

Our Lady's RC Primary School, Manchester

Whalley Road, Whalley Range, Manchester, M16 8AW

Inspection dates 7–8 July 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	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.

- Determined, resilient and ambitious leadership, ably supported by a united staff, has turned the school around. Strengths have been maintained and significant weaknesses have been eradicated.
- Despite much needed change, no one has let go of the fundamental values which make Our Lady's a very special place in the community.
- Strong teamwork, open communication and clear systems for improving and checking on teaching means everybody knows their role and is willing to share good practice. This has led to a purposeful learning community where everyone is striving for the best.
- Close support and informed challenge from members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) has been pivotal in improving teaching and raising pupils' achievement.
- Pupils are fiercely proud of their school. They behave well, feel safe and enjoy their learning.
- Teachers harness pupils' excitement for learning through fun, purposeful and relevant topics. Lessons are planned well to help different groups of pupils build on what they already know and can do.
- Almost all pupils make better than expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics so standards match the national average. All groups of pupils achieve well.
- Pupils' achievement in reading excels across the school. They are confident speakers and attentive listeners who willingly share their ideas and work.
- The strong start children make in the early years sets them up well for future success in Year 1 and as they move throughout the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all pupils make such strong gains in subjects other than English and mathematics because teachers do not always plan for subject-specific skills and knowledge.
- Some of the leaders for subjects other than English and mathematics do not have enough influence on teaching and learning in their area of responsibility.
- Pupils' achievement in writing sometimes slows because they do not have the stamina to write at length; some are hampered by weak handwriting and presentation skills.
- Teachers' marking does not always pick up common punctuation and spelling errors.
- In Reception, learning opportunities are sometimes missed because the role of additional adults is not planned for carefully enough.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors made several visits to every classroom to observe teaching and learning, to chat to pupils and to look at their books.
- Inspectors observed and spoke to pupils during play and lunchtime. They met formally with three groups of pupils and heard pupils read during lessons.
- Meetings were held with staff, senior and middle leaders. Discussion took place with members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and a representative from the local authority and the diocese.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including arrangements for safeguarding, information about pupils' achievement and pupils' books.
- Inspectors met with a group of 10 parents during the inspection and chatted to parents at the start of the school day. They took account of the 50 responses to Parent View (the online questionnaire) to inform the inspection.

