

# Our Lady and St Swithin's Catholic Primary School

Parkstile Lane, Liverpool, Merseyside L11 0BQ

<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–9 December 2015
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Require improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- The overall quality of teaching is not consistently good. Inadequate teaching has been eradicated but there remains a substantial proportion of teaching that requires further improvement.
- Teaching of subjects other than English and mathematics lacks rigour. As a consequence, pupils do not make good progress in these subjects.
- Teachers' marking does not always help pupils to improve their work. Too often mistakes of grammar, punctuation and spelling go unchecked, leading to repeated errors and writing of poor quality.
- Teachers' expectations of how pupils present their work are too low. As a result, pupils do not demonstrate the same pride in the presentation of their work as they do in other aspects of school life.
- Although pupils' achievement is improving rapidly in reading and mathematics, it is still not good enough.
- Pupils across the school make weak progress in writing.
- Students with special educational needs or disabilities do not make good progress. This is because this aspect of the school's work has been poorly led in the past and there is much ground to make up.
- Teaching assistants are relatively new to their posts and lack experience. As a result, they are not always deployed effectively in lessons.
- The rate of persistent absenteeism is too high. This is because a very small minority of parents fail in their duty to make sure that their children attend school on a regular basis.

### The school has the following strengths

- Strong, united leadership of this school has been the defining feature in turning it around. As a result, this school is rapidly improving and is far better placed to go forward than at the time of the previous inspection.
- Pupils are polite, friendly and hardworking. They are the very embodiment of the school's motto: 'Love, live, learn!'
- Children in the Nursery and Reception thrive and make good progress from their individual starting points.

## 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.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, and thereby improve outcomes for all pupils, particularly in writing, by:
  - developing further existing arrangements to ensure that all teachers gain the skills required to pitch lessons appropriately to suit pupils' needs and abilities
  - improving the quality and effectiveness of marking
  - giving pupils more opportunities to write extensively, accurately and creatively
  - making sure all teaching assistants are deployed productively in lessons
  - encouraging all teachers to increase their expectations regarding pupils' presentation of their work
  - embedding changes to the curriculum and ensure that teaching of subjects other than English and mathematics is rigorous.
  
- Reduce the rate of persistent absenteeism by:
  - improving relationships further with the small minority of parents who do not send their children to school regularly
  - ensuring school leaders use all powers at their disposal to encourage parents to help their children improve their attendance.
  
- Improve outcomes for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities by embedding current improvements to the leadership of this area of the school's work.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- This school has been transformed since the previous inspection. Strong leadership from the executive headteacher, in combination with the stability provided by the head of school, has provided the impetus for change that has propelled the school forward, leading to rapid and sustainable improvement in outcomes for pupils.
- The head of school, who was acting headteacher at the time of the previous inspection, has remained steadfast through a maelstrom of change that sometimes threatened the very survival of this school. Governors agree that she has become 'the heart and soul' of Our Lady and St Swithin's, demonstrating considerable resilience in the face of very testing challenges. As a result of her determination, this school has emerged from special measures with its head held high, a beacon for the local community and in a much better place to go forward.
- The head of school's strengths are complemented well by the incisive executive headteacher, who has provided much needed strategic direction and vision; the school has benefited immensely from his expertise. Furthermore, as the headteacher of a local outstanding school, he has both credibility and an established track record of securing improvement.
- At the time of the previous inspection, procedures to manage the performance of staff were in their infancy. Governors have worked highly effectively with school leaders to develop these procedures, which are now very rigorous. With support from the previous executive headteacher and the local authority, inadequate teaching has been eradicated.
- Expectations are high. The ethos of the school has been transformed and all teachers are now prepared to 'go the extra mile' for the sake of their pupils. This is a refreshing change from the former prevailing culture: complacency and low expectations were the norm.
- For many years this school had been inward-looking and therefore did not keep pace with changes in education. The executive teacher has quickly established many productive partnerships with other local schools that have been helpful in shaking the school out of its insularity. These links have been immensely beneficial; for example, new teachers to the school attend staff training in a local outstanding school that has Teaching School status. As a result, these new entrants to the profession can improve their skills and enjoy just the kind of support that they need at this stage in their career.
- The executive headteacher has brought a critical, objective eye to the school's assessment of its overall effectiveness. As a result, self-evaluation is now exemplary in its frankness and accuracy. Such truthful analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses has enabled leaders to draw up clear plans for further development that are eminently fit for purpose.
- The expenditure of the pupil premium is now more effective, and disadvantaged pupils' progress is catching up quickly with that of their peers. In this respect, school leaders promote equality and tackle discrimination effectively.
- Sports premium funding is spent wisely. The wide variety of sporting activities organised by sports coaches at lunchtime prevent pupils getting bored and keep them active. Pupils and staff spoken to during the inspection were adamant that this had helped to improve behaviour.
- School leaders have been less successful in ensuring that pupils with special educational needs and disabilities make good progress. This area of the school's work has been poorly led in the past. New leadership has injected much more rigour into supporting the educational development of such pupils and there are some tentative signs of improvement.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, but subjects other than English and mathematics are sometimes not well taught and, as a consequence, pupils do not always make good progress in these subjects. Pupils appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer. The early morning breakfast club is well attended and pupils have welcomed the earlier start to the school day, when they can go to their classroom, read books and go over work with their teachers.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development underpins the life of the school. Pupils are taught to respect others and to feel empathy for people less fortunate than themselves. Pupils recently took part in a production of *Macbeth*, by William Shakespeare, organised in conjunction with The Royal Shakespeare Company, and spoke proudly of their recent visit to the Houses of Parliament, where they met the local MP and also the Dalai Lama. In this way, overall, the school prepares pupils well to take their place as citizens of modern Britain, although their understanding of other faiths is somewhat superficial.

