warm up their brains' as some pupils described it. Teachers and pupils make good use of information technology to enhance learning, from the early years upwards. Pupils are confident in their use of technology.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. The spiritual and moral aspects are particularly well developed through assemblies, the whole school values and through subjects such as religious education and personal, social and health education. Pupils' social development is promoted well through opportunities, for example, to take responsibility. Pupils relish such opportunities, for example as librarians or holding doors open or ensuring that their peers walk into school sensibly and smartly. Pupils are developing an understanding of British values such as democracy through, for example, their own voting systems for the school council and house captains. They demonstrate tolerance and

respect for those of different faiths and cultures. They are well prepared for moving on to secondary school by the values and attitudes to learning that they have acquired at St Monica's.

- The local authority has provided effective and well-received support for school leaders, subject coordinators and governors. Although the school has been considered as light touch by the authority, it has provided useful support. For example, the new early years leader has been given effective on-site training by a local authority adviser. The support for the teaching of mathematics was described by teachers as 'brilliant'. The authority has also facilitated collaboration with other local schools, for example, in comparing assessments of pupils' work, through a group called ASPIRE. They have also provided valuable support for the school's work with pupils who are at an early stage of learning English.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is effective. Governors have a good grasp of pupils' performance data and have used this to challenge school leaders, for example, about standards in writing. They provide a good balance of support and challenge to school leaders. Some are also regular visitors to the school and meet with teachers and pupils to increase their own knowledge of the school.
 - Governors know about the quality of teaching in the school and how leaders have tackled underperformance. They oversee arrangements for teachers' target setting and reviews, and ensure that progression up the pay scales is linked to successful attainment of targets and good quality teaching.
 - Governors carry out their statutory responsibilities and oversee finances well. They ensure that pupil premium and sport funds are used to best effect and are having a positive impact on pupils' achievements.
 - Governors have a clear vision for the school's continued improvement and plan for succession. They have confidence in the leadership and appreciate the support that they have received from the local authority.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are polite and respectful towards each other and adults.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to school. They say it is fun. They are keen to learn and this contributes to the good progress that they make. They tackle activities with interest and enthusiasm. They take pride in their work, and presentation in their books is neat.
- Pupils relate well to each other, showing care and concern. They listen to each other respectfully. Pupils of all ethnic origins play and work together well.
- There have been very few incidents of poor behaviour over the years and exclusions are rarely made. Exceptions have been where pupils' behaviour has been very challenging and linked to a statement of special educational needs. Most pupils spoken to said that behaviour is good. The majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire agree that the school promotes good behaviour. Sometimes a few pupils lose focus and concentration when not fully engaged with their learning, but they pay attention once given a task to undertake for themselves.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils feel safe in school and parents agreed that their children feel safe, in discussion with inspectors and their response to the Parent View questionnaire. Pupils are well supervised around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes.
- Pupils are taught about different forms of bullying, including e-safety. They say that bullying is rare and they know who to turn to if they have concerns.
- From the early years, pupils are provided with a place called the nurture room where they can go to get help with personal and emotional, as well as academic, problems.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is consistently good throughout the school. Teachers and teaching assistants plan carefully to meet pupils' different abilities. Good use is made of assessment data to identify pupils who need additional help. They are given extra support in both literacy and mathematics to help them catch up.
- Relationships are good and teachers make learning fun for pupils. They encourage pupils to answer questions in full and to explain their reasoning in mathematics. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and encourage pupils to use correct terminology.
- Teachers provide pupils with regular and clear written feedback, including showing pupils how to improve or by challenging them further. Teachers follow the school's marking policy consistently and pupils understand it and say it helps them to improve.
- Phonics (the sounds that letters make) is taught well and pupils use their knowledge of letters and sounds to read unfamiliar words. Reception children take delight in sounding out words such as 'mother' when preparing their Mothers' Day cards. Pupils enjoy reading and make good use of the library. They are given ample opportunities to write in Key Stages 1 and 2. Teachers make their expectations of writing skills explicit when giving feedback, so that pupils know how to improve further.
- Mathematics is taught well throughout the school. The school has employed a mathematics specialist teacher to work with the most-able Years 5 and 6 pupils. This is effective and pupils' love of mathematics and desire to solve difficult problems are evident.
- The school provides opportunities for the most-able Key Stage 2 pupils to attend after-school science lessons in the local secondary school. Writing groups for the highest attaining pupils have also just been introduced, but it is too early to see the impact on their writing.
- Sometimes the most-able pupils, particularly in Key Stage 1, are not stretched enough in lessons and have to wait too long before getting on to the challenging work. This slows down their progress.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language receive well-tailored and effective support from the early years onwards.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are supported well. The school liaises effectively with outside agencies and school staff are well trained and highly skilled in how to support these learners. As a result, these pupils are making good progress.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils join St Monica's with knowledge and skills that are broadly typical for their age, although some are at an early stage of learning English. They make good progress in all years from their different starting points. Attainment at the end of the early years and Key Stages 1 and 2 has risen steadily in recent years.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make very good progress and outperform their peers in the school and all pupils nationally. Pupils of Black African origin also achieve very well throughout the school. White British pupils, particularly boys, have made less progress than other groups in the past. School leaders are tackling this through small-group work and employing topics that appeal to boys, which are starting to have a positive impact on their engagement and progress.
- Results in the Year 1 phonic screening check have risen steadily and were close to the national average in 2014. By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' attainment has also risen and was above average in reading, writing and mathematics in 2014. Work in books, teachers' records and predictions for 2015 indicate further improvements.
- Results at the end of Key Stage 2 have also risen in recent years, although they were adversely affected last year by the high proportion of pupils with special educational needs whose attainment was lower than their peers. In addition, several pupils joined the school after the start of Key Stage 2, including in Year 6. Despite this, the proportions of pupils that reached the expected level in mathematics, reading, spelling, grammar and punctuation were above average. The proportions reaching above expected standards were close to average in these subjects and in writing.
- Key Stage 2 pupils' progress and attainment in writing have been less strong than in reading and mathematics. School leaders have tackled this rigorously and are having a positive impact. Work seen in pupils' books, teachers' records and predictions for 2015 indicate a rise in standards and progress in writing.
- The most-able pupils attain high standards by the end of Key Stage 2. The proportions attaining above-expected Levels 5 and 6 in reading, writing and mathematics have been close to the national averages over the past few years. Although standards have risen in Key Stage 1, the proportion of pupils who attain the above-expected level is just below average in reading, writing and mathematics.

- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress. Their individual needs are planned for carefully and they benefit from the well-targeted support that they receive.
- The gap has been closing in recent years between the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils and others in school and nationally. In 2014, disadvantaged pupils were around two and a half terms behind their classmates in reading and writing and three and a half terms behind in mathematics. The gaps with other pupils nationally were slightly higher for writing and mathematics in 2014.

The early years provision

is good

- Children make good progress from their starting points in all areas of learning. By the end of the Reception Year, the proportion of children who have reached a good level of development is now above average. Children are well prepared for Year 1. There is good cooperation between staff in the early years and Year 1.
- The school involves parents well in their children's learning. Home visits are made before children start school. Parents are invited to 'stay and play' with their children, and information is sent home every week. Early years staff make themselves available to talk to parents each day.
- The early years is well led and managed. Staff ensure that children are kept safe and all statutory requirements are met. Children are taught to carry equipment and use scissors safely. Children's individual needs are catered for sensitively and effectively.
- Teaching is good in the early years. Adults keep a close track of how well children are learning. They provide a range of activities that promotes children's progress in all the areas of learning inside and outside. Children have access to computers that help with their literacy and numeracy skills. Adults interact well to help pupils progress further by, for example, talking about addition and subtraction.
- Children are introduced to phonics and writing words and sentences in the Reception classes. Children respond well and make good progress. They enjoy sounding out words and 'reading' books.
- Children make good progress in their personal development. Their social skills are well developed. They are kind to each other and cooperate well, for example, when playing in the garden outside or lining up to walk down a plank. They respond well to adults' instructions and behave well.

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	110482
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	448400

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	461
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dominic Kingsman
Headteacher	Peter Kennedy
Date of previous school inspection	12–13 May 2010
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