Inspection team

Joanne Olsson, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Judith Tolley

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is almost three times higher than the national average. The largest groups in the school are from Black Caribbean, Black African and White British heritage. One third of the school's population speaks English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is higher than the national average. Pupil premium is additional funding provided by the government for pupils who are known to be eligible for free schools meals or who are looked after by the local authority.
- An average proportion of pupils are disabled or have special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils who join or leave the school throughout the school year is similar to other schools.
- The school has full-time Nursery provision for 30 children.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which are the minimum standards and rate of progress expected of primary pupils.
- At the previous inspection, in February 2014, the school was judged to be inadequate. It has been subject to monitoring from Her Majesty's Inspector. This was the fourth monitoring inspection.
- Following the previous inspection, the substantive headteacher retired. The school entered into a partnership with Holy Name Catholic Primary School. The substantive headteacher of the partner school is the executive headteacher of Our Lady's. The governing body has been replaced with an Interim Executive Board (IEB). There have been considerable changes in staff. Three teachers left the school, which resulted in a number of temporary appointments. Staffing is now stable; three new teachers have taken up post and a member of staff has returned to school following a period of extended leave.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and raise pupils' achievement further, particularly in subjects other than English and mathematics, by:
 - making sure teachers always plan for the specific skills and knowledge related to different subjects so pupils gain sufficient depth in their learning across the whole curriculum
 - providing greater opportunities for pupils to write at length in order to help them develop their ideas fully
 - developing pupils' handwriting skills and insisting on high levels of presentation across the school
 - picking up and correcting common spelling and punctuation errors in pupils' work so they learn from their mistakes quickly
 - carefully planning the role of additional adults in Reception to ensure no learning opportunities are missed.
- Improve leadership and management by sharing best practice across the school to help all subject leaders have a greater role in influencing teaching and pupils' achievement in subjects other than English and mathematics.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Clear-sighted and ambitious leadership is at the heart of the school's quick recovery. Sensitive but firm action means almost every aspect of the school has improved and pupils, regardless of their age, background or ability have an equal chance of success. The executive headteacher and head of school have the full backing of a united and reinvigorated staff because change has been managed well and everyone can see the fruits of their labour. No one has opted for the easy route; quick fixes have been avoided and no stone has been left unturned. A 'root and branch' approach means new ways of working are embedded. Change for the better is here to stay and there is firm bedrock on which to build for the future. Leaders' views of the school are spot-on; the priorities for the next stage of the school's journey are accurate and improvement planning provides a good road map towards the future. Consequently, capacity for further improvement is strong.
- Senior and middle leaders are making a valuable contribution to driving improvement to teaching and pupils' achievement. They are flourishing because they know the purpose of their role and they have been equipped with the skills to do the job well. They check teaching and pupils' progress frequently. They lead by example and willingly roll up their sleeves to their support colleagues. Nonetheless, they are alert to, and ready to challenge, any signs of teaching which is failing to hit the mark. The work of those leaders who have responsibility for subjects other than English and mathematics is more variable. Some are forging ahead. Others are not having enough influence in making sure teachers always plan for subject-specific skills and knowledge to help pupils gain sufficient depth in their learning across the whole curriculum.
- Teaching has come a long way because leaders have set their sights high and demanded nothing less than good from everyone. Frequent checks on teaching and a rigorous approach to managing performance means teachers know exactly what they need to do to lift their game. Teachers have been well supported in their quest to improve through ample opportunity to attend training courses, work with colleagues in the partner school and more recently share good practice among themselves. All follow whole-school policies. However, leaders do not hold teachers in straitjackets. As teachers' confidence has grown, they have been given permission to try out new ideas. This has unleashed their creativity and stopped them following published schemes slavishly.
- Parents are supportive of the school. Almost all would recommend the school to others and few chose to remove their children when the school was judged inadequate. Their faith has been repaid and parents are delighted with the improvements to pupils' achievement and behaviour.
- The local authority and diocese have kept a close watch on the school and provided effective support. Links with the partner school have been exploited well to support individual teachers and leaders to grow into their role. This work has made a real difference in helping teachers to check on the progress pupils are making. This means data is reliable and paints a true picture of the school.
- A review of pupil premium funding led to an overhaul in how this additional money is used to support pupils who need it most. Well-targeted small group sessions are helping this group to make better progress across the school so achievement gaps are closing rapidly.
- Funding for sports is being used to enhance teachers' skills in teaching physical education (PE) through the use of expert coaches, as well as widening opportunities for pupils to be involved in physical activity during and after school. This is working well; there is a greater take-up of sport within school and across the local authority. Older pupils (and teachers) are particularly proud of their recent success in local football competitions!
- The systems to protect pupils are secure, up-to-date and meet all statutory requirements. Staff know how to spot and report any risks to pupils' safety because they have been trained well. Behaviour is improving due to a consistent and fair approach across the school. The few incidents of poor behaviour, bullying or name-calling are recorded and information is used effectively to pinpoint hotspots. This means incidents are nipped in the bud before they have a chance to escalate.
- Along with everything else, the learning programmes across the school have been refreshed. Teachers are seizing the opportunity to link subjects together into meaningful and exciting topics which ignite pupils' desire to learn. As one pupil commented: 'It is not all about pen and paper here!' Moreover, pupils have the opportunity to influence what they learn. Pupils' obvious delight when they talk about the range of visits and visitors, the Rainforest Café, Victorian school days and the forthcoming Ancient Egypt day is clear proof that the curriculum is hitting the mark. Opportunities to learn about different faiths and cultures through projects, such as Black History Week, and to take part in business enterprise schemes are promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development very well. This work, plus the international dimension of the curriculum, is equipping them to succeed as citizens in modern Britain.