- The head of school is well respected in the local community and effective engagement with parents is one of her top priorities. Parents demonstrate positive attitudes towards the school; for example, during the inspection, a delightful Nativity performance by the Nursery was very well attended and the children clearly enjoyed seeing their mothers, fathers and grandparents in the audience.
- The local authority and the archdiocese have worked well together to shape the future direction of this school. They have refused to be deflected by obstacles to improvement that seemed, at times, almost insuperable. Their enduring commitment to the pupils of the school, and the community it serves, has been a crucial factor in turning the school around.
- The Liverpool Learning Partnership, a consortium of local schools, last year provided indispensable financial assistance, enabling school leaders to develop the enchanting new outdoor space that children in the early years can now explore and enjoy.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The governing body, relatively new at the time of the previous inspection, has been relentless in its drive to turn the school around. Governors are loyal, dedicated and unflinching: they have been immeasurably instrumental in getting this school back on its feet.
  - The Chair of the Governing Body has left no stone unturned in his unremitting routing of poor performance. He has never swerved from taking tough decisions when they were in the pupils' best interest.
  - Governors take their responsibilities seriously and are actively involved in the life of the school. The parish priest, who also serves on the governing body, makes a strong contribution to the spiritual and moral dimensions of pupils' education, leading thought-provoking assemblies that encourage pupils to reflect on a wide range of issues.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Safeguarding and promoting pupils' well-being are very much at the heart of the school's work. All procedures and systems are robust. Staff training in safeguarding is comprehensive and regularly updated. As a result, the school provides a safe haven for all pupils, including those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## requires improvement

- The overall quality of teaching is not consistently good. Inadequate teaching has been eradicated, but there remains a substantial proportion of teaching that requires further improvement.
- School leaders have challenged underperformance relentlessly and the large majority of staff in post at the time of the previous inspection have left. As a result, most teachers currently in the school are new to the profession.
- The vast majority of teachers are enthusiastic, knowledgeable and keen to learn. They have injected dynamism into lessons and, as a result, according to parents spoken to during the inspection, pupils enjoy school more. Nevertheless, sometimes teachers' relative inexperience leads them to misjudge how to pitch a lesson; as a consequence, some pupils find the work too difficult and others too easy.
- School leaders acknowledge that teachers' skills require further development. A coaching programme has been introduced to support staff, and new teachers have also had the opportunity to attend training with other teachers in the North Liverpool Teaching School Partnership family of schools. There are early signs that this training has started to have a beneficial impact.
- The teaching of subjects other than English and mathematics is not always of good quality, and pupils' knowledge of other faiths lacks depth. The teaching of Spanish has been neglected over time and, as a result, some pupils spoken to during the inspection thought that they were not being taught this subject any more.
- Marking often has little impact on improving pupils' work. Too much marking does not pick up on the mistakes that pupils have made, leading to them making repeated errors. Marking in English and mathematics is more rigorous than in other subjects; however, pupils receive mixed messages regarding the importance of writing grammatically and spelling words correctly, because errors are not always picked up on in their topic books.
- Teachers' expectations of how pupils present their work are not high enough. As a result, pupils do not always demonstrate the same pride in their presentation that they show in other aspects of school life.
- Systems to check up on the quality of teachers' assessments are robust. Teachers work in partnership with a number of teachers across other schools to verify that these assessments are accurate. School leaders have encouraged all teachers to set their sights high, and pupils are set demanding targets.

