

St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Castlefields Avenue South, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 2NR

Inspection dates 9–10 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
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 new headteacher and the governing body have successfully provided a clear direction for the school that is shared by all stakeholders. Staff work very well as a team and morale is high. The school continues to improve.
- All pupil groups are now making good or better progress in reading, writing and mathematics to reach standards in line with or above those expected for their age. A number of pupils are now working at higher levels in reading and mathematics.
- Provision for children in the early years is good. Teachers and support staff encourage independent learning and good behaviour in a safe and secure setting. Most children are now achieving good levels of development in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils' behaviour in and around school is exemplary and their attendance is above the national average. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are exceptionally well promoted.
- The quality of teaching is good. Teachers and support staff provide lessons that stimulate and interest pupils of all abilities so that they enjoy learning and make good progress.
- Senior leaders regularly monitor lessons and ensure that teaching and learning are never less than good.
- Governors are very well informed about the work of the school. They hold leaders and staff to account through regular visits and reports back to the full governing body.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In the early years, the tracking of children's progress is not as well informed by examples of their work as it could be.
- The checking and reinforcement of spelling, punctuation, grammar and mathematical skills is not consistently evident in each subject area. As a result, some pupils do not make enough progress.

Information about this inspection

- All teachers were observed in a range of lessons throughout the age range. The headteacher jointly observed two lessons with one of the inspectors.
- Inspectors held discussions about the school and its development with the headteacher, other leaders, the local authority representative, and separate groups of governors and parents. Informal discussions and formal meetings were held between inspectors and pupils.
- Inspectors analysed 27 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and 17 questionnaire returns from school staff.
- Inspectors looked at a range of school documentation including: national and school information about pupils' progress and attainment; school policies relating to behaviour and safeguarding; behaviour and incident logs; curriculum documents; the school's own reports about how well the school is doing; governors' reports and minutes of meetings; and samples of pupils' work.

Inspection team

John Ashley, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Anthony Buckley	Additional Inspector
Lesley Else	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is slightly larger than the average-sized primary school. Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is above the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding the school receives for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above the national average.
- The school meets the current government floor standard. This is the minimum expectation of pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6.
- Provision for children in the early years is mornings only for the Nursery and full time for Reception-aged children.
- The headteacher was appointed in September 2014.
- The headteacher has promoted the formation of a working partnership (The Go Group) with three other primary schools to share best practice in teaching and learning. These schools are: Halton Lodge, The Brow and The Holy Spirit.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the attainment of all groups of pupils even further, by:
 - ensuring that children's records in the early years contain sufficient evidence of work in reading, writing and mathematics so that staff can track progress with greater precision
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels consistently check and reinforce pupils' skills in their use of spelling, punctuation, grammar and mathematics in all subjects.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The new headteacher has provided a clear sense of direction for other leaders and staff, ably supported by a knowledgeable governing body that holds leaders to account. As a result, agreed actions have led to rapid improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement since the start of this academic year, alongside outstanding pupil behaviour. The areas for improvement from the last inspection have been addressed. Pupils now know their targets in mathematics and respond quickly to teachers' marking to make good or better progress. The most able pupils are now working at the higher levels in mathematics.
- School leaders and staff have overseen the teaching of British values extremely well so that pupils have had a say in what aspects are important to them. For example, they voted that 'love' and 'determination' were values required for a happy and hardworking school to thrive and develop. As a result, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and contributes significantly to the positive atmosphere in classrooms and around school. The school's equal opportunities policy ensures that all pupils are fully included in lessons and out-of-school activities. Staff ensure that there is no discriminatory behaviour at the school in relation to race, ethnicity, sexuality or religious background.
- Senior and middle leaders regularly check the quality of teaching with regard to pupils' engagement in lessons and the progress of different groups and provide feedback so staff can sharpen their practice. The headteachers' partnership with local schools has helped in making sure that staff are clear about pupils' levels of ability in different subjects through regular sampling of work. This has assisted teachers in planning well for pupils who might require additional help or further challenge in their work. Occasionally, the checking and monitoring of pupils' work does not always take full account of how accurately pupils use their skills in spelling, punctuation, grammar and mathematics in different subjects.
- There are good policies and practices in place for checking the performance of teachers and support staff. It is clear that teachers are held accountable for their work in and out of the classroom, with reference to the agreed Teachers' Standards. Teachers are set clear objectives with a particular emphasis on positive outcomes for pupils. They and the school benefit from targeted professional development.
- The local authority representative has visited the school providing some support in jointly observing teaching and sampling pupils' work books. There has also been a recent review of early years provision overseen by an external advisor. It is recognised that further work is needed in the Nursery to ensure that children's work is regularly checked and included in individual records to help track progress.
- The curriculum provides a range of experiences for pupils both in and out of lessons. Each subject leader has provided an action plan so that the school is keeping up to date with national changes. British values are taught through studies of famous British people, like Florence Nightingale, or when learning about VE Day. Pupils say they attend and enjoy after-school activities, including dance, music and sport. They have opportunities to visit local parks and museums or to attend a residential trip, for example, to RobinWood. The curriculum also includes learning about different faiths and religions.
- Partnerships with parents are strong. Parents are invited into school to share in whole-school assemblies. Their views about the school are regularly sought and all staff maintain regular and friendly contact with families, especially if there are concerns.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are strong. Governors and staff have regular updated training and there are named safeguarding personnel. Staff demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of reporting any child protection concerns. Any behaviour incidents or accidents are logged and there is good provision for first aid. Attendance is well monitored and is above the national average.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is good. There has been a recent audit of the governing body resulting in the formation of two committees and a clear action plan for further development. There are named governors for particular aspects of the school's work, for example, safeguarding or special educational needs. These governors regularly visit the school and report back to the full governing body so that it is well informed about any improvements or issues. For example, governors receive information about pupils' performance in the national tests and ask searching questions about the progress of different groups. There is evidence of regular governor training and minutes of meetings show that governors ask challenging questions.
 - Financial management is good. Governors ensure that the headteacher reports accurately and regularly on teachers' performance before making decisions about pay, support or capability. Governors are now in a position to appoint a deputy and assistant headteacher at the start of the next academic year as well as new site manager. The use of pupil premium and additional sports funding is overseen well by governors because they agree how it should be used and know which groups of pupils have benefited.

