

St Nicholas's Catholic Primary School

Orthes Street, Liverpool, Merseyside L3 5XF

Inspection dates

30–31 January 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement. The development of the role of subject leaders in subjects other than English and mathematics is at an early stage.
- The quality of teaching is inconsistent between year groups and subjects. At times, the opportunities are limited for pupils, particularly the most able pupils, to develop their knowledge and understanding at greater depth.
- Not enough pupils, especially the most able, make the progress needed to allow them to attain the highest standards.
- Not enough children in the early years attain the standards expected by the end of the Reception Year.
- The management, analysis and sharing of assessment data are not strong enough. As a result, teachers do not make good use of assessment information to inform their planning of pupils' learning.
- Tracking systems, including those in the early years, are not fully embedded. They do not allow leaders to check easily the progress that children make from when they start school.
- Parents and carers have limited opportunities to become involved in their children's learning in the early years.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils' behaviour and conduct are of a high standard. Pupils are respectful, polite and courteous to each other and to visitors.
- Pupils are eager learners. However, they do not regularly demonstrate confidence in owning and directing their learning.
- The leadership of the early years has considerably improved and has brought about sustained improvement to the quality of the provision and children's learning.
- The new headteacher's clear vision and passion to improve the school have brought about rapid improvements, particularly in the early years. As a result, the school is no longer inadequate.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics in key stage 2 is well above average.
- Nearly all pupils attend school regularly. They say they enjoy school, feel safe and like the help that teachers give them.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of most pupils well.

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 the quality of leadership and management by:
 - further developing the roles and responsibilities of subject leaders, particularly in subjects other than English and mathematics
 - ensuring that leaders effectively promote teachers' use of the information held on pupils' attainment and progress to better inform their planning
 - refining the school's assessment and tracking systems to make it easier for leaders to track and evaluate the progress that pupils make from the date of their admission to school.
- Enhance the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils by promoting opportunities for pupils to develop their confidence to take ownership of their own learning.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that:
 - there is greater consistency of high-quality teaching between year groups
 - teachers make the best use of the assessment data available to them to inform their planning
 - the most able pupils regularly receive the challenge they need to develop their knowledge and understanding at greater depth.
- Improve the quality of the early years by:
 - building on the improvements already made so that greater proportions of children attain a good level of development
 - enhancing opportunities for parents to contribute to their children's learning and the assessment of their children's attainment and progress
 - strengthening further the skills and experience of the early years leader so as to ensure high-quality transition and continuity of learning into key stage 1 of those children who do not attain a good level of development.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- In September 2016, the school was judged to be inadequate due to serious concerns relating to the strategic leadership and management of the school and the quality of provision for pupils in the early years. It is now a different school. Strategic leadership and management have improved considerably. Leaders demonstrate high expectations, a clear vision for development and the capacity to sustain improvement. The school is now a place where leaders and staff work as a team. They place the welfare and achievement of pupils at the heart of all their actions. However, leaders are not complacent and recognise their work is not yet done in ensuring that the school makes the progress required to become good.
- The new headteacher has a clear, insightful and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. He has developed an aspirational vision for improvement that is shared by staff and governors. Leaders' planning for school improvement is clear and effective.
- The quality of subject leadership is inconsistent. The leadership of English, mathematics and special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is stronger than that of other subjects. This is because senior leaders have prioritised these areas since the last inspection. Subject leaders for English and mathematics now have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and have appropriate time to undertake their duties. As a result, they understand where the strengths and weaknesses are in their subjects and are taking appropriate and effective actions that have brought about improvements. A number of other subject leaders are new to their roles and have limited leadership experience, knowledge and skills. Senior leaders have appropriate training and development plans in place.
- Senior leaders have ensured that the assessment of pupils' attainment is now more frequent and rigorous. As a result, they have a wealth of information about pupils' attainment but the analysis of this data is not refined enough to allow leaders to easily evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' progress. This is particularly the case for the high numbers of pupils who join during the school year and/or only stay for a short period. Additionally, leaders with responsibility for assessment do not ensure that teachers make the best use of assessment information to inform their planning.
- Leaders demonstrate a secure understanding of the barriers to learning faced by disadvantaged pupils. Leaders' appropriate use of the pupil premium funding ensures that disadvantaged pupils achieve well. Actions include a focus on building pupils' skills in literacy and communication to allow them to access learning in other areas of the curriculum.
- Leaders' good use of the additional primary school sport funding has resulted in high levels of pupil participation in sports and in their adoption of healthier lifestyles. Leaders use the additional funding effectively to provide staff training, expert coaching and a rich diet of sporting opportunities for pupils, including boxercise and a range of inter-school competitive events.
- Senior leaders place a high priority on pupils' attendance as being key to helping pupils to succeed. Highly effective systems to track and respond quickly to any absence are

well established. These include the use of a tenacious and highly effective pastoral care manager to support families in getting their children to school on time. The meticulous analysis of attendance allows leaders to identify those pupils at risk. As a result, they head off many absences. Where necessary, this analysis ensures that leaders have sufficient evidence to take appropriate enforcement action.

