

St John's Roman Catholic Primary School

Ann Street, Rochdale, Lancashire OL11 1EZ

Inspection dates	6–7 July 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
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

- The headteacher and other senior leaders provide ambitious and determined leadership.
- Pupils, staff and parents and carers are proud of their school.
- Children get off to a flying start in the early years. They make good progress and are well prepared for Year 1.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Teachers plan lessons that engage and enthuse pupils. Pupils take great pride in their work.
- This is a harmonious school. Pupils from different faiths and backgrounds get on exceptionally well together.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe is highly effective.
- The school takes excellent care of its most vulnerable pupils and their families.
- Almost all groups of pupils achieve well, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who speak English as an additional language and those who are disadvantaged.
- When pupils leave the school at the end of Year 6, they are well prepared for secondary school, with standards above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Pupils show respect for different cultures and traditions, learn about the history of our country and know how to be good citizens.
- Leaders provide excellent support and training for teachers, particularly those in the early stages of their careers, and teaching assistants.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The governing body has not been swift enough to tackle the priorities identified in the external review of governance.
- The most able pupils in key stages 1 and 2 do not achieve the very high standards they should.
- Not all pupils have developed a passion for reading.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the rate at which the governing body is tackling the priorities for improvement identified following the external review of governance.
- Ensure that teachers set work that is challenging enough to enable the most able pupils to make the progress needed to achieve high standards, particularly in reading and writing.
- Build on the work already done by leaders to ignite a passion for reading in pupils across the school, so that pupils gain as much pleasure in reading outside the classroom as in it.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher and other senior leaders are determined to provide the best possible education for the pupils in their school. They have worked tirelessly to improve all aspects of the school's performance. Governors, staff, parents and pupils recognise the significant improvements made since the headteacher's appointment.
- The headteacher knows his school very well. Together with other senior leaders, he frequently reviews the quality of teaching, looks at pupils' work in books, talks with staff and pupils and checks assessment information, so that he has an accurate view of how well pupils are doing across the school.
- Leaders use the comprehensive information they have about all aspects of the school's performance to make sure the actions they put in place are making a positive difference. Their judicious use of support from external specialists has built the capacity of the leadership team so that they have been able to accelerate the progress of their improvement plans.
- The headteacher, supported by the governing body, has not shied away from challenging underperformance among teachers. The headteacher has clearly communicated his high expectations for pupils' behaviour, attendance and learning. Together with the senior leaders, he has worked alongside teachers, particularly those in the early stages of their careers, to secure consistently high standards across the school. As a result, pupils' achievement is now securely good.
- Staff recognise the positive difference that frequent training is making to their day-to-day working. Senior leaders have made sure that everyone has the skills and knowledge to do their jobs well. The support given to the recently appointed middle leaders, all of whom are in the early stages of their careers, has made sure that they understand their roles and responsibilities well. As a result, they are starting to make a noticeable difference to the quality of teaching in subjects across the curriculum.
- Leaders and governors ensure that performance management processes are rigorous and robust. Staff value the opportunity for professional dialogue with leaders and find the process has a positive impact on their effectiveness in their roles. Moreover, the governing body ensures recruitment procedures are thorough, ensuring recently appointed staff have the skills and qualities which make them a 'good fit' for St John's.
- Leaders are making effective use of the additional funding for primary physical education and sport. Pupils participate in a wide range of sports including football, rounders and golf. The sports leader's infectious enthusiasm encourages pupils to adopt a more active lifestyle and many take part in extra-curricular sporting activities, including the 'Change4Life' club, which helps pupils learn about healthier lifestyles. Many pupils have represented the school in inter-school competitions and the school has supported the most able pupils so they can join external clubs to hone their skills. The school has been awarded the Kitemark Gold Award for physical education.
- Leaders use pupil premium funding to great effect, ensuring that disadvantaged pupils are well supported to achieve their full potential. Close tracking of the performance of this group throughout the school means that leaders are able swiftly to put in place actions to support any pupil falling behind. Throughout the school, disadvantaged pupils are making strong progress from their different starting points, so that they are catching up with their peers.
- The school has crafted a curriculum which is broad, balanced and tailored to the needs of the pupils. Teachers plan a range of well-considered out-of-school trips, visitors to the school and activities to help prepare pupils for their learning. For example, some pupils visited a castle before studying a cross-curricular project based on the story of King Arthur. This visit gave pupils a wealth of ideas to incorporate in their writing as well as a good understanding about how people lived in the Middle Ages.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education well. Pupils work and play harmoniously together, respecting each other's different religions and cultures. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Pupils are confident to share their ideas to improve the school, apply for positions of responsibility such as 'Leaders', support the development of computing, and make sure their school delivers on its pledge to recycle. Pupils are well informed about how our country is run.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors are passionate about the school. The governing body has ensured that governors are more skilled in understanding the school's performance data and this is helping them to ask questions of senior leaders. However, too much of the work of the governing body is done by a minority of governors and this limits their overall effectiveness.