- Equality of opportunity is strong. There are few incidents of harassment in this school where differences are celebrated and everyone is valued. Improving achievement for all is leading to inequality gaps being eradicated. Consequently, all have the chance to flourish and shine.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the IEB have been pivotal in driving the school forward because they have the skills and knowledge to ask the right questions and they share the same high expectations for all pupils. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This is because they have kept a sharp eye on key priorities and they have a deep understanding of school and national data. They have spent time finding out for themselves the difference the school's work is making to teaching and they are well placed to tackle any underperformance. Consequently, their decisions on rewarding teachers are thorough and based on irrevocable evidence.
 - IEB members have worked tirelessly to tackle endemic weaknesses while ensuring they fulfil all statutory responsibilities, including those related to safeguarding and publishing information on the website.
 - Members of the IEB act as champions for disadvantaged pupils. They influence the decisions on how pupil premium funding is spent and keep a close check on the achievement of this group to make sure additional support is making a difference.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Eager pupils cross the school threshold each and every day because they are excited by their learning, enjoy their time in school and feel well cared for. Their enthusiasm for learning does not falter throughout the school day. Pupils follow instructions, listen carefully and set about their work with minimum fuss; most strive to do their best at all times. Pupils behave equally well around school. Playtimes and lunchtimes are harmonious; little time is wasted in dealing with the fall out of inappropriate behaviour during these unstructured sessions. As a result, incidents of poor behaviour, which get in the way of learning, are few and far between.
- The number of pupils who miss playtime or the popular 'Joy Days' as a result of poor behaviour is reducing rapidly over time. Few pupils need to have their behaviour checked through the 'hot-spot' timetables. This success is due to pupils' increasing ability and desire to manage their own behaviour and the rich and varied learning opportunities which capture their interest.
- Pupils of all ages and abilities sing the praises of the school. They are proud to be a member of Our Lady's community. This is reflected in the care they take with their uniforms and school property, their punctuality to lessons and their above average attendance.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Trust, respect and tolerance underpin a strong sense of family where everyone belongs. Pupils from different minority ethnic groups get along well; new arrivals, often in the early stages of speaking English, are quickly brought into the fold and pupils feel free to air their views and share their work without any fear of teasing from their peers. In particular, the most-able pupils are able to soar because their talents are celebrated and not a cause for hurtful remarks.
- Pupils have a good understanding of different types of bullying and they know what to do if they are bullied, using the whole-school STOP (Several Times On Purpose) strategy. They say, and school records confirm, that bullying is rare. They have absolute confidence that adults listen to their concerns and take action to resolve problems before they get out of hand. Pupils know why name-calling, including racist or homophobic remarks, are hurtful. They say name-calling happens from time-to-time, but it is not allowed to fester. A comment from one pupil summed up the views of many in a nutshell: 'We are a family; we have our ups and downs, but we always forgive and forget.'
- The overwhelming majority of parents agree pupils are safe, behave well and bullying is dealt with effectively.

The quality of teaching is good

- Resilient and reflective teachers who willingly accept and act upon advice to enhance their skills go a long way in explaining the transformation in teaching. Weak teaching is a distant memory and all pupils benefit from consistently good teaching day-in and day-out. Teachers accept every offer of support with open-

hands. They are flushed with their success; hungry for more, and keen to look beyond the school and the local area to learn from the best.

- A sense of fun, good humour, constant praise and trusting relationships lead to classrooms in which pupils thrive because they feel safe to try out their ideas and make mistakes. Teachers' skills in nurturing positive relationships have never been in doubt. The big change since the last inspection is teachers' ability to match their high levels of care with equally ambitious aspirations for all pupils to succeed.
- Teachers foster a love of learning through exciting topics, set in relevant contexts, which capture pupils' imagination. Teachers plan lessons carefully so pupils are able to build on what they already know and can do. Vibrant classrooms are proving to be effective in helping pupils to solve problems for themselves, either by 'stealing' words from the walls, using a thesaurus, choosing mathematical equipment to help solve calculations, or simply picking up a book to enjoy during some downtime.
- In some classes, pupils make very strong gains in their learning because teachers model new learning carefully, ask searching questions and set challenging tasks which prompt pupils to use their prior knowledge and think hard.
- Teachers follow the whole-school marking policy without fault. This is helping pupils to see the next steps in their learning journey. However, not all teachers are relentless enough in correcting common spelling and punctuation errors so pupils can learn from their mistakes. Some do not always insist on high levels of presentation.
- Teachers know what to teach, as well as how to teach, due to agreed whole-school approaches which are followed systematically. This is particularly successful in helping pupils to gain a good grasp of the sounds that letters make (phonics) and ensuring teachers are well equipped with the subject knowledge and techniques for teaching mathematics.
- Teachers are very effective at promoting pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills across other subjects. Nonetheless, some teachers are not giving sufficient weight to the specific skills and knowledge pupils should gain in subjects other than English and mathematics in their planning.
- In most classes, teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning because they are skilled at spotting pupils who are struggling. They use questions well to help pupils get back on track quickly. The support they provide for pupils who find learning more difficult, or those at the early stages of learning English, is particularly strong. It ensures everyone is included and these groups make the same progress as their peers.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils at Our Lady's no longer have to race to catch up with pupils in other schools. Almost all are making better than expected progress so they are working at the levels they should be for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The 2015 unvalidated results show the improving picture at the end of Key Stage 1 has been maintained and built on so standards are slightly above the 2014 national average. Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are the best the school has enjoyed in a long while. Last year, pupils left the school almost a year behind in their learning; this year they start Year 7 with standards that match the national picture. From lower than average starting points this represents good progress for both Year 2 and Year 6. This positive picture is not a one-hit wonder but a consistent pattern across the school. Year 5 have already exceeded the amount of progress normally expected by the end of the year. They, and the pupils in every other year group, are ready to hit the ground running in the new academic year.
- All groups of pupils make similar progress and achievement gaps are closing rapidly. Pupils from Black African and Caribbean heritage have caught up to their classmates and pupils who speak English as an additional language do as well as their peers. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress from their different starting points due to the close and effective support they receive in lessons.
- The most-able pupils are soaring because they are challenged in lessons. They are encouraged to go the extra mile through the additional problems teachers pose in their marking or by activities which cause them to think hard. For example, the most-able pupils in Year 2 deepened their understanding of sorting data by constructing and using their own Carroll diagrams from scratch.
- The gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally has halved. This year, disadvantaged pupils are two terms behind in writing and one term behind in reading and mathematics. There is an in-school gap. Disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 made the same strong progress as their non-disadvantaged classmates. However, this group had the most ground to make-up. Disadvantaged pupils are two terms behind their peers in reading and writing, but less than one term in mathematics. In the

