

St Nicholas's Catholic Primary School

Orthes Street, Liverpool, Merseyside L3 5XF

Inspection dates

13–14 September 2016

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- School leaders and governors do not provide clear strategic leadership.
- Leaders' plans to improve provision, including for disadvantaged pupils, lack precision and rigour.
- Governors' knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school is unclear. As a result, they have failed to challenge school leaders or hold them to account.
- Middle leaders have not been effective in developing teachers' skills and confidence in order to promote good teaching and learning in the full range of subjects.
- Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching mean that pupils make variable progress across a range of subjects. Teaching provides insufficient challenge, particularly for the most able.
- As a result of inconsistent teaching and progress, outcomes in reading and mathematics have declined. In 2016 they were low in comparison with provisional national figures at the end of key stage 2.
- The curriculum is poorly balanced with insufficient time given to the teaching of some subjects, which inhibits progress and does not prepare pupils well for secondary school.
- Provision is inadequate in the early years. A legacy of weak leadership has left behind an environment which currently does not support high-quality learning.
- Assessment of children's starting points and consequent progress has been inaccurate and unreliable in the early years.
- The large investment in staff training has not provided value for money as it has made little impact on improving classroom practice.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are well looked after, feel safe and are well supported by the pastoral staff.
- Pupils enjoy physical education and many are involved in physical activity and competitive sport.
- Most pupils are keen to learn. They show great respect to pupils of different cultures.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management at all levels by:
 - ensuring that school leaders have a well-informed strategic plan that provides clear direction for the school and will move it forward
 - strengthening governance so that governors carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively to enable the quality of provision throughout the school to be rapidly improved
 - developing effective middle leaders who can improve the curriculum, alongside teachers' subject knowledge and expertise, to enable them to teach across a range of subjects with increasing confidence
 - providing appropriate quality training for all staff, to improve their practice in order to raise standards, accelerate progress and provide challenge across a range of subjects, including reading, writing and mathematics
 - making sure that classroom monitoring is regular, rigorous and is used to improve the quality of teaching
 - making sure that additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is well managed and spent wisely to improve outcomes for these pupils, including those who are most able
 - managing the performance of teachers effectively and using this process to improve the quality of the workforce
 - ensuring that the school website meets statutory requirements and provides parents with regular and relevant information about the school and what their children are doing.
- Improve the effectiveness of early years provision by:
 - ensuring that the recently appointed staff are provided with appropriate induction and support so that they can fulfil their duties effectively
 - providing staff with access to high-quality training to develop their practice
 - improving assessment practice on entry to the school to ensure that children's progress can be tracked accurately and help to inform teachers' planning
 - ensuring that more activities create opportunities for children to develop reading, writing and numeracy skills in order that more children are ready for Year 1
 - improving the quality of the learning environment and resources available in order to stimulate children's curiosity and engagement
 - ensuring that all children have access to the full range of resources and activities in order to promote equality of opportunity and challenge stereotypical roles.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- In the last couple of years, improvement has lacked momentum because there has been a dearth of clear strategic leadership. Leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, have failed to secure sufficient improvement, including areas identified as needing improvement at the last inspection.
- There is a lack of clarity about school priorities. There is no development plan in place for this academic year. This is a particular concern in a school where many staff are new to the school, have new responsibilities or are teaching age groups that they have not previously taught.
- Strategic leadership lacks rigour. For example, staff in the early years have not been provided with adequate induction or support. Science, which last year was taught by one teacher throughout the school, is now being taught by class teachers but there has been no specific preparation for this change.
- The school website does not meet requirements and includes too much information which is out of date. For example, autumn term information for parents about the curriculum is not current and includes the names of teachers who are no longer at the school. All this is symptomatic of lax leadership.
- Procedures such as monitoring of teaching are in place but are not effective in improving quality. Leaders identify weaknesses but there is a lack of a clear strategy or approach on how to deal with them.
- There has been considerable investment in staff training but there is little evidence to show how this links with priorities or how it has improved outcomes. There is no doubting the good care and support pupils receive. However, little appears to have been done to increase challenge in lessons to ensure that pupils, especially the most able, are stretched academically.
- Use of the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is not sufficiently focused or prioritised. Actions are very general, too broad and not evaluated with any rigour.
- Sports funding has been used effectively to provide specialist teaching which has had an impact on raising the quality of provision, the popularity of the subject and training for class teachers. Increasing numbers of pupils are accessing after-school sports clubs and participating in competitive sport.
- Systems for checking the performance of staff are in place. However, they do not sufficiently take into account the effectiveness of teaching nor are they used well enough to inform individual training needs. Teachers' performance targets are not focused sharply enough on key priorities.
- The roles of middle leaders and subject leaders are not defined clearly enough with regard to improving provision in their area of responsibility. Some leaders, such as the early years coordinator, are new to the school and to post. There is too much focus on routine organisation rather than on specific approaches which will improve the quality of teaching and teachers' confidence.
- An attempt has been made to provide a broad curriculum. However, it is not well balanced. Too little time is allocated to teaching some subjects, such as history, geography, art and design and technology, in sufficient depth. Too often, teachers focus on improving the quality of pupils' writing at the expense of developing pupils'

knowledge, understanding and skills in subjects. As a result, pupils are not making good enough progress.