- The governing body’s determination to appoint the ‘right’ headteacher was not diminished despite advertising the post several times. They fully support the headteacher and other senior leaders, appreciating the significant impact leaders have had on the school’s performance.
- Governors put together an action plan, using findings from the external review of governance, following the previous inspection. While the governing body has made some inroads into the priorities for improvement, too many actions in this plan have not been fully implemented. This is now limiting the positive impact that the governing body is having on the school’s performance.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school’s culture of vigilance, strong partnerships with external agencies and robust record-keeping all help to make sure pupils are kept safe. The school’s investment in training for all staff means that staff are aware of their wider responsibilities to keep pupils safe and the specific local issues that pose a greater risk to the pupils at St John’s. The school works in partnership with external partners to provide a range of training for pupils about keeping themselves safe from harm. Parents, staff and pupils are unanimous in their agreement that pupils are safe and well cared for. The school takes particularly good care of its most vulnerable pupils, providing practical support to families when needed.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Leaders have had a relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment since the previous inspection. They have ensured that teachers and support staff know exactly what is expected of them in the classroom. Pupils say that their work is interesting, fun and challenging.
- Pupils enjoy their learning. Classrooms are calm and purposeful learning environments. Pupils use the wealth of hints and tips displayed on the walls well to help them with their work. Teachers ensure that appropriate equipment is made available to help pupils with their work and pupils are taught how to use it well. This means that most pupils are working within the curriculum for their year group, which particularly benefits pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils who speak English as an additional language, as well as less-able pupils.
- New approaches to assessment are thorough. They are well understood and used to good effect by leaders, staff and pupils. Assessment has been built around pupils working towards and then securing understanding and knowledge. This has ensured that more pupils are now working at age-related expectations. Leaders have further refined assessment so that expectations for the most able pupils are raised.
- Teaching staff have received the training needed to meet the high standards now expected. Leaders have ‘rolled their sleeves up’, working alongside teachers to develop teachers’ skills further so that standards are consistently high across the school.
- Teachers use what they know about pupils’ knowledge and skills to plan lessons that motivate and challenge them. Teachers’ familiarity with the curriculum requirements and sound subject knowledge mean that they make good use of lesson time.
- Teachers and support staff use questioning skilfully to check pupils’ understanding and deepen their learning. For example, during the inspection the teacher made sure that pupils in Year 6 understood the meaning of an unfamiliar word in their class text and checked they knew how to use it appropriately in their own speech and writing.
- In many mathematics lessons, pupils are given the opportunity to consolidate and extend their learning through reasoning and problem-solving activities. Pupils in Year 2 were solving mathematical problems linked to their topic on boats, which required them to practise a range of skills. These included comparing and ordering the heights of masts to work out the difference between the tallest and shortest. Pupils responded well to choosing which level of difficulty they wanted to work at for each challenge, most opting for the harder problems. At the end of the lesson, pupils were reluctant to leave before they solved the final challenge. The resilience and perseverance shown by these pupils is replicated across the school, helping pupils to make good progress.
- Teachers keep a close eye on pupils’ learning. They regularly check pupils’ understanding during lessons as well as using marking to pick up on any misconceptions and errors. Pupils find their teachers’ marking and feedback helpful. They enjoy grappling with the challenging questions set by their teachers when they have met their learning objectives.