They know that the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in school have closed at Key Stage 1 and are closing at Key Stage 2. In addition, governors know that more pupils are now enjoying more sport.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Their conduct in and around school is always of the highest order. Pupils are polite and respectful to one another, staff and visitors. Their attendance is above the national average and they wear their uniform with pride.
- Staff work particularly well to encourage positive behaviour and respect from pupils at all times. They create attractive and welcoming classrooms which ensure that pupils feel able to partake fully in lessons, regardless of their ability levels or particular needs. The shared respect between staff and pupils contributes greatly to the strong, nurturing ethos of the school
- Pupils' attitudes to their learning are outstanding. From early on in the school, they are taught to listen well and to respond swiftly to instructions. As a result, any low-level misbehaviour is extremely rare.
- Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility, either when looking after their equipment in lessons and keeping the classroom tidy, or if partaking in assemblies or the school council. They move around the school calmly and will take turns when sharing play equipment or waiting in line for lunch or the tuck shop.
- On rare occasions, one or two pupils with additional behavioural needs benefit from a behaviour plan organised and overseen by relevant staff.
- There are no signs of any graffiti or litter and pupils' displays are fully respected and unspoilt.
- Staff and the vast majority of parents who have responded to recent questionnaire surveys or met with the inspectors agree that pupils' behaviour in school is outstanding.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Safeguarding arrangements are in place to ensure that pupils are well supervised and secure. The premises are well maintained and visitors to the school are well managed.
- There have been no fixed-term exclusions and very few low-level behavioural incidents. Any incidents are recorded and shared with parents, as are any accidents on site.
- There are clear risk assessments in place, for example, when planning school trips. Other health and safety policies, including those for behaviour, safeguarding and child protection, are in place and regularly reviewed by governors.
- Pupils and their parents say that they are safe in school. Pupils interviewed stated that they learn about internet safety and different forms of bullying during their lessons in school. They stated that they were unaware of any bullying, racism or homophobia in school.
- Vulnerable pupils are well supported by caring staff who liaise regularly with parents and families or with outside agencies when required.

The quality of teaching is good

- Senior leaders have worked hard alongside subject leaders to ensure that the quality of teaching is now invariably good or better. The partnership working with other primary schools and the local authority representative has supported this work. As a result, teaching in mathematics has improved since the last inspection report, especially in regard to how marking enables pupils to be clear about what they have achieved and their next steps for learning.
- Teachers' assessment of pupils' abilities in reading, writing and mathematics ensures that they know which pupils may require additional support for learning or, indeed, more challenge. Skilled teaching assistants are deployed, for example, to review work with pupils in Key Stage 2 who are still uncertain about how to construct different types of sentences in their independent writing.
- Teachers have created classrooms that are attractive and welcoming. This means that pupils arrive to lessons ready and eager to learn because they receive support, challenge and encouragement to try hard and to succeed.
- Teachers in Key Stage 1 use questioning techniques and explanations with great skill when sharing stories

with pupils. They introduce technical aspects of independent writing such as adjectives and conjunctions and challenge pupils to recognise them within a shared text. This approach encourages a love of reading because pupils are keen to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding to the teacher and their peers.