- Leaders ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is nurtured well and is in line with the school's Catholic ethos. As a result, pupils say they feel valued and are treated with understanding and respect. Leaders promote equality strongly and effectively in this culturally diverse school.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced and meets well the needs of most pupils. It ensures that pupils systematically develop their knowledge and skills across a wide range of subjects. The curriculum promotes well fundamental British values and pupils' personal development. The curriculum equips most pupils effectively for their next stage of education. However, some pupils who enter Year 1 without having attained a good level of development do not have regular access to a curriculum that fully meets their developmental needs and allows them to catch up quickly.
- Leaders make effective use of the additional funding they receive for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. The leader with responsibility for SEN and/or disabilities is relatively new to her role. However, she ensures that support is carefully planned, well organised and effective in ensuring that pupils make sustained progress from their starting points.
- Parents are effectively informed about life in school and their children's progress through regular newsletters, individual pupil reports and frequent electronic communications. They overwhelmingly support the school and recognise the improvements since the last inspection.

Governance of the school

- The governance of the school is effective. Many governors are new to their roles since the last inspection. Governors possess professional skills and use them well to hold leaders closely to account for the impact of their actions. Governors have sought and acted swiftly upon advice from the local authority and archdiocese. As a result, they have improved their skills in checking the school's progress and measuring the success of leaders' actions.
- Governors share the headteacher's vision and commitment to continue to improve the school. They know their school well because of the quality of the information they now receive and the questions they now ask. They regularly check the accuracy of the information they receive through visits to the school to talk with teachers and pupils. Consequently, governors understand how teachers are going about raising standards and where further action is needed.
- Governors have a secure understanding of the school's policy for managing performance, including its link to teachers' pay, and ensure that it is now robustly applied.
- Governors have ensured that the content of the school's website meets the requirements relating to the curriculum.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and implemented effectively by staff. Statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with children, including those members of staff from the adjoining nursery who work on the school site.
- Leaders have taken appropriate actions to ensure that the school is a safe and secure place in which pupils can learn.
- Appropriate training ensures that staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding and are vigilant about the potential risks pupils may face. Records are fit for purpose and meticulously kept. Leaders share information with parents and appropriate authorities effectively to ensure pupils' safety.
- Governors have ensured that appropriate monitoring and filtering arrangements are in place for the school's internet connection.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the inspection in 2016. However, there remains some inconsistency in how effectively teachers use pupils' assessment information to inform their planning and in the quality of teaching between year groups.
- On occasions, teachers' low expectations of what can be covered in a lesson limit the pace of learning. Tasks are sometimes too easy or too difficult for some pupils. Pupils, including the small number of those most able pupils, do not regularly have opportunities to apply their skills and develop their knowledge and understanding at greater depth.
- Teachers and committed teaching assistants have benefited from appropriate and effective professional development from the local authority to improve their knowledge and skills. As a result, teachers and teaching assistants have good subject knowledge in a wide range of subjects, including English, mathematics, science and music. Pupils are encouraged to learn through interesting and, at times, challenging activities that take them out of their comfort zones, for example learning to play the violin alongside their class teacher and teaching assistants with the intent to achieve a recognised qualification.
- Teachers make good use of frequent and systematic homework to extend learning further beyond the school day.
- Writing is taught systematically across the school. This results in pupils, including the large proportion who speak English as an additional language, developing well their skills in reading and writing from their starting points. Writing activities frequently link to other subjects. For example, pupils develop their technical and descriptive vocabulary and their evaluative writing skills through the frequent recording of practical scientific investigations. However, leaders accept that the teaching of writing still needs further improvement to ensure that a higher proportion of pupils close the gaps in their

knowledge and make the progress required to attain the highest standards.