- Teachers take every opportunity to celebrate pupils' success. This is making a positive difference to pupils' self-confidence. Pupils are willing to 'have a go', knowing that their peers and teachers will celebrate their efforts. Pupils' best writing is displayed around the school, and their achievements are reported in the school's newsletter and through frequent updates on Twitter. The good relationships teachers have developed with pupils are making a positive difference to the quality of their work.
- Pupils, particularly the most able, are not given enough opportunities to edit and redraft their work so that they increase their mastery of language. Too often teachers' marking and feedback does not demand enough of these pupils. As a result, the most able pupils are making slower progress than their peers and too few are exceeding age-related expectations, particularly in reading and writing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The school is a harmonious community with its Catholic mission at its heart. Pupils, irrespective of religion and race, get on well together. They wear their uniforms with pride, treat adults and each other with respect and try their best.
- Pupils feel safe and well cared for. As one pupil said, 'The headteacher looks after everyone. He makes sure we are all happy.' Pupils are confident that, on the very rare occasions when pupils call each other names, staff will take swift and decisive action.
- The school supports its most vulnerable pupils and their families exceptionally well. The work of the member of staff leading on inclusion is highly regarded by pupils and parents alike. She works in partnership with external agencies to make sure that pupils and their families receive the specialist support they need. Teachers and teaching assistants are highly skilled in supporting pupils who find it harder to manage their own behaviour so that these pupils quickly develop the skills to help them be more successful in school.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe. The school works well with other agencies to make sure pupils know about the different risks they face, including those more prevalent in the local area, and how to deal with these. Pupils say that any rare incidents of bullying are sorted out quickly and effectively by staff.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is extremely strong. Pupils enjoy taking part in a wealth of activities: sporting, musical, cultural and artistic. The regular trips and visits make a positive contribution to pupils' learning. The pupils who make up the 'growing in faith team' make sure that everyone, whatever their personal faith, is able to take part in the spiritual life of the school; for example the dedicated outdoor and indoor prayer spaces are used by staff and pupils from a number of different religions. Pupils were keen to take part in the talent show which took place during the inspectors' visit. Pupils enthusiastically supported each other, enjoying the range of performances during the afternoon.
- Pupils keenly support a range of charities. Following a visit from the director of Project Harar Ethiopia, pupils have raised money through cake and book sales to support children who have disabilities so that they may access medical care.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- The school is calm and orderly. Pupils, parents and staff have all noticed the improvements in behaviour since the new headteacher has taken up post. Pupils' behaviour, both inside and outside the classrooms, is a significant strength and contributes well to the good progress pupils are now making. Pupils take responsibility for their own and others' behaviour. They quickly respond to their teachers' instructions, take good care of their books and resources, and are always willing to lend a hand.
- Staff are highly skilled in working with pupils with challenging behaviour. They ensure that pupils who misbehave are well supported to regulate their own behaviour more effectively. The school works in partnership with external agencies to make sure that these pupils receive the specialist support they need to become successful learners.
- Absence is followed up rigorously and attendance is given a high profile in school. As a result of the effective actions taken by school leaders, pupils' attendance in almost all classes is above the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- School information and inspection evidence show that pupils' attainment has improved throughout the school. Where there is national information, standards are at least in line with national averages. As a result, pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education by the end of Year 6.
- The school's own data confirms that outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 2 are above the national average. This data is at odds with recent test results in reading and mathematics. However, convincing evidence of the accuracy of the school's data, including pupils' work in books, results in practice tests and findings from external moderation, supports the school's judgements of the standards pupils are working at. The school has analysed the reasons for pupils' poor performance in these tests and leaders have put in place an action plan to ensure that the issues do not happen again.
- Pupils in key stage 1 get off to a good start. They make strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics so that, from their low starting points, current year groups have caught up and, in some cases, overtaken their peers nationally by the end of Year 2.
- Throughout the school, leaders' investment in improving the quality of teaching of writing is paying dividends. Teachers' strong subject knowledge, high expectations and frequent opportunities for pupils to practise their writing in a range of subjects are securing good progress in almost all year groups. The school's focus on improving pupils' knowledge and use of grammar, punctuation and spelling has made a positive difference to the accuracy of pupils' writing across subjects. There has been a marked improvement in pupils' handwriting, so that joined handwriting is now the norm for pupils in key stage 2. The overwhelming majority of pupils are working securely at age-related expectations and the legacy of underperformance in writing has almost been eliminated.
- Leaders have tackled the issues in mathematics raised at the previous inspection. They have put in place training to improve teachers' subject knowledge and skills in teaching mathematics. Teachers are now setting pupils more challenging work which is making them think hard. Pupils enjoy the problem-solving activities that are now a more frequent feature of their lessons. As a result, pupils are making better progress in mathematics and most pupils are performing at least in line with other pupils nationally.
- Accurate and timely identification of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is making a positive difference to the outcomes for this group. The teacher in charge of special educational needs and disabilities makes sure that support is well matched to pupils' needs. Leaders keep a close eye on the progress of this group of pupils. As a result, this group of pupils make faster progress than their classmates throughout the school, helping them to catch up quickly.
- Pupils from the wide range of different ethnic groups make good progress through the school. Black African pupils, who historically did less well than their peers, are now making faster progress so that they now attain at least as well as their peers and often better. The school's strong practice in working with pupils who speak English as an additional language means that this group also achieve well in comparison to their classmates.
- Although less-able and middle-ability pupils achieve well, the most able pupils are not doing as well as they should. Leaders acknowledge that their focus on ensuring that all pupils achieve age-related expectations has meant that they have not demanded enough of their most able pupils.
- Pupils' outcomes in reading have improved throughout the school. Good teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) means that almost all pupils meet the expected standard by the end of Year 1. Teachers' judicious choice of high-quality texts that engage and enthuse pupils means that pupils make good progress throughout the school. These are complemented by well-considered tasks to develop pupils' knowledge and skills to understand increasingly challenging writing. Too few pupils are passionate readers outside the classroom, however. Leaders have recognised this and already have made changes, including the development of a new school library and book areas in classrooms throughout the school.