- Most parents are very appreciative of the help and support provided by the school for their children. They feel that they are kept well informed and up to date with school events using social media. However, parents raised some concerns about the teaching of reading and the level of challenge for pupils.
- The local authority arranged light touch monitoring and support for the school. This failed to challenge the school or identify weaknesses rigorously enough. The school has made regular use of the training opportunities and subject network meetings provided by the local authority.
- The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Governance of the school

- The governance of the school is ineffective. Governors lack clarity about the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They lack a clear understanding of what is being done to improve pupils' progress.
- Governors are very supportive but offer no challenge to school leaders. Meetings are taken up with policy reviews or receipt of information but there is very little evidence that governors challenge the information that is presented to them.
- The headteacher's reports are accepted at face value and the work of school leaders is not adequately monitored or evaluated. Governors have a limited understanding of how well different groups of pupils are progressing or whether the performance management of teachers is helping to raise standards.
- Governors do not carry out some of their statutory responsibilities. For example, some of the information on the school's website is out of date.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff are well briefed and fully aware of the procedures to follow should they have any concerns about the safety or care of pupils. The school works very effectively with local agencies to ensure that vulnerable children and their families are identified and supported.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because, over time, it has been inconsistent across classes and a range of subjects. This has not been helped by the recent high turnover of staff.
- Tracking systems in phonics are good and pupils are readily switched between groups according to their progress. However, approaches and confidence in delivery vary from session to session. For example, the lack of appropriate resources distracted lower-ability pupils in one class and made them restless. Middle-ability and higher-ability pupils are achieving relatively well. The new staff in the early years have not been sufficiently trained to teach phonics effectively.
- Handwriting is not improving as it should for all pupils, notably the least able, because insufficient emphasis is placed on expectations of presentation, correct joins and letter

size.

- In key stage 1, reading procedures do not have sufficient rigour to ensure that all pupils make rapid progress as they practise and try to improve their reading. Those who need to catch up are not given sufficient opportunity to do so.
- There is variability in the frequency with which home reading is followed up. The most able pupils read well. Those who speak English as an additional language often quickly master the English language and make rapid progress. Middle-ability and lower-ability pupils need lots of practice and not all pupils take books home. As one teacher admitted, 'it's the beginning of the school year so we are not organised yet.'
- Not all teaching is matched well enough to pupils' current knowledge and experience. For example, in history pupils were searching for 'Stone Age' artefacts in a sand tray. They were excited and the activity captured their interest. However, they were not in a position to classify their finds as, at this early stage in the topic, they did not have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the Stone Age to complete the given task effectively.
- Teaching is not yet good because different groups of pupils make differing progress. For example, in mathematics, appropriate challenge and support were provided for the most able pupils who were using their understanding of 'one thousandth' successfully to solve a variety of increasingly complex problems. However, the lower-ability pupils and some of the middle-ability pupils struggled because they did not understand the concept of tenths and hundredths.
- Teachers do not always have the subject knowledge or resources to teach the creative curriculum with confidence. Tasks set often occupy rather than challenge pupils and lack depth. There is a particular lack of challenge for the most able. For example, pupils were researching information about ancient Greece on electronic tablets. There was no clear rationale behind the search and pupils were merely transferring information from one source to another without much need to think or understand.
- Physical education is very popular among the pupils and reflects the good quality of the specialist teaching available. There has been an increasing uptake and involvement in sporting activities after school as well as in competitive sport.
- The quality of support provided by teaching assistants is variable. Some high-quality and appropriate support is provided, especially for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Other support is less effective, such as when pupils are discouraged from thinking for themselves and they become too dependent on an adult to provide the answers to questions that have been set.
- Pupils are very positive about the regular one-to-one feedback sessions to discuss their attendance, behaviour and progress, notably in their reading, writing and mathematics. They appreciate the guidance provided but this is not always carried through into their work, especially by the least able.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school is a caring community. Parents say that 'teachers go the extra mile to welcome new pupils and settle them into school'.

