

Saint Mary's Catholic Voluntary Academy

Wellington Street, Grimsby, Lincolnshire DN32 7JX

Inspection dates

14–15 October 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Teaching is not consistently good enough for all pupils to make good progress in every subject and every class. The most-able pupils' learning is not always challenging enough.
- With weak teaching in the past, pupils, particularly in Key Stage 2, have significant gaps in their knowledge and skills. Their basic literacy and numeracy skills are not always sufficiently secure to move on to harder work.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not always high enough. Assessment is not always used well to challenge pupils at the right level for them.
- Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are below average at the end of Years 2 and 6.
- Occasionally, pupils' learning is not checked often enough in lessons to make adjustments to secure faster learning and progress.
- Children in the early years do not always practise their communication and language skills enough to help them to make the rapid progress they need in these areas.
- Marking in subjects other than literacy is very variable and does not always help pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and the executive headteacher have driven school improvement effectively. They are developing the skills of other leaders well so that good practice is embedded and sustained.
- Senior leaders, including governors, have tackled weak teaching robustly and instilled high expectations of staff. This underpins the school's good capacity to improve further.
- The school is a warm, welcoming environment. Pupils' efforts are valued through the high quality displays of their work around the school.
- Progress is accelerating in all classes and the gaps in pupils' learning from the past are closing. More pupils are now beginning to make good progress.
- Pupils learning English as an additional language and those who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs make good progress and achieve well because they receive good support.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Assemblies and other activities ensure that they have a good understanding of life beyond school.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils enjoy learning and try hard. They feel safe at school and form good relationships with others.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare has a high profile and they are looked after well.

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Secure consistently good or better teaching across all year groups and subjects to improve rates of pupils' progress, by:
 - planning activities that are accurately matched to groups of pupils' different abilities and checking that the most able are challenged sufficiently
 - making sure that pupils understand why they are doing specific work and know when they have completed it successfully
 - adapting lesson activities in response to pupils' understanding so that learning is accelerated
 - asking pupils questions that deepen their understanding and so strengthen their learning
 - ensuring that marking is effective in all subjects and that pupils know how to improve their work.

- Raise standards in English and mathematics by ensuring that:
 - the gaps in pupils' learning are identified clearly and planning addresses these issues securely before pupils move on to new work
 - pupils, particularly those who are low attaining, have more opportunities to read aloud in school
 - pupils apply their basic skills in literacy accurately when writing in other subjects
 - pupils have a secure understanding of number charts and place value and multiplication tables and apply these with greater accuracy and speed
 - pupils tackle solving problems methodically and show that they understand their work.