- Some teaching is of good quality; in such instances, lessons are characterised by high expectations and delivered with confidence and expertise. For example, in one Year 4 lesson on suffixes, observed during the inspection, pupils listened carefully to the teacher as she asked them to identify the root of such words as 'confession'. Pupils eagerly tried to attract the teacher's attention, waving their white boards, to show her they had the correct answer. In this lesson, intellectual challenge and pupils' attendant thirst for learning were palpable.
- All teaching assistants, bar one, that were in post at the time of the previous inspection have left the school. They have been replaced with an enthusiastic team who are eager to give of their best. At present, their deployment is not as effective as it might be as they require further training. School leaders have plans in place to sort this out in the very near future.
- The school's partnership with Hope University has been influential in increasing expectations and the level of challenge in lessons. For example, during the inspection, trainee teachers and class teachers were observed teaching pupils about electricity and simple circuits. Pupils were utterly captivated and eagerly set about applying this knowledge; they proudly showed inspectors the charming, twinkling Christmas decorations they had made and could explain exactly how a circuit works.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare **is good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupil's personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils that we spoke to during the inspection said that they feel safe in school. This positive opinion is echoed by parents who responded to the school's parental questionnaire, which was designed to explore their views. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in the outside world through the curriculum and a well constructed programme of assemblies that deals with many social issues, such as racism, and dangers that pupils may come across, such as when using the internet or mobile phones.
- School leaders have created a happy school where the individual is cherished. Pupils spoken to during the inspection say that they enjoy coming to school. During the inspection, it was a delight to see pupils rushing into school, clutching their books and bags, beaming and keen to learn.
- Pupils spoken to said that bullying of any description is rare and that when it happens it gets sorted out by their teachers. Derogatory language of any description, including that of a racist or homophobic nature is totally frowned upon.
- The school has productive links with many outside agencies, such as the police and the fire service. Representatives of these bodies come into school regularly and give talks to pupils to alert them to possible risks; in this way, good relationships are fostered and pupils are also encouraged to become law-abiding citizens.
- There has been considerable change to the learning environment since the previous inspection. The learning mentor is a talented artist; she has created entrancing, intriguing displays all around the school that stimulate the imagination and delight the eye. These displays also encourage a love for the written word: the portrayal of the wardrobe door from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis positively invites pupils to take a peek and excites their curiosity.
- Pupils respect their surroundings and the school is scrupulously clean. There is not a scrap of litter to be seen and no graffiti anywhere.
- Older pupils make a positive contribution to the life of the school, acting as counsellors and reading buddies to the younger ones. Pupils enjoy the weekly rewards for good behaviour and they spoke very highly of the many clubs they can join that contribute well to their personal, social and physical development.
- Although pupils learn about other faiths, this is in a somewhat tokenistic fashion. Pupils do not get sufficient opportunities to visit places of worship for other religions or meet people from different cultural backgrounds. As a result, their appreciation of the diversity of life is rather limited.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils show commitment to their school and its values, expressed in the mission statement: 'Love, live, learn'. They are kind to each other and show respect to their teachers and visitors to the school.
- Pupils move around the school in a calm and orderly fashion. They wear their uniform with pride and

have good manners, for example, by opening doors for others and sharing equipment sensibly in lessons.

