

St Clare's Catholic Primary School

Cloes Lane, Clacton-on-Sea, CO16 8AG

Inspection dates 3–4 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	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 Clare's is a rapidly improving school. In partnership with their sponsors, leaders have taken decisive action to improve teaching. As a result, standards are rising quickly and progress is accelerating.
- Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has been in line with national averages since the academy opened. From their starting points, this means the large majority of pupils make good progress.
- Children in the Reception classes make good progress so they are well prepared for learning in Key Stage 1.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, disadvantaged pupils and those who speak English as an additional language do well because support for them is well planned and effective.
- The school keeps pupils safe. Pupils say they feel safe and well looked after. The vast majority of parents agree that the school is a safe and cohesive community.
- Teaching is often exciting and stimulating and responds to the good training teachers receive. It is consistently good. Teachers have strong relationships with the pupils.
- Behaviour is good and pupils have very positive attitudes towards learning. This has a strong impact on the progress they make.
- The school fosters a climate where respect is given to all, regardless of faith or background. This helps to strongly promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development so that they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The sponsors manage the school well. Governors have acted on external advice to reorganise their responsibilities. They are extremely well led. As a result they hold school leaders fully to account.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Girls in general and the most-able pupils have not made as much progress in mathematics as their peers.
- In mathematics, tasks are sometimes too easy or too hard for the pupils. When this happens, progress slows.
- Teachers' marking and feedback are not always clear and this limits the improvement that pupils can make. This is particularly the case in mathematics.
- Adults do not make the most of the outdoor area to help children in the Reception classes to practise their number skills.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited most classes. Five observations were shared with senior leaders. Inspectors also made a number of other short visits to classrooms.
- Inspectors heard pupils read, and looked at pupils' writing and mathematics work from each year group, much of this with subject leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including the school improvement plan and records on behaviour, safety and attendance. They also looked at information on individual pupils' progress and anonymised records of teachers' performance, and records of meetings held by the governing body.
- Inspectors met with pupils, interviewed a sample of staff, and spoke to parents. They also spoke to members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- The views of parents were obtained through the school's surveys and the 45 responses to the online Parent View survey. Written comments on the Ofsted questionnaire from 28 members of staff were also considered.

Inspection team

Brian Netto, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Claire Whittington	Additional Inspector
Lynn Lowery	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Clare's became an academy on 1 September 2013, sponsored by St Thomas More's Catholic Primary School in Colchester, a teaching school which supports six other schools.
- The executive headteacher is a national leader of education.
- St Clare's is an average-sized primary school.
- Children in the Reception classes attend full time. Some pupils are taught in mixed-age classes. At the time of the inspection Year 6 pupils were away from school on a residential trip.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is average. Few of these speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils looked after by the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is average.
- The school provides a breakfast club managed by the governing body.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- On becoming an academy there were changes in staffing and some staff were employed on a temporary basis.
- The school appointed an executive headteacher in September 2014 who also has this role in its sponsor school. In addition, in September 2014 a head of school was appointed, alongside a head of teaching and learning, and a special educational needs coordinator. Two teachers were seconded from St Thomas More's at the same time, and one remains on the staff.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching in mathematics across the school, in order to ensure that the progress made by girls, and the most able pupils, accelerates, by:
 - planning activities which help pupils develop mathematical reasoning when they are trying to solve problems, so they can deepen their understanding
 - making sure that activities are not too hard or too easy for pupils to complete
 - giving children in the early years more opportunities to use and apply their skills with numbers, especially in the outdoor area
 - ensuring that marking and feedback consistently helps pupils to correct and improve their work.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders, including governors, have taken decisive action to successfully tackle weaknesses in teaching. Inspired by the strong leadership of the executive headteacher and the head of school, there have been significant improvements in teaching. The school is now fully staffed and no longer has to employ long-term supply teachers. Leaders have raised aspirations for the school community, so teaching is consistently good and standards are rising. As a result this is a rapidly improving school.
- Leaders set high expectations for learning and behaviour. This fosters a positive culture for learning and respect for the needs of all the pupils. Relationships are strong, and pupils respond well to awards which reflect their care and respect for others, for example, the 'good citizen' award presented by the diocese.
- Teachers with additional responsibilities play a good role. They are involved in regular checks on teaching and on pupils' work. They offer training to their colleagues. There is a strong focus on professional development for all teachers including those new to the profession. This is helping to make good teaching more consistent across the school.
- Leaders, including those responsible for subjects, make effective use of a wide range of information about the school's performance. This gives them an accurate view of the school and helps them identify the correct priorities for further improvement. Plans for improving the school have specific targets which are regularly reviewed.
- Teachers plan topics together so that pupils experience a broad and balanced curriculum. There are many opportunities for pupils to learn outside the classroom. Older pupils for example are taken on residential trips, and have visited their sponsor school which is located in a more multi-faith, urban environment. These experiences strongly promote the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Regular celebrations of Christian and other festivals help pupils to appreciate the values shared by the wider community. Pupils learn about the importance of democracy and the rule of law, and the importance of showing respect to people with different faiths or values. This prepares them well for life in modern Britain.
- The school tracks the progress of the pupils carefully so that any pupil who falls behind is quickly identified and supported. Teachers are held to account at regular intervals when they meet senior leaders to discuss the progress made by pupils in their class. Pay awards reflect higher rates of pupil progress. Support is provided to teachers when necessary and staff appreciate the help they are given. Staff morale is high as a result, as one teacher commented, 'St Clare's is a very happy, friendly, healthy school where all children learn. I am proud to be part of a fantastic team of hard working staff'.
- The pupil premium is used effectively to support the academic and personal development of disadvantaged pupils. One-to-one support, additional teaching assistants, and subsidising trips all contribute to their overall achievement. As a result, their progress is accelerating.
- The school spends much of the primary physical education and sports premium on specialist teachers who help pupils experience a wider range of sports. More pupils now take part in competitive sports, including hockey, netball and football. Teachers feel more confident about teaching physical education as their own skills have developed.
- Leaders have fostered a climate of high expectations. The vast majority of parents agree that the school is improving and they support leaders' ambitions.
- The sponsor has worked effectively to integrate the school into its ways of working and to introduce a culture of high expectations and holding staff to account. Decisive action has been taken to strengthen leadership at all levels. The school now has an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.