- Pupils enjoy school, feel safe and are happy to be a part of a multi-cultural family. There is a strong focus on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are highly considerate of each other. They oppose all forms of racism and are proud of their own heritage. The multi-cultural nature of the school is celebrated well and is acknowledged by parents.
- Pupils report that incidents of bullying are very rare and they are fully confident that teachers will tackle these should they arise.
- The culture of care is reflected in the very strong support provided by the pastoral team and SENCo (special educational needs coordinator). They know and understand pupils very well and special care is taken to keep vulnerable pupils safe. This includes tracking vulnerable pupils during the long two-month summer holiday and being vigilant about any forms of abuse, such as girls who may be vulnerable to female genital mutilation. A close eye is also kept on pupils who are persistently absent and for signs of possible radicalisation. Parents are particularly appreciative of the quality of the help and support offered, especially to those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Pupils feel safe and access to the school site is strictly controlled. Parents have no concerns about their children's safety, as reflected in responses to inspectors as well as through the school's own survey and through Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire). Pupils are regularly updated about how to stay safe online and there is further guidance for them and their parents on the school website.
- A programme of personal, social and health education was introduced into the curriculum last year but is not yet fully embedded in all classes. It is not monitored and there is little evidence to suggest that teaching is of a consistently good quality. Pupils identified that they would like more opportunities to discuss personal and social issues.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are articulate, inquisitive and well behaved in class. They are eager to learn and try hard to complete their set tasks. However, at times, some pupils, notably boys, do not sustain their attention. They can become disengaged, especially when they are not stimulated by the task or do not fully comprehend what they are expected to do.
- Behaviour is well managed. Pupils respond to the system of rewards and sanctions. They are very competitive in their desire to acquire electronic rewards.
- The vast majority of pupils value their education. Weak attendance has been an issue in the past but is improving and is currently close to the national average. Persistent absenteeism is decreasing and the school acknowledges that this improvement needs to continue, especially for disadvantaged and White British pupils. The school is employing a range of strategies to tackle attendance issues. These include moving summer holidays in line with university vacations, home visits and individual mentoring.

Outcomes for pupils

Require improvement

- From their individual starting points, pupils are making variable rates of progress in a range of subjects across the curriculum because of the inconsistencies which still exist in the quality of teaching. The acknowledged unreliability of some of the data on entry

into the school in the early years further clouds the picture, especially at key stage 1.

- The proportion of pupils in Year 1 reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check, although improving slowly, remains below the national average and reflects inconsistencies in teaching.
- As a result of inconsistent progress, there are variations in attainment which are reflected in the latest results. Outcomes at the end of key stage 2 in reading, mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling were well below the national average in 2016. This was a decline from a previously stronger picture.
- Pupils from minority ethnic groups make up three quarters of the school population, with the greater majority being at least bilingual. Approximately half of these need help with their English on entry into the school. Most learn the language very swiftly and they quickly catch up with their peers.
- Systems for tracking reading to enable pupils to make rapid progress are not yet fully in place. Middle-ability and lower-ability pupils, in particular, continue to make less progress than that of which they are capable. The most able pupils read with confidence and expression using inference to explain and predict. These pupils are more enthusiastic and many are well supported at home. By Year 6 they are, on the whole, confident readers.
- Pupils' writing in their books is of variable quality and reflects the inconsistencies across classes and subjects. Some is of a high standard, with the most able pupils, especially, writing play scripts and stories using a variety of vocabulary. In contrast, the work of middle-ability and lower-ability pupils is often poorly presented and is not of a sufficiently high standard. Pupils generally make expected rather than good progress.
- A similar pattern is emerging in mathematics, where the most able pupils clearly understand the key concepts and are able to apply these to more complex calculations in order to solve problems. Lower-ability pupils struggle to make sufficient progress to reach the expected standard because they do not understand the basics.
- Generally, disadvantaged pupils make better progress in key stage 2. However, differences between them and pupils nationally are not diminishing quickly enough, especially in writing and mathematics. Current information suggests that this has not improved and, in fact, has worsened, especially in reading. The small numbers of most-able disadvantaged pupils fail to make more than expected progress in their reading and writing.
- The most able pupils achieve the expected standard but few reach higher than expected standards. Their progress is inhibited by insufficient challenge. More challenge has been introduced recently in mathematics.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities progress well from their individual starting points. They benefit from good individual support both in lessons and in small group sessions.
- Progress in subjects other than English and mathematics is patchy and lacks depth. Pupils do not make the sustained progress in their knowledge, skills and understanding that they should in history and geography, for example, because topics are not covered in sufficient depth.

