

St Marie's Catholic Primary School

Bigdale Drive, Northwood, Kirkby L33 6XL

Inspection dates	18–19 May 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- In her unswerving determination to improve every aspect of pupils' learning, the headteacher has set high expectations for staff and for pupils.
- Staff have risen well to the demands placed upon them. The speed of improvement in the past year is impressive, especially in writing.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. As a result, pupils of all ages and abilities are making good progress.
- Staff have worked together really well to establish the new curriculum and assessment systems. All subjects are taught in sufficient depth to enable pupils to make good progress in them.
- School leaders have managed staff absences really well, particularly in the early years, minimising the impact they might have on pupils' learning.
- Staffing has been stabilised for the next school year, enabling the school to show it has strong capacity for further improvement.
- Leaders at all levels, including governors, have united to make sure that improvements are secure.
- Good management of the provision for children in the early years ensures that they get off to a good start and are prepared well for Year 1.
- What the school does to ensure pupils' welfare and well-being, and to help pupils develop strong personal skills, is outstanding. It permeates the whole curriculum.
- Pupils feel safe and they behave well. They want to come to school because they enjoy learning. They are eager to do well. Attendance is above average.
- Governors have made excellent use of an external review to sharpen their skills in holding the school to account. They now do this really well.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Despite now making good progress, boys still do not do as well as girls in writing.
- Staff in the early years do not always capitalise on opportunities to develop children's communication and language skills.
- Other than in writing, the quality of written feedback given to pupils about their learning does not always adhere to the school's marking policy, which asks teachers to give pupils precise guidance on what they need to improve and why.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- While continuing to support girls in making the best possible progress, help boys to make faster progress so that they can catch up by:
 - in the early years:
 - placing greater emphasis on improving children’s speech, language and communication skills
 - making sure that all adults talk to children and encourage children to talk to each other as much as possible so that they learn how to communicate better
 - finding ways to involve parents in helping their children to speak clearly and develop a good range of vocabulary
 - in the rest of the school:
 - encouraging boys in particular to make better use of the opportunities they have to talk with and learn from other pupils and staff, to organise their thoughts better before putting pen to paper.
- Make sure all staff adhere to the requirements set out in the school’s marking policy so that pupils have clear guidance in all subjects as to what they need to do to improve and why.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher is highly respected by staff and pupils, not least for the determined way in which she has accelerated the pace of improvement since her appointment. Her ambition is fired by a passion to help pupils do as well as they possibly can, regardless of background or ability. Staff and governors are fully behind her in all of this.
- Staff value the headteacher's clear leadership, saying it helps them to understand what is expected of them and how to become even better. Staff morale is high. Staff were unanimous in their view that the school is 'a lot better' than at the previous inspection. Some described it as 'unrecognisable'.
- Systems for managing staff performance are very robust. Targets set for staff reflect the school's priorities and areas for development are followed up rigorously through further monitoring and well-targeted training. The school's own evaluation of its effectiveness is accurate and well founded.
- Leaders who are responsible for particular phases or subjects (middle leaders) have embraced the headteacher's aspirational approach. All staff have had leadership training so that they understand their roles and responsibilities better, and have the skills to fulfil them well.
- Senior leaders, and those who lead English and mathematics, carry out regular checks to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. This has helped to secure a great deal of consistency, including among staff that are new to the school or to teaching. Leaders have rightly prioritised other subjects so that, over time, leadership in all of them will be of equally high quality.
- Consistency in the application of agreed systems and procedures is a recurrent theme throughout the school. It is evident in the approaches taken to managing behaviour and ensuring pupils' welfare and well-being, as well as in implementing assessment systems to gain accurate information about pupils' learning in the absence of national curriculum levels. There is, however, some inconsistency in how teachers apply the school's marking policy.
- Input from the local authority has strengthened the school's leadership capacity. Inspectors agree with the local authority's view that, under the present leadership and governance, the school has strong capacity to improve further.
- The school has engaged wholeheartedly with the new curriculum. Staff have planned it well to help pupils reach higher standards of literacy and numeracy. In doing so, they have not neglected other subjects. Expectations are equally high in all of them, including science and a modern foreign language.
- Threaded throughout the curriculum is a strong emphasis on teaching pupils about British values, including as part of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Visits and visitors extend pupils' experience and contribute effectively to their learning, personal and emotional development.
- Various activities in and beyond the normal school day encourage pupils to cooperate, work in teams, respect and listen to each other, and express their views and opinions openly and honestly. By working towards, for example, the Junior Achievement Award and the Mayor's Award, pupils begin to learn what it means to be part of a wider community. The various fund-raising events in which they participate also enhance this learning.
- The primary school sports funding has enabled the school to increase the range and variety of sports and exercise activities on offer to the pupils, and to help teachers teach physical education better. Leaders report that more pupils are taking part in sports activities than previously, and opportunities for competitive sport have been expanded.
- Pupil premium funding is used wisely to help disadvantaged pupils make good progress in their learning, and to enable them to take part in a wider range of activities than they might otherwise have.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Members of the governing board are wholly dedicated to the school and to continuing its journey of improvement. They are enthusiastic and well informed, and they have a realistic strategic view of the school's long-term development.
 - Governors bring to their roles a wide range of relevant experience and expertise, which they use exceedingly well to challenge school leaders on every aspect of school life. They fine-tune their skills by attending training and by visiting the school to check on the impact of their decisions.
 - Governors ensure that systems to manage the performance of staff, including the headteacher, are rigorous. They check that objectives match the needs of the school while supporting staff in their own development. They support the headteacher in making decisions about pay related to staff