- The school has robust procedures to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Security around the school ensures that only adults have access to certain parts using entry fobs. Staff have a good understanding of their duties with regard to child protection and take their responsibilities seriously.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - On becoming an academy, the Chair of the Governing Body from St Thomas More's took up the same role at St Clare's. Governors have reconstituted and taken on clearer responsibilities. They are now much better informed about the school's performance in comparison to other schools, and hold school leaders to account well. They have overseen rapid improvements in the school's performance.
 - Governors have helped to ensure that the academy partnership raises standards. Changes in staffing including appointments at leadership level and the secondment of two outstanding teachers from the sponsor school have raised the quality of teaching.
 - Governors have an effective oversight of teachers' pay awards. They ensure that teachers' targets are robust and challenging.
 - Governors are well informed about how the pupil premium is spent and how this benefits the pupils' academic and personal development. They are also aware of the way that the primary physical education and sports premium has increased the school's participation in many local sports competitions, and helped to promote healthy lifestyles.
 - The school has up to date policies which actively promote British values and aim to tackle extremism. This helps governors to promote the school's Catholic values, their commitment to equality of opportunity and to tackling all forms of discrimination.
 - Governors ensure that all statutory requirements are met, including those with regard to safeguarding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Most pupils enjoy learning and have very positive attitudes. They listen attentively to adults, and show enthusiasm in responding to questions.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the school, and on occasions their behaviour is exemplary. For example, during assemblies where they sing with gusto, recite prayers and respond using signing and gestures to follow the music and words. They are polite and welcoming and this contributes strongly to a calm and orderly environment.
- Pupils enjoy taking on additional responsibilities, and the older ones volunteer to help out at break times and lunchtimes, for example as 'play leaders' helping younger pupils in team games. The school council relish the chance to influence the school through democratic procedures, and recently voted to change the school uniform even though their choice was not popular with all of the staff.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils are taught about safety in different situations. For example, Year 4's trip to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution helped them understand safety at sea. Pupils have a good understanding of road safety and how to use the internet safely. Parents have also taken part in a workshop which helped them with understanding what they could do to keep their children safe when using the internet at home.
- Although a few parents expressed concerns about bullying and other matters when responding to Parent View, the school's own recent survey of a larger sample shows that parents are very positive about the school, and agree that the school keeps their children safe and happy. Inspectors found that the school deals thoroughly and robustly with the few instances of bullying that have been reported.
- Pupils have a good understanding of what bullying means, referring to the acronym 'STOP' to remind them ('several times on purpose'). Racist incidents and exclusions are low, and pupils' kindness and sensitivity towards each other helps to make the school racially harmonious.
- Pupils welcome the early start to the day in the breakfast club where those who attend are well looked

after. They enjoy a healthy meal which helps them prepare well for the day.

- Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in the numbers who cannot wait to get to school. The overall attendance is improving and is around the national average but it is not as high as it could be.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has improved strongly following the secondment of two teachers from the partner school. Teachers plan together, share their best ideas and offer help to each other to improve. As a result teaching is consistently good throughout the school.
- The teaching of phonics (letters and their sounds) is effective. Pupils confidently use their skills to tackle unfamiliar words. Reading is strongly promoted so pupils enjoy regular chances to read. The 'bedtime stories' workshop for families helped parents with tips on reading to their children at home, with their children dressed in their pyjamas listening to stories.
- Teaching is exciting and stimulates pupils to work hard. Pupils in Year 3 for example used thesauruses to find interesting synonyms to improve their story writing. Pupils composed sentences which described an 'odious smell', a 'malevolent evil' and a 'perishing cold'. Writing skills are well developed as teachers' subject knowledge is strong.
- Teachers are successful in teaching basic calculation skills in mathematics. Work is set so that pupils can choose which degree of challenge best suits their needs, choosing the 'cookie' work which is bite size, the 'cupcake' for extra challenge or the 'large cake' if they really want to test themselves.
- During the inspection teachers made mathematics interesting by encouraging pupils to use different resources and asking them to investigate practical problems. For example pupils in Year 2 helped the site manager to check measurements for a new den. However, sometimes mathematics work is too hard or too easy, and pupils make the wrong choices. As a result, girls and the most able pupils do not make as much progress as their peers.
- Teachers are effective in encouraging pupils to develop their creative skills. Painting and construction activities help children in Reception to develop these skills. Older pupils have produced startling examples of portraits using famous artists' such as Picasso's own self-portraits as an inspiration.
- Teachers mark work thoroughly and give guidance to pupils on what they should do to improve their learning, following the school's marking policy. Pupils use their 'target pencils' well to tell them what they are aiming for. This activity has improved considerably in recent months but occasionally pupils are not given clear guidance, especially in mathematics, and work is not checked to ensure improvements have been made.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 was around the national average in reading, writing and mathematics in 2014. Although progress for the Year 6 pupils was weak in reading, writing and mathematics, all other year groups had made good progress. Standards are rising throughout the school and progress accelerating, so that most pupils now make good progress in all subjects.
- The proportion of pupils who met the expected standard in the phonics screen check in Year 1 was in line with the national average.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make progress similar to their peers, often from lower starting points. This is due to their needs being identified quickly and consistently good teaching both in class and in smaller groups outside the class.

- Disadvantaged pupils achieve well throughout the school. Since 2014, gaps are narrowing in reading, writing and mathematics in all year groups. In 2014 the gap in attainment with their peers was about one term in reading, a smaller gap in writing, and two and a half terms in mathematics. Compared with others nationally, disadvantaged pupils attained around two terms in reading, a term and a half behind in writing and nearly a year behind, in mathematics. Progress for disadvantaged pupils currently in the school is accelerating so that the gap is narrowing.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make good progress, in line with the improvement seen in the progress of their peers this year.
- Pupils' attainment at the higher levels at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 were not as strong in mathematics when compared to reading and writing, especially for girls and the most able pupils. However, information provided by the school shows that gaps in attainment are closing for these groups, and in some cases eliminated. This is because the majority of the most able pupils are now making good progress throughout the school. The proportions attaining the higher levels at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 are rising. Teachers now plan work which is suitably challenging to the different ability groups so these pupils achieve well. This has not always been the case in the past, especially in mathematics. A few of the most able pupil are not doing as well as they could.

The early years provision

is good

- Children in the Reception classes have skills which are typical for their age when they join the school. However, there are considerable gaps in their skills of communication and language as well as their understanding of number. Over the past year they have made make good progress and are on track to improve considerably on their 2014 performance which was below average. Progress is improving quickly as a result of an engaging and lively curriculum.
- Children settle quickly and develop confidence in making good use of the wide range of interesting resources. Their independence and curiosity is encouraged. They cooperate well and show well developed social skills.
- Teaching is good. A strong focus on early mark making, letter formation and writing has raised children's literacy skills. Children enjoy many opportunities to practise their writing, and this is good preparation for the next stage in their education. Phonics is taught well so children quickly learn how to recognise new words by listening to the sounds of the phonemes and understanding the meaning of familiar and new words.
- Staff make good use of the outdoor area to support children's physical development. There is a strong focus on developing creative skills, as the children enjoy using paint and other materials. However, adults do not make the most of the outdoor area to promote the children's understanding of number and shapes.
- Children behave extremely well, and show considerable respect towards adults. They are kept safe and are well looked after.
- Leadership and management are good, as there is a strong focus on raising standards of achievement and the children's personal development. Teamwork is effective in promoting consistent expectations and this leads to good outcomes.
- Teachers keep extensive records of what the children have achieved. This is regularly shared with parents who are encouraged to contribute by recording important events in their child's learning. This enables teachers to accurately keep track of the children and plan appropriate activities so that no one falls behind.

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	139583
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	450278

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	297
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Simon Fenning
Headteacher (Executive)	Bridget Harris
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01255 425344
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