- Improve provision in the early years by being sure that:
 - children talk about their activities more, using a wider vocabulary and gain confidence in talking in front of others
 - children have more opportunities to practise their reading, writing and number skills when they work by themselves
 - children explore all the different areas of learning enough, particularly those aspects that they find more difficult
 - the most-able children are challenged fully in the activities planned for them.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The executive headteacher and the head of school have provided strong leadership since the previous inspection and eradicated the serious weaknesses identified in the last report. School improvement has been good and the school is well placed to move forward to secure better progress for all pupils.
- While not yet good, teaching has improved significantly and leaders have successfully addressed weak teaching. The high turnover of staff has been managed well and teamwork across the school is good. Pupils benefit from the positive atmosphere leaders have established throughout the school and pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are now good. Staff and governors are very ambitious for the pupils and their high aspirations are underpinning pupils' good progress, now evident in several classes.
- Leaders monitor the quality of teaching rigorously. Pupils are beginning to make more rapid progress particularly at the upper end of the school. The gaps in learning still remain due to the weaknesses in teaching in the past. However, pupils' progress is accelerating because systems to monitor progress are quickly and effectively identifying those pupils who are at risk of falling behind. Additional support is initiated fast to help them catch up, supporting the promotion of equality of opportunity successfully.
- New subject leaders are clear about their responsibilities to secure good outcomes for pupils in the areas they manage. They are effectively involved in monitoring teaching and learning and are increasingly more accountable for their areas of responsibility. Senior leaders model good leadership skills and other leaders follow their example – increasing the school's capacity to improve further.
- All staff are held to account for the progress their pupils make and performance management is used effectively to set challenging targets. Staff training is a high priority and all teachers have opportunities to extend their skills and improve practice. Newly qualified teachers receive good guidance and support to develop their skills and secure good outcomes for pupils. Staff are clear that pay awards are linked to them achieving the targets set for pupils in their classes.
- The curriculum topics and activities are planned to hold pupils' interest and enjoyment of school. Pupils go on many visits and visitors extend their learning and improve their skills. While the basic skills of literacy and numeracy are covered, many pupils have gaps in these skills and so are not always confident in moving on to harder work or accurately applying the skills they have in other subjects. The most-able pupils do not always have work set at the level they need to achieve more.
- Pupils have many good experiences to broaden their understanding of life in Britain and the wider world. Religious festivals and cultural traditions from other countries are celebrated and pupils understand well that differences should be valued. The church ethos is richly celebrated through assemblies and opportunities to take part in church events. Time for reflection encourages pupils to think about global issues such as food and water poverty and the rights of children across the globe. As one pupil said, 'Everyone's religion is important to them. Inside we are all the same.'
- The primary sports funding is used well to support a wide range of sporting activities. Pupils say many clubs like football and basketball are full all the time and that it is better that everyone takes part in sports day, 'because you don't have to be good to join in and it keeps you healthy'. Teachers have benefited by working alongside sports coaches and so increasing sporting activities in the school.
- The budget for supporting disadvantaged pupils is used effectively to provide additional support for those in particular need. Pupils and their families benefit from the advice and care the school offers; breakfast club provides a healthy start for those who want it and trips enrich pupils' experiences of other lifestyles. Support for pupils who need help with their learning is of high quality and as result they achieve well.
- The academy trust provides good support to the school and monitors its performance closely. It challenges leaders effectively and ensures that the school focuses on priorities that will improve outcomes for pupils of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. Partnership with other schools is good for sharing practice.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors are ambitious for the school and its community. They want to provide the best they can for the pupils and have supported leaders effectively since the previous inspection. They have worked with the senior leaders in taking tough decisions to improve the quality of teaching and ensure that pay awards are linked to teachers' performance.
 - Governors challenge leaders rigorously, ensuring that school improvement is effective in raising pupils' achievement. They have benefited from the review of governance and the training on how to best deploy the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils. These pupils are making good progress and progress for all pupils is improving. Governors also ensure that parents are kept fully informed and involved in school