performance, including when difficult decisions have to be taken due to continued underperformance.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. This school goes the extra mile to ensure pupils are safe and well cared for at school and, as far as possible, at home. Specially trained staff contribute in great measure to all of this, working closely with families and external agencies to do so.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The teaching of writing and of mathematics has improved significantly since the previous inspection. Teachers understand the increased demands of the new curriculum and they plan pupils' learning well so that pupils continue to use their reading, writing and mathematical skills in work in different subjects.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good. Skilful questioning, adapted to suit pupils' different abilities, probes pupils' thinking and deepens their understanding while correcting misconceptions and motivating pupils to find more out for themselves.
- Teachers take account of pupils' interests and pupils enjoy having a say in what they learn. For example, as they were exploring light in science, they wanted to know who invented the light bulb. This led to pupils undertaking research and writing a biography of Thomas Edison. Pupils often continue the work they do in class, at home, by themselves because they find it interesting or because a question has roused their curiosity and they want to find out more.
- Attractive displays in classrooms and around the school celebrate pupils' personal and academic achievements and visually capture different aspects of the learning process for the pupils. Thus, teachers ensure that pupils can see what they might aspire to in their own work.
- Up-to-date information displayed on 'working walls' keeps pupils focused on what they are learning in lessons, and reminds them how they can reach their targets. Pupils explain how all of this helps to clarify their learning and encourages them to become more independent.
- The teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) is good. Systems are well established. Each session builds on the previous one and staff introduce new sounds in a fun way that motivates pupils. Staff successfully encourage pupils to use their knowledge of phonics as they learn to read, write and spell.
- Teachers encourage pupils to become writers. They give writing a real context or purpose, be it a balanced argument about whether mobile phones should be allowed in school, or finding out about living conditions in the Amazonian rainforest. They help pupils build their writing skills systematically.
- Pupils receive good written feedback on their writing that helps them to improve it. All other work is also marked but the feedback there does not always adhere to the school's marking policy. It is not always precise enough to help pupils understand what they need to improve and why, including in mathematics.
- In mathematics, the strong emphasis on using mathematical skills to solve problems includes giving mathematics a context in which pupils can see its value in everyday life. Basic skills sessions are used particularly well to challenge pupils and close gaps in their learning.
- Teachers brief their teaching assistants well and use them to support different ability groups effectively at different times. The close working partnership between teaching and support staff is a major factor in the pupils' rapidly improving progress.
- Planning is very strong because teachers are clear about what constitutes good progress and about the different stages of learning as identified in the new curriculum. They assess pupils' work accurately and move learning on well in English, mathematics and science.
- Assessments are being set up systematically for other subjects, with history, geography and computing furthest ahead. All assessment information is used effectively to plan next steps in learning for groups and, where relevant, for individuals. Therefore, all pupils make good progress, from the least to the most able, disadvantaged or not.
- The school is mindful of its most-able pupils and ensures that they too make good progress. They are given harder work to do and often moved on to it sooner in whole-class sessions, while the teacher works with other pupils to break their learning down further.