Early years provision

is good

- Pupils get off to a flying start in the early years. Almost all pupils enter the early years with skills well below those typical for their age, particularly in communication and language. All children, including those new to English, make rapid progress from their different starting points so that the proportion of pupils who reach a good level of development by the end of Reception is in line with the national average.

- The highly skilled and experienced teacher in charge has worked hard since the previous inspection to improve outcomes for pupils in the early years. She has an accurate understanding of the department's strengths and weaknesses. The training she has put in place for all staff is making a positive difference for children. Teaching staff are now using the observations they make to extend and shape the learning of all children more effectively. This ensures that all groups of children make strong progress over the course of their time in the early years.
- Collaborative working between the Nursery and Reception classes has made sure that no time is wasted as children move up. Those children who have been in school since the beginning of the Nursery Year achieved well above the national average at the end of the Reception Year. These children are better prepared for their move to Year 1 than children in previous year groups.
- The additional funding provided to narrow gaps for disadvantaged pupils is well used. These children achieve standards in line with their classmates and above their peers nationally. Thorough assessments of children's knowledge and skills on entry help teachers put in place any additional support required to help these children to catch up quickly.
- Phonics is well taught. This year, most children achieved age-related expectations in reading at the end of the early years and a third of children exceeded age-related expectations.
- Learning is well resourced, with stimulating and imaginative environments both indoors and in the outdoor spaces. Children flourish in this setting. During the inspection, children made their own pizzas. They prepared their pizzas for the oven, washed and dried their utensils and tidied up the food preparation area, independent of adult support.
- Teaching staff have the highest expectations of children's behaviour and development. At lunchtime, when the children sit together to eat, they know exactly how they are expected to behave. They learn to use cutlery correctly, talk politely to their neighbours and remember to say 'please' and 'thank you'.
- The vigilance of staff keeps all the children safe. Robust risk assessment, policies and procedures are in place. Leaders ensure that staff are up to date with their training so they know their roles and responsibilities. Teaching staff make sure that children know how to keep themselves safe and healthy. The school meets statutory welfare requirements. As a result, parents are confident that their children are safe and well cared for.
- Teaching staff are particularly skilled in working with children who are learning English as an additional language. They successfully engage families in their children's learning through a bilingual reading programme which makes sure these pupils get off to a good start.
- Parents feel well informed about how well their children are getting on. Parents are encouraged to spend time with their children in the classrooms at the start of the day, attend frequent workshops to help them better support their child's learning at home and share their child's success at home through the online learning record.

School details

Unique reference number	105826
Local authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	10012165

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	277
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elizabeth Skilling
Headteacher	Michael Unsworth
Telephone number	01706 647195
Website	www.stjohnsrc.rochdale.sch.uk
Email address	admin@stjohnsrc.rochdale.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–4 June 2014

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- A new headteacher has been appointed since the previous inspection.
- Half of the pupils are of the Catholic faith. The school also welcomes pupils of other faiths, most of whom are Muslim.
- The large majority of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is well above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning, including jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, in all classrooms.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, other members of staff, members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the Diocese of Salford.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, school improvement planning, assessment information and reports on the quality of teaching.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils informally during the school day and observed them during playtime and lunch. They also met formally with two groups of pupils to talk about their learning, behaviour and safety. Inspectors made a note of the results of a survey of pupils' views conducted by the school.
- Inspectors heard a number of pupils read.
- Inspectors took note of displays around the school.
- A range of pupils' books was checked jointly with the headteacher and assistant headteacher.
- Inspectors spoke with a number of parents, considered the three responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and took note of the school's own survey results.
- Inspectors spoke with two groups of staff and also considered the 16 responses they received to the inspection questionnaire for school staff.

Inspection team

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