developments.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Training for staff and governors is up to date.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- While there is good teaching in the school and teaching is improving strongly, the overall quality is not consistently good. Pupils, particularly those in Key Stage 2, who have experienced weak teaching in the past, have gaps in their knowledge and understanding and so do not achieve well when facing new work.
- In Key Stage 2, pupils' learning sometimes slows when their understanding is not sufficiently clarified by well-timed questions or further explanations before teachers move on to other tasks. High quality questioning that deepens and consolidates pupils' learning is not routine in all classes and expectations of what pupils can achieve are generally not high enough.
- The work pupils do is not always matched to their abilities accurately. For some it is too easy and for others, too hard. The most-able pupils do not always receive harder tasks quickly enough, even when teachers recognise they are finding the work easy. Lower ability pupils generally receive support to help them make good progress. Average ability pupils who are not always secure with previous learning find it difficult to achieve well when facing new situations. Occasionally, teachers do not make it clear enough as to what they expect of pupils and so pupils do not always know when they have completed work successfully.
- The school has now established rigorous assessment procedures and the information gathered is generally reliable to inform teachers' planning. However, not all teachers are confident in applying the new systems to the revised curriculum. Hence, planning requires improvement so that pupils build successfully on what they know and understand from previous learning and do not go over ground they have already mastered successfully.
- Expectations for pupils to apply their basic literacy and numeracy skills accurately and confidently in other subjects are not always high enough. Pupils frequently submit work that repeats errors, despite receiving feedback from teachers' marking. Errors including use of capitals, full stops and other punctuation persist through to Key Stage 2. In mathematics, pupils do not always set their calculations out correctly so that they can check their work efficiently.
- The teaching of reading requires improvement. The teaching of phonics, (letters and the sounds they make), has improved so that Key Stage 1 pupils make good progress. Older pupils however, who did not have this level of phonics teaching when they were in Key Stage 1, are less secure in their word-building skills to read unfamiliar words and to spell accurately. Pupils say that they do not read aloud enough at school. While the most-able readers progress well without this support, those who struggle with reading do not always receive the help they need to achieve enough.
- The teaching of pupils with special educational needs and those supported through pupil premium has not always been good in the past but has improved significantly. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support small groups and individuals. These pupils make good gains from their starting points and achieve well. Many make better progress than others in the class because the additional support they receive is carefully matched to their specific needs.
- Pupils learning English as an additional language are integrated quickly and receive good personalised support. Those who speak Polish as their mother tongue benefit from bilingual teaching and gain in confidence quickly. Providing that they are at the school long enough, these pupils make good progress.
- The best teaching occurs when teachers provide high levels of challenge in the work they set and encourage pupils to think for themselves and express their ideas with confidence. For example, pupils in Year 6 were intrigued by the idea that people who pursue a vocation might choose to work for little money; others in Year 5 were fascinated by the migration of wildebeest on the African plains and whales in the oceans.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The school is a warm, friendly environment and pupils feel safe and valued there. They are cared for well and every effort is made to support their emotional and social needs so that they can grow in confidence and self-esteem.
- Staff encourage pupils to take on responsibilities such as class monitors and school councillors and they

learn about the democratic process by voting for representatives to speak on their behalf. Older pupils look after younger ones, for example at lunchtimes, and all pupils have an opportunity to contribute to the school house system; they are eager to try hard and earn points for their house.

- Pupils are kind and considerate to others. They listen and cooperate well both in lessons and at play so that altercations are few. They are confident that teachers will act promptly if concerns arise and that they will help them resolve issues at home and school.
- Pupils try hard with their work and most persevere even when they find it difficult. They like to please teachers and seek their reassurance when unsure of how to proceed. They say they love being at school because they like learning and like their teachers. They are particularly proud when their work is displayed around the school, explaining why it is good and how they achieved success.
- Assemblies and lessons provide good opportunities for pupils to consider the importance of treating others with respect and tolerance.
- The school is particularly effective in supporting pupils' understanding of faith and their appreciation that other communities may follow different practices but that all faiths are important. A significant number of pupils come from families from around the world and this diversity is celebrated well. Pupils gain a good insight into how communities can live in harmony and form good friendships with their classmates.
- Pupils' attendance has improved and is now at the national average. The learning mentor works hard to engage with families who keep their children off school unduly and to encourage punctuality. Most pupils attend regularly throughout the year because they want to be at school. With tighter guidelines and higher expectations, the school is striving to raise attendance further.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils understand the school's systems for rewards and sanctions and staff reinforce them consistently across the school. Pupils know that to get a warning is not good and so behave well in lessons and around the school. Where occasional lapses in behaviour occur, staff address them promptly. Pupils know what is expected of them and most try their best. Incidents of bad behaviour are rare.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and settle to work promptly. A few are sometimes slow to settle but this is often when they are not challenged in their learning or do not understand what to do. Pupils say that school is important, 'because they help you learn things so you can get a good job one day'.
- Pupils have a good understanding of different types of bullying including the dangers posed by social media sites and internet chat rooms. Younger children know not to go anywhere with strangers and to report any incidents to parents or teachers. Pupils also say that name calling is like bullying because it can be very hurtful but also say that teachers will put a stop to it straightaway.
- Parents, pupils and staff all indicate that behaviour has improved significantly in the last year.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Progress is still not consistently good in every class and every subject and so requires improvement. However, as a result of the improvements in teaching and teachers' higher expectations of pupils, progress is rising steadily and a greater proportion of pupils are now making at least expected progress and many are making more than the expected progress.
- Given pupils' individual, often very low, starting points, standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 in reading, writing and mathematics are still below average but the proportion making the expected progress has increased in the last two years and current pupils in the school are on track to achieve well this year. The proportion of pupils exceeding the expected level of progress has also increased, particularly in writing. This is because the school has introduced a range of effective initiatives to motivate pupils, particularly boys who were lagging behind the performance of the girls. Resources, especially books and school visits to engage boys more, have proved effective.
- Throughout the school, the most-able pupils are not challenged enough to help them achieve more. However, the school did achieve some success in 2015 tests and assessments in that an increased proportion of pupils gained the higher Level 3 at Key Stage 1 and Level 5 at Key Stage 2.
- Although planning for individual needs is demanding, with improved assessment and increasingly good teaching, in all classes, pupils with complex learning needs are making better progress. Progress is best at the upper end of Key Stage 2 but with many pupils still making up lost ground from previously weak