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

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The school uses specifically trained staff exceedingly well to support pupils and their families. It works with them to overcome issues that affect pupils' learning and personal development, so that learning can get back on track as quickly as possible.
- Pupils speak with much enjoyment of school, and particularly the work they have to do. They take pride in their work and in their school, caring for the school environment and speaking very positively about how much the school has improved recently.
- Pupils have a settled start to their day, be it by attending the popular breakfast club or gathering with staff in the hall before proceeding to their classes each morning. They feel safe in school. Well-established routines ensure that they are safe and well cared for at all times.
- Displays in classrooms and around the school remind pupils how to use the internet and mobile phones safely and the importance of reporting anything untoward. Pupils have a good awareness of how to do these things and of how to keep themselves safe in and out of school.
- Pupils know what bullying is and what to do should they experience or know of any. They display a high degree of trust in adults to help them in such situations saying, for example, 'Things do happen quickly if (any type of behaviour) goes wrong'.
- The warm, inclusive relationships throughout the school mean that all pupils are equally valued. Pupils learn to be reflective and caring, to accept others, and to develop a strong sense of right and wrong as they learn about British values and the benefits of living in a democratic society. They also learn about the dangers associated with any form of extremism.
- The use of sports coaches to work with pupils on some days at breakfast club or at lunchtime is raising pupils' awareness of the importance of keeping themselves fit and healthy. It also contributes to their enjoyment of school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The school can pinpoint a good number of pupils whose behaviour has improved significantly over time. Staff manage pupils' behaviour well at all times and pupils respond quickly when they are called to order, for whatever reason.
- Pupils' self-discipline is improving. Pupils understand how the choices they make can affect them and others, and why rules are necessary to enable the school and, ultimately, society, to function well.
- Attendance is above average because pupils want to come to school. They are eager to learn and want to do well. The school follows up all absences rigorously and pupils are highly motivated by the range of awards that encourage their good attendance.
- Play and lunchtimes are happy, social occasions where pupils eat and chat together and, mostly, play amicably in the playground. Supervisors lead younger children in safe, well-organised play. There is little equipment for older pupils and this sometimes leads, for example, to over-boisterous games of tag. Any untoward behaviour at these times is dealt with swiftly and effectively.
- Pupils acknowledge that there is sometimes some unkindness in the way they relate to each other that occasionally increases to become bullying.

Outcomes for pupils **are good**

- Pupils' books show that, from low starting points in terms of language and communication, all pupils are now making good progress. Progress in reading, writing and mathematics gathered momentum as the year went on and pupils got better at using these skills in different subjects.
- Pupils are also making good progress in other subjects, most notably science, history and geography, and those in Years 2 to 6 benefit from learning to speak Spanish. Overall, standards are rising and most pupils are now on track to reach the expectations for their age. The quality and range of work across all subjects ensure that pupils are being prepared well for secondary school.
- Younger pupils have a good knowledge of phonics, which they use well to help them read. They work in small groups, specific to their stage of development. Consistency in the range of activities across all groups ensures that, as they move to a harder group, pupils hear the same language but at a higher level

that demands more of them.

- Pupils mostly read fluently, using an appropriate range of strategies to help them read new words or understand what they are reading. The morning sessions, when the whole class reads at the same time, are helping to develop good reading habits, especially among pupils who do not read at home.
- Impressive improvements in the quality and range of pupils' writing, including their handwriting, mean that some pupils have caught up by as much as two years since last July. By Year 6, all written work is neat and legible and grammar, punctuation and spelling are usually accurate.
- Pupils make good use of the displays and writing walls that provide them with many excellent examples of what constitutes good writing in different year groups. They are especially eager to obtain their 'pen licences', which they get when they can show that they write neatly and legibly, in cursive style (joined-up writing) at all times.
- Although boys have made good and sometimes outstanding progress in writing this year, they still do not do as well as girls. Boys do not always think things through sufficiently, or make best use of the time given to them to talk and marshal their thoughts before they write. They then rush their work and make mistakes that, from speaking to them, it is clear they could have avoided.
- Improvements in pupils' ability to calculate and to use their mathematical skills to solve problems have brought about much improvement in mathematics, including for girls. Pupils readily explain their learning. Opportunities such as those that challenge them to make up mathematical problems themselves ensure that they deepen their understanding and begin to develop mastery in the subject.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability make good progress. This is because their work is modified to suit their stage of learning. It is also kept under close review so that they can be given additional support if they are still struggling, or moved on quicker if they have achieved their targets.
- The good progress that disadvantaged pupils are now making means that the gaps between them and other pupils in the school and nationally are closing. Last year, they did better than other pupils in the grammar, punctuation and spelling tests, and the gap between their attainment and that of other pupils nationally was narrower than in most schools.
- Outcomes for the most able pupils are improving. Very few pupils who took the end of key stage 2 tests in 2015 had left key stage 1 with above-average attainment, but those who had done so, and were therefore defined as most able, made expected progress in key stage 2. An above-average proportion of pupils achieved highly in spelling, punctuation and grammar at the end of key stage 2 in 2015. Inspection evidence indicates that pupils are now securing higher standards across a range of subjects from their respective starting points. The most able pupils are benefiting from additional challenge to spur on their learning.