- Teaching, support staff and resources are well used in support of disabled pupils or those with special educational needs at Key Stage 1. For example, less able pupils received close support to reinforce their knowledge and understanding of counting to ten, while more able peers were engaged in working out how to complete subtraction number sentences by counting backwards. In writing, less able pupils refer to simpler guidance for writing independently than their more able peers. This ensures equal opportunities and access to learning for the less able pupils and appropriate levels of challenge for the more able.
- Teaching and support staff ensure that the key skills of reading, writing, number and communication are promoted in all lessons, not just in English and mathematics. For example, in the Year 5 class, pupils are provided with opportunities to learn about the work of Pythagoras in a topic about the Greeks; pupils in Key Stage 2 science practise their independent writing when summarising an experiment.
- At Key Stage 2, the teaching of mathematics is promoted particularly well where the subject knowledge of the teachers and their enthusiasm for the subject lead to equally enthusiastic learning. The most able pupils rise to the challenge of working out, 'Which squared number is 11 more than the one before it?' Pupils' responses are valued even when the answer is not correct!
- Teachers use marking well to identify whether pupils have succeeded in achieving their learning objectives. They provide guidance for pupils to follow to either make corrections or complete a more challenging task. Homework is regularly provided to reinforce pupils' learning. However, not all teachers consistently check whether or not pupils effectively use their skills in spelling, punctuation, grammar and mathematics across all subjects.
- Staff make interesting displays of pupils' independent writing in class and on the school corridor. This reinforces pupils' pride in their work and in promoting their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- All pupil groups have made accelerated progress in reading, writing and mathematics over the past year. Some underachievement at the higher levels that was evident in 2014 has been swiftly addressed. Reading has become a particular strength as all year groups are in line with or above national expectations.
- Pupils build upon progress made in the early years so that in Key Stage 1, they achieve above expectations in the national phonics check (assessing pupils' knowledge of letters and the sounds that they make).
- Pupils in Key Stage 1 are enthusiastic about learning to read, write and spell. They respond well when the teacher asks them to identify conjunctions like 'and' or 'but' in a shared story or when using their phonic skills to read a new word. By the end of Year 2, most pupils are using joined-up handwriting in their books and show great pride in their achievements.
- Pupils in Key Stage 1, who were heard reading, say that they enjoy reading and do so regularly. They take their reading books home and practise their skills in different lessons.
- At Key Stage 1, pupils learn to sequence numbers forwards and backwards. More able pupils learn to use subtraction when solving simple word problems. They use and understand terms like 'digits' and 'multiples of five'.
- By the end of Year 2, pupils' attainments in reading, writing and mathematics are broadly in line with national averages. School and national information on pupil progress shows that at Key Stage 1 disadvantaged pupils are in line with their peers in reading and writing and one term adrift in mathematics.
- At Key Stage 2, pupils develop their independent reading, writing and mathematical skills well. For example, they research the internet for information about and make notes for future reference. In mathematics, they consider how best to cost out different mobile phones with regard to the different features offered – thus using and applying taught skills to work out problems.
- Occasionally, pupils' spelling, punctuation, grammar and numeracy skills are not always accurately applied in all subjects because not all teachers consistently follow the school's agreed marking policy.
- Pupils with a disability or those who have special educational needs receive good teaching and support based upon accurate assessment of their learning or other needs. As a result, they make good or better progress from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics.

- The school's results in national tests for Year 6 pupils in 2014 were broadly in line with the national average. However, there were gaps evident between certain groups and their peers nationally, for example, disadvantaged pupils. An examination of work by current pupils shows that the gap between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and their peers in school and nationally is reducing in reading, writing and mathematics to less than two terms, from nearly three terms.
- The most able pupils are now working at level 6 in mathematics because they are receiving targeted support and clear information from teachers about their progress and next steps for learning.
- Because of the effective pastoral support received by pupils and their strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, pupils at the end of Year 6 are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.

The early years provision

is good

- Achievement in the early years is good. Children enter the Nursery with skills and abilities below those typical for their age. They receive strong pastoral care and support within settings that allow them to develop good social skills and independence. The proportion of children gaining good levels of development in literacy and numeracy were not in line with national expectations in 2014 but there is strong evidence from the inspection to confirm that this year, by the end of their time in Reception, most children will achieve expected levels and will be ready for learning in Year 1.
- Staff work well as a team in the early years. Resources are exciting and attractive. Children are encouraged to explore their surroundings so that they develop their knowledge and understanding of the world around them.
- Staff identify children with disabilities or with special educational needs and provide additional, close support – for example, when learning to develop early writing skills. The most able demonstrate good abilities when using technology to listen and watch a story or when practising writing a list of items to be included in a lunch box.
- The teaching of phonics and numbers is good because staff make effective use of questioning, explanations and visual resources when supporting learning. For example, children learn to sound out letters when spelling new words or make use of a number line to practise counting backwards and forwards when learning about subtraction.
- Children behave and socialise well. They respond to high expectations and follow routines within a safe and secure environment.
- Leadership and management of the early years is good because team work is strong leading to good teaching and support. However, checks on children's progress are not as well informed by records of their work as they could be.

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	111316
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	461917

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	270
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tony Mitchell
Headteacher	Rachel Tainsh
Date of previous school inspection	10 July 2012
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