teaching, it is taking time to close the gap so that all pupils attain as well as all pupils nationally.

- Pupils learning English as an additional language have high aspirations, value learning and always try their best. They receive effective support and make good progress, attaining standards that are close to average if they have been at the school long enough.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs generally make good progress, depending on their level of disability. They are supported well and challenged appropriately.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress. At the end of Year 6 in 2014 their attainment was one term ahead of other pupils in the school in reading, writing and mathematics. This is because they benefit from good support. They were, however, three terms behind all pupils nationally in their writing and four terms behind in mathematics and reading. Gaps in achievement are closing steadily but because all pupils in the school attained below national average standards, disadvantaged pupils remain behind all pupils nationally.
- Attainment in reading was below average at the end of both key stages in 2014 but was slightly better than in 2013. The school has improved the teaching of phonics in the last two years and the 2015 Year 1 phonics screening assessment check shows that pupils in Year 1 achieved close to the national average, a marked improvement on previous years. This has not been translated into higher attainment in reading yet but pupils are making better progress. Pupils enjoy reading but their limited vocabulary prevents them from making better sense of their texts and increasing their confidence and fluency.
- Standards in writing are the strongest because pupils write at length in regular literacy sessions and also write in several subjects. However, their work is not always as accurate in their topic books, for example, as it is in their literacy books; errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation limit their achievement.
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics is hampered by the legacy of weak teaching in the past, resulting in considerable gaps in their understanding of number and basic calculation skills. While improvements are evident this year, many pupils are unsure about the relationship, for example, between multiplication and division calculations and do not always understand which operations to apply when solving problems. The most-able pupils make the progress they should but other pupils are less confident and so their progress is slow.