- Attendance has improved over time and is now broadly average. The vast majority of pupils attend well and arrive punctually each morning, ready and willing to learn.
- However, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is still too high. This is because a very small minority of families do not take their responsibilities seriously enough regarding getting their children to school regularly and on time. Furthermore, school leaders have sometimes been reluctant to use all the powers at their disposal to sort this out.
- The number of exclusions and detentions has reduced substantially over recent months. The vast majority of pupils abide by the school's rules. This is because they understand very clearly what will happen if they do not do so, appreciate the rewards they can get for good behaviour and, because the teaching is more engaging, they are less tempted to behave badly in the first place.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good for the most part. They concentrate well in lessons and they want to do well. Pupils' good behaviour is a strong contributory factor to improving rates of progress across the school.
- On rare occasions, a little low-level disruption occurs when the teaching is not pitched appropriately. Teachers generally handle such instances in a calm and measured manner and the overwhelming majority of pupils respond very positively to teachers' instructions.

## Outcomes for pupils

## require improvement

- In 2013, across the school, the progress that pupils had made during their time at Our Lady and St Swithin's was inadequate and their attainment was well below the national average. This is no longer the case and standards are improving swiftly.
- In Key Stage 1, there has been an improvement in all key performance indicators. In 2015, pupils' attainment in mathematics was broadly in line with the national average. Pupils in Key Stage 1 did exceptionally well in the phonics check, which assesses their understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds. However, their attainment in reading and writing, although improving, is still below the national average.
- In Key Stage 2, an improving trajectory has been firmly established. In 2015, pupils at the end of Year 6 achieved standards only very slightly below the national average across the board. Over time there has been a strong improvement in attainment in mathematics, reading and pupils' grasp of grammar, punctuation and spelling. Overall, in 2015, most groups of pupils in Key Stage 2 made reasonable progress in mathematics and reading.
- According to information provided by the school during the inspection, standards are improving quickly across the school, particularly in reading and mathematics. School leaders have made every effort to check that this information is robust, particularly by working with teachers in local schools in order to get a second opinion and thereby verify the accuracy of assessment. Work seen in pupils' books, and their progress as observed in lessons during the inspection, provided strong evidence to support school leaders' view that progress across the school is improving.
- Despite improvements in mathematics and reading, improvements in writing remain elusive. Pupils' writing in subjects other than English is weak and pupils' written answers to questions sometimes lack depth. Although reading is promoted well throughout the school and through visits from celebrated authors, such as Frank Cottrell Boyce, there is little evidence of well-executed, extended writing by pupils.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils is mixed but better overall than at the time of the previous inspection. In 2015, disadvantaged pupils in Key Stage 1 achieved higher standards than other pupils nationally in the phonics test. The progress made by disadvantaged pupils in Key Stage 2 in 2014 had risen from significantly below the national average in 2013 to broadly average.
- Gaps between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school are still too wide but they are closing when compared with other pupils nationally. In 2015, disadvantaged pupils were two terms behind others nationally in mathematics and writing but less than a term behind in reading. According to information provided by the school during the inspection, in-school gaps are closing: disadvantaged pupils are now catching up quickly and in some instances are out-performing their classmates.
- In 2015, the most-able pupils in Year 6 made good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, inspection evidence suggests that the progress of this group of pupils currently in the school varies considerably, depending on the quality of teaching they receive. In general, they make good progress when lessons are demanding and intriguing. For example, in one Year 2 phonics session

observed during the inspection, a six-year-old pupil confidently used the term 'split digraph' to explain how a certain word was spelt. It was clear from the other pupils' reaction that such discourse about language was typical.

- The growing proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language make reasonable progress as they move up through the school, often catching up with their classmates and sometimes out-performing them in mathematics. The employment of a teaching assistant who speaks Polish has been helpful in building bridges between home and school for some families.
- The progress of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities is not good. This area of the school's work has been poorly led in the past. Pupils were often identified wrongly as having special educational needs and very little effective action was taken to improve these pupils' progress. Much improved leadership is now in place and this is starting to show the early signs of impact.