Early years provision

is good

- Good management and effective temporary leadership, together with support from an outstanding school, have ensured that, despite staff absences, children have continued to make good progress in Nursery and Reception.
- Early indications from moderated assessments are that the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is higher this year than in the past, and children have done better in reading, writing and mathematics. This is borne out by what was seen in their books.
- Staff plan the children's work well, mindful of their different ages and stages of learning, and the considerably weak language, communication and mathematical skills with which they start school. Prompts for learning are adjusted to suit the children's level of understanding and there is a good degree of clarity about what learning is expected in each activity, indoors and out.
- Early reading and writing skills are taught well. Children quickly learn to read and to use their phonics when reading and spelling. They use joined-up writing well as they begin to write stories, using capital letters and full stops.
- Children begin to write numerals accurately and to record simple number sentences as they learn to count, add and subtract. They enjoy making up their own challenges in mathematics. Through doing so, they demonstrate their increasing understanding of basic mathematical concepts.
- Staff assess pupils' learning throughout each session, collate the information and use it to plan next steps for different groups or individuals as necessary. They take account of what the children say as they learn and use it to move their learning on.
- At times, adults miss opportunities to encourage children to talk more to develop their speech and

language skills. This was noted at snack time, and it also happens occasionally in lessons, when adults do not interact enough with children to encourage them to speak clearly, develop their thinking and extend their vocabulary.

- Parents report that their children are safe and well looked after and they are right. The school is vigilant in ensuring the children's welfare and well-being. Staff work closely with external agencies where necessary to support children and their families.
- An increasing number of parents are becoming involved in 'stay and play' sessions. At these times, staff miss opportunities to engage parents in their children's learning by, for example, showing them how they can help their children at home, to read, speak and communicate clearly.

School details

Unique reference number	104446
Local authority	Knowsley
Inspection number	10012085

This inspection 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	285
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Finton O'Driscoll
Headteacher	Sheelagh O'Keefe
Telephone number	0151 477 8480
Website	www.stmariescps.co.uk
Email address	stmaries@knowsley.gov.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 April 2014

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school. Children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 are taught in mixed-age classes. Nursery children and pupils in Years 3 to 6 are taught in single-age classes.
- Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for disadvantaged pupils) is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The proportion of pupils joining or leaving the school at different times is well above that found in most schools. Some of these pupils join, leave and then re-join the school due to allocations of housing in the area.
- The school runs a breakfast club from 8am each day.
- There has been a high turnover of staff in the past two years, including at senior management level. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2015, after a short spell as acting headteacher. A new deputy headteacher was appointed in March 2016, after a short spell as acting deputy headteacher.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in parts of 25 sessions. Seven visits were made jointly with the headteacher. Inspectors also analysed the work in the books of all groups of pupils currently in the school, as well as the school's most recent information about pupils' progress.
- Inspectors listened to pupils in Year 1 and Year 5 read, and sampled sessions where staff were teaching phonics.
- Discussions were held with key leaders, six members of the governing board and representatives from the local authority and the diocese to gain their views of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils, formally and informally. They also took account of the 19 responses to the online questionnaire for pupils.
- A range of documents relating to school improvement were examined, along with policies and procedures relating to teaching, safeguarding pupils, and provision for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs or disability.
- Inspectors gained the views of a number of parents at first hand as they brought their children to school. There were too few responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) for an analysis, so inspectors examined the outcomes of the questionnaire parents had completed for the school in March 2016.
- Inspectors spoke to staff and took account of the views of the 13 members of staff who completed Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

Doris Bell, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Ann Gill	Ofsted Inspector
Michelle Beard	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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