Early years provision

requires improvement

- Children start in the early years with knowledge and skills that are very low for their age. Their communication and language skills and all areas of literacy and numeracy are particularly low. They make good progress in their social and emotional development and many aspects of their creative and physical skills. However, overall progress is not good because children, particularly the most-able, are not challenged enough. Hence, teaching requires improvement.
- At the end of Reception, most children remain below average in the key areas of communication and language, literacy and numeracy and so start in Year 1 with skills that are below average overall. Since the previous inspection, there has been a steady increase in the number of children attaining good levels of development and there is strong evidence that progress is accelerating.
- The leadership of the early years is relatively new but significant inroads have been made in improving teaching and assessment so that current progress information is more accurate and reliable. Home visits before children start in the nursery provide valuable insight into children's starting points. Parents value this initial contact and staff work hard to involve parents in supporting their children's learning at home. Workshops for parents on how to teach letters and sounds and number skills have been very successful.
- Staff keep detailed records of their observations of children working and playing and these snapshots help parents understand what their children are doing; they also inform teachers' subsequent planning. However, opportunities are missed to stretch and challenge all children sufficiently, particularly in their speech. When asked questions, for example, children frequently respond with single word answers or short phrases and some find it difficult to listen well and retain relevant vocabulary to recount familiar stories.
- Children make good progress in their personal, social, and emotional development. They play with each other safely and happily and are kind to each other, sharing resources and waiting their turn. Conversations between children are often only generated when staff intervene and occasionally children play on their own for lengthy periods without engaging with others.
- Staff lead small groups to ensure that all children try all activities regularly. These activities include writing and reading tasks and children respond well when staff guide them. The teaching of letters and the sounds they make is developing well to support children's early reading and writing skills. In their free choice time, a few children, particularly boys, occasionally select options that avoid the more challenging areas of reading

and writing, preferring the more practical construction and physical activities unless staff intervene.

- While teamwork among the early years staff is good and planning is thorough, opportunities are missed to promote a language-rich environment to extend children's vocabulary and encourage them to use new words confidently.
- The outside area attracts children because it is spacious and well resourced. Children enjoy opportunities to extend their physical skills such as riding bikes and climbing.
- Children are kept safe and form trusting relationships. They enjoy school and behave well. They like to please and so seek attention and ask for help confidently. They like working with adults and try their best, although when activities are too long they find it hard to sustain interest and concentration and so become restless and inattentive. Such lapses are managed successfully. Staff know the children well and recognise that many do not have the levels of independence they need to learn without support.
- Children who have specific additional needs, including any new to learning English or those who are disadvantaged, are supported well. They settle quickly and are fully included in everything their classmates do. Relationships between home and school are good and parents are alerted if any concerns or issues arise.

School details

Unique reference number	139009
Local authority	North East Lincolnshire
Inspection number	10001634

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	235
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jan Ducey
Headteacher	Catherine McHale
Telephone number	01472 357982
Website	www.st-marys-pri-ne-links-sch-uk
Email address	office@smp.nelcmail.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	29–30 April 2014

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- Children in the early years attend part time in the Nursery and full time in the Reception class.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils from a minority ethnic background is slightly below average. Most of these pupils are of other White heritages. The majority of these pupils speak English as an additional language but only a few are at an early stage of learning English.
- The proportion of pupils moving in and out of the school after the start of the early years is above average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils deemed disadvantaged and supported through the pupil premium is above average. (The pupil premium is additional government funding provided to support disadvantaged pupils including those who are known to be eligible for free school meals and looked after children.)
- The school has had a significant number of staff changes since its previous inspection. Almost all teachers are new to the school since the previous inspection.
- In 2014, the school did not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The academy is part of the Northern Lincolnshire Catholic Academy Trust (NoLCAT).
- Since the previous inspection, the school has undertaken a review of governance to consider how governance can be strengthened.
- The school has also undertaken a review of its use of pupil premium to improve this aspect of leadership and management.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching throughout the school; a number of observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. In addition, the inspectors scrutinised pupils' workbooks and listened to pupils read.
- Meetings were held with pupils, the Chair and vice chair of the Governing Body, the headteacher, senior and middle leaders and subject leaders. The inspectors also had meetings with an academy sponsor representative and the school's improvement partner.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents including the school's evaluation of its own performance, information on current pupils' progress, and planning and monitoring documentation. Inspectors scrutinised how funds for disadvantaged pupils and primary school sport were spent. Records relating to behaviour and attendance and documents relating to safeguarding were also taken into consideration.
- As there were only five responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) inspectors considered the views of a number of parents they spoke to during the inspection, those who submitted text messages and the school's own parent survey from 2015.
- The inspectors also took account of the 26 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and talked to staff during the inspection about their views of the school.

Inspection team

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