Early years provision

Inadequate

- Provision continues to be affected adversely by a lack of effective leadership and strategic planning. Over the last couple of years, there have been frequent changes of staff with a completely new team in place for the start of this academic year.
- Unfortunately, these new staff have been 'dropped in at the deep end' without appropriate induction or support. Despite their enthusiasm and some understanding of the enormity of the task that faces them, they are currently lacking clear direction and are struggling. As a result, there is a lack of rigour and challenge across all areas of provision. Additional funding has not been allocated effectively to improve the progress of disadvantaged children.
- Currently, children in the Nursery and Reception classes do not have access to a broad range of quality experiences to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding. Although improving slowly, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development remains well below the national average and they are not adequately prepared to start Year 1.
- The school acknowledges that assessment of children's starting points and consequent progress has been unreliable and was not based on secure observations of children's learning. As a result, there is a lack of understanding around the needs of the children, including those coming from the school's own Nursery. Information about the progress of different groups is inaccurate and unreliable.
- Inspectors observed a range of abilities on entry into the Nursery. Quite often children are very articulate and answer appropriately in sentences, can make their own choices and respond well to instructions. Others, with more limited English, may have initial difficulties but most learn quickly and soon are able to participate more fully.
- The surroundings do not support high-quality learning. There is a lack of stimulation to grab children's attention and inspire their enthusiasm to learn. Reading areas are poorly resourced with very limited reading materials. Outdoor provision, particularly in Reception, is limited in both space and resources and is not being used effectively.
- The learning environment is disorganised and, at times, chaotic with children off task, often moving from one activity to another with little purpose. Children are often unfocused and it is sometimes unclear what they are learning or how they are developing. At times there is some boisterous behaviour.
- Staff are not grasping opportunities sufficiently often to improve children's learning. There is also a lack of challenge. Too often limited or weak questioning does not support children's understanding and language development. In contrast, inspectors observed children in the mud kitchen exploring filling different vessels with different-sized spoons. An open question: 'let's see what happens' stimulated more creative interest and activity. This was the exception rather than the norm.
- Equality of opportunity is not being pursued with sufficient consideration. Adults do not challenge gender stereotypes in children's activities.
- Under difficult and unfamiliar circumstances, staff are trying hard to build positive relationships with children and their parents. Currently, children are cared for and looked after but not sufficiently stimulated to make the progress in their learning and development that they should. Parents welcome the fact that staff give feedback on

the day when they collect their children at home time.

School details

Unique reference number	104657
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	10000848

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	230
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Canon Anthony O'Brien
Headteacher	Vanessa Nice
Telephone number	0151 709 5532
Website	http://stnicholasliverpool.co.uk/
Email address	nicholas-ao@st-nicholas.liverpool.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–12 July 2012

Information about this school

- The school is slightly smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils entitled to additional support through the pupil premium is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is close to the national average. No pupils have a statement of educational need or an education, health and care plan.
- A minority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. Most pupils come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest groups come from the Middle East, the Far East and Eastern and Mediterranean Europe. Most pupils speak English as an additional language.
- High proportions of pupils leave or join the school at other than the usual times.

- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school does not meet the requirements on the publication of information about the most recent key stage 2 results, the current curriculum and the use and impact of the pupil premium grant on its website.
- Over the last two years there has been a significant turnover of staff.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes in the school. They looked at phonics teaching, listened to several groups of pupils read and observed pupils at break, lunchtime and around the school.
- On the first day, Her Majesty’s Inspector conducted two learning walks through the school, accompanied by a senior leader, looking at outcomes and engagement in lessons.
- Inspectors scrutinised and evaluated pupils’ work across a range of subjects, especially English, mathematics, and topic work, which included science, history and geography.
- A wide range of documentation was considered, including school policies, local authority reports, monitoring files on the quality of teaching, self-evaluation and procedures to safeguard pupils.
- Inspectors met with school leaders, staff, two governors and with two representatives from the local authority.
- Meetings were held with two groups of pupils to discuss their work, how safe they felt and what they thought about the school. Inspectors also talked to many other pupils during lessons and around the school.
- Nineteen responses to the online questionnaire ‘Parent View’, the school’s own parental survey and an email sent in by a parent were considered. Inspectors also talked briefly to a small number of parents who were bringing their children to school at the start of the second day. Her Majesty’s Inspector also talked to a group of four parents who requested to see him on day one of the inspection.
- There were 15 staff questionnaire responses, which were taken into account, as were several conversations with staff and support staff across the school.

Inspection team

Leszek Iwaskow, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Barbara Harrold	Ofsted Inspector
Louise Smith	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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