rest of the school, disadvantaged pupils are increasingly doing as well as others.

- Pupils' achievement in reading is a strength across the school. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the national phonics check at the end of Year 1 is above average. Ample opportunities to read for purpose and pleasure across a range of subjects means pupils can tackle unfamiliar words but also understand what they are reading. As a result, standards at the end of Year 2 are in line with the national average; they are above average at the end of Year 6.
- Pupils' achievement in mathematics, a considerable weakness at the last inspection, is a success story. Pupils are doing well because they use number and mathematical operations fluently to solve problems which deepen their understanding.
- Pupils are creative writers who willingly put pen to paper and pepper their work with rich vocabulary to appeal to the reader. Nonetheless, writing achievement lags a bit behind reading and mathematics because pupils do not always have the opportunity or stamina to write at length. For some, the quality and quantity of their writing is hampered by weak handwriting skills. Pupils are competent speakers and willing listeners who think nothing of sharing their ideas and reading their work. During the inspection, Year 6 pupils confidently delivered their business plans to a wide audience, including lecturers from Salford University.
- For a while, the relentless focus on closing gaps in pupils' writing, reading and mathematical skills got in the way of pupils flourishing across all subjects. In some classes, this weakness has been arrested and pupils learn age-appropriate skills and knowledge in subject such as science, history and geography. Not all are making similar gains in subjects other than English and mathematics.

The early years provision

is good

- The time children spend in Nursery and Reception stands them in good stead for future success and sets the tone for their experiences throughout the school. Warm relationships and skilful teaching not only help children stride forward in their learning but also foster respect and tolerance, so that children get along with each other, learn how to cooperate and to make friends.
- Typically, over half of the children who enter Nursery have skills and knowledge that are below those usually associated with their age. Their grasp of early reading, writing and number is particularly underdeveloped. Nonetheless, children catch up quickly. They make good progress in all areas of learning so that the proportion reaching the expected goals at the end of Reception is slightly above the national figure. Consequently, they are well equipped to meet the demands of the Year 1 curriculum. They are ready to fly in reading and writing, due to the close focus on basic skills. However, their gains in early mathematics are not forging ahead quite so quickly.
- Children enjoy their time in early years; they enter classrooms with hardly a backward glance because they feel safe and they are keen to find out what exciting activities are in store for them during the day. They behave well, showing consideration to other children, to adults and to their environment. They listen to and follow instructions. In a physical education lesson, Reception children worked extremely well together, controlling their movements as they explored different ways to move around gymnastic equipment. They showed excellent control of their bodies and their behaviour, working safely at all times.
- Children show high levels of concentration and curiosity because teachers are effective in matching activities to their needs and interests. The well-organised learning environment, both indoors and outside, enables children to access all areas of learning through fun but purposeful activity. Teaching is good because adults know the next steps in children's learning and they shape their questions well to help children move forward. In the Nursery, the work of different adults is seamless because everyone is crystal clear about their role and they know precisely when to intervene in children's learning. This effective practice is not as strong in Reception because the role of additional adults is not explicit at the planning stage. As a result, learning opportunities are sometimes missed.
- The early years is well led and managed. The strengths noted at the last inspection have not been lost despite the challenges faced by the rest of the school. The early years leader has set about driving improvement along with everyone else, seeking external support to enhance teaching and the systems for measuring children's gains in learning. Data is used well to pinpoint weaknesses. This has led to more children doing well with their reading and writing skills. All welfare and safeguarding systems are in place. The strong relationships with parents are being enhanced through the use of the Nursery and Reception Blog, which give parents an extra insight into their children's experience at school.

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	105543
Local authority	Manchester
Inspection number	456471

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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	244
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Wiktor Daron
Headteacher	Catherine Gordon
Date of previous school inspection	26 February 2014
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