## Early years provision

**is good**

- Early years provision has gone from strength to strength since the previous inspection. This is because this area of the school's work is led with vision, passion and expertise. Every opportunity is taken to enrich children's lives and develop their skills through enticing activities that they enjoy immensely.
- The majority of children, an increasing proportion of whom speak English as an additional language, start in the Nursery with knowledge and skills that are below those typically expected, with particular weaknesses in early reading, writing and numeracy skills.
- Children make good progress in Nursery and Reception from their individual starting points because of the consistently good teaching and support they receive. However, in 2015, too many children had not reached the acceptable standard when they started Year 1, largely because they had so much ground to make up when they joined Nursery. Additional funding has been used effectively to reduce the gaps between disadvantaged children and their peers. As a result, the school predicts better outcomes for all children in 2016 and inspection evidence supports this point of view.
- Teachers and teaching assistants plan an interesting range of well resourced activities that effectively meet children's individual needs and interests, stimulating their curiosity about the world. For example, during the inspection, the teacher used a programme on the interactive whiteboard to teach children the names of the bones in the human body. The excitement was practically tangible as the children jumped about and sang in time to the music, laughing with each other as the skeleton danced across the screen.
- Children quickly settle in to the attractive environment that is designed to exploit, at every turn, opportunities to reinforce early learning. A healthy balance is struck between caring for the emotional needs of children and ensuring they make gains in their learning.
- Staff develop children's personal, emotional and social skills well. As a result, children play happily with their friends, willingly taking turns and sharing their toys. Children are taught effectively to take on responsibilities, for example, by choosing their own resources for activities and clearing up after themselves when they have finished.
- Most children show good levels of concentration on the tasks in hand and are keen to learn new things. As a result, their behaviour is impeccable and they follow their teachers' instructions to the letter.
- The 'language-rich' environment supports the development of children's reading and writing skills well. The use of writing for a purpose is helpful in linking activities with the outside world; children clearly enjoyed writing Christmas cards to their friends or compiling lists of presents they would like to receive.
- The much improved outdoor space provides excellent opportunities for children to explore the natural environment, for example by planting spring bulbs in the flower beds, digging in the sand or playing in the 'mud kitchen'. During the inspection, children were very excited at building a camp fire; they happily scrunched up paper to light it and literally licked their lips as they toasted marshmallows over the flames.
- Children's progress is carefully tracked and this information is used well to plan further activities. Teachers regularly share with parents information on how well their children are doing. Relationships with parents are harmonious and productive, leading to high levels of parental engagement with the school.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	104632
<b>Local authority</b>	Liverpool
<b>Inspection number</b>	10005419

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	232
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	John McCormack
<b>Executive Headteacher</b>	Jeremy Barnes
<b>Head of School</b>	Sandra Hamilton
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 546 3868
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.ourladyandstswithins.co.uk">www.ourladyandstswithins.co.uk</a>
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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	28 January 2014

## Information about this school

- Our Lady and St Swithin's is smaller than the average-sized primary school, but the number of pupils is rising.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are eligible for support through the pupil premium is almost twice the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support the educational achievement of pupils who are eligible for free school meals or those in the care of the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is increasing and almost double that at the time of the previous inspection.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or with disabilities is above the national average.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- Since the previous inspection, almost all the teaching staff, including teaching assistants, have left the school.
- There have been several changes to the leadership of the school since the previous inspection. In 2014, an executive headteacher was appointed, who was also headteacher of a local secondary school. The acting headteacher was appointed head of school. The previous executive headteacher has left the school and a further executive headteacher was appointed in 2015; he is headteacher of a local primary school.
- The school has links with the Liverpool Learning Partnership, the North Liverpool Teaching School Partnership, Hope University and Croxteth Community Primary School.
- The school runs a daily breakfast club.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6.



## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in every classroom. Inspectors also observed a Nativity performance by the Nursery class, an artist working with a small group of pupils, a coaching session with staff from Liverpool Football Club and a science session that was part of a project with Hope University, called the 'Hope Challenge'.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the head of school and members of the governing body, including parent governors. Inspectors also discussed the work of the school with staff in the school, pupils and representatives of the local authority and the archdiocese.
- At the time of the inspection, there were too few responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, but inspectors did consider the school's own survey of parents' views.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of documentation, including: information relating to pupils' attendance and behaviour records; a selection of school policies, particularly those relating to safeguarding; minutes of meetings of the governing body and information on pupils' current attainment and progress.
- We also looked at an extensive sample of pupils' work.

## Inspection team

Joan Bonenfant, Lead Inspector

Doreen Davenport

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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