- Pupils develop their basic reading skills well because of the support they receive from dedicated staff. Pupils who speak English as an additional language at times find the more complex reading skills more difficult. The teaching of phonics is systematic and carefully planned to match pupils' knowledge and abilities, including their knowledge of the English language and its sounds. As a result, pupils make secure progress from their starting points.
- Mathematics teaching has improved considerably. Teachers are confident in their own knowledge and skills and most use them effectively to promote understanding of mathematical ideas, such as equivalent fractions, to all groups of pupils. Teachers and teaching assistants make good use of questions and encourage pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding by frequently asking for the reasoning behind pupils' answers. However, teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils, particularly those who are most able, to apply their mathematical skills to investigations that develop knowledge and understanding at greater depth.
- Pupils' work in books shows that pupils develop their knowledge in a wide range of subjects systematically. However, in some subjects, particularly those other than English and mathematics, teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are inconsistent. Consequently, activities planned are not matched carefully to pupils' abilities. As a result, the opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding at greater depth are limited.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Teachers and other adults working in school have positive relationships with pupils and with their families. As a result, pupils say they feel valued and cared for. Parents who spoke with inspectors, and those who responded to the school's recent questionnaire, mirrored pupils' views. This was typified by comments such as 'This school not only supports and helps pupils but works with the whole family. Staff go beyond what is expected.'
- Pupils know how to stay safe, including while online, because of the teaching and guidance that they receive. Pupils speak of visits from local police officers, regular online safety lessons and the opportunities to learn to swim using the local university's sports facilities.
- Pupils receive a range of opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding in school and beyond. A language of the month is promoted to reflect the considerable diversity in languages spoken in each year group and is additional to the study of Spanish, the school's modern foreign language. Pupils regularly make use of local university facilities to study such things as science, and visit cultural sites in the school's locality.
- Pupils are provided with increased opportunities to develop their leadership skills and self-confidence by undertaking roles as prefects, head boy or girl or one of their deputies or as a 'buddy reader' for younger pupils. However, these roles are relatively

new and still not fully embedded.

- Pupils are eager learners but do not frequently display the confidence and maturity to take ownership of their own learning, for example by undertaking independent study programmes or having the confidence to ask challenging questions of teachers.
- Pupils say that bullying is rare and that the school is a safe place to attend. They are confident that, if they had any concerns, staff, including the new headteacher and particularly the pastoral care manager, would listen and act quickly to deal with their worries.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' conduct is exemplary in the way they move around the school and interact with each other and adults. Pupils are polite. They hold doors open for others to pass and are eager to talk about their learning.
- Leaders' use of exclusion has, over time, been higher than the national average. The number of exclusions is now low. Exclusion is used as a final resort following high levels of intervention and support from a dedicated and skilled pastoral team.
- Historically, overall attendance has been close to the national average. However, the rates of absence for disadvantaged pupils and those who are persistently absent rose considerably in 2017. The most recent attendance figures show improvement, including in the substantial reduction of persistent absenteeism. Leaders' detailed analysis of records shows that the vast majority of absences are for acceptable reasons, often relating to pupils' medical needs or their return to their home countries. The pastoral care manager tenaciously challenges absence and lateness and provides appropriate and effective support and guidance to parents. Despite this, a small number of parents do not ensure that their children attend school on a regular basis.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Outcomes for pupils have improved since the last inspection, particularly in the early years and in mathematics. However, the proportion of pupils who make the progress required to attain at greater depth remains well below national averages, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1.
- In the 2017 key stage 2 national assessments, outcomes were much stronger than in 2016. The proportion of pupils who attained the expected standards in reading and writing were at least in line with national averages and higher in mathematics. This was because sharper, focused teaching accelerated the rate of pupils' progress. From their starting points, pupils' progress was well above the national average in mathematics and average in reading and writing.
- Historically, pupils' attainment in English and mathematics in key stage 1 has been below national averages. This was the same in 2017. However, the school's information shows that pupils made secure progress from their starting points. Many pupils entered the key stage from the early years with lower-than-expected levels of development. In addition, considerable numbers had joined the school in key stage 1 speaking little or

no English.

- Current assessment information and work in pupils' books show that, in key stage 2, typically, more than three quarters of pupils in each year group make at least steady progress from their starting points. Few make the stronger progress required to develop their knowledge and understanding at greater depth and to enable them to reach the highest standards. There is a similar picture in key stage 1. Work in pupils' books shows that pupils develop a secure understanding of basic literacy and numeracy because of the systematic development of skills. As a result, progress in English and mathematics is secure but steady. However, the work in books also shows that pupils have limited opportunities to apply their skills to more challenging tasks. As a result, the proportion of pupils developing their knowledge and understanding at greater depth is low.
- In subjects other than English and mathematics, pupils' work in books shows that they develop a broad range of knowledge and understanding. However, the work also shows that the most able pupils do not develop their knowledge and understanding to any greater depth than other pupils in their year group.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make effective progress from their starting points because of the support and teaching they receive.
- Pupils read widely and often as part of their homework and lessons. Those pupils who speak English as an additional language receive appropriate support to develop their reading skills to access the curriculum. Leaders recognise that progress in reading is not as strong as that in writing and mathematics and they are taking appropriate actions to strengthen it. These include refinements to the teaching of phonics, and amendments to timetables to ensure the frequent teaching of reading in all classes. Pupils develop a love of reading and exhibit good levels of fluency. Pupils' confidence in using phonics to identify unfamiliar words is growing.
- Pupils make secure progress from their starting points in phonics. However, the large numbers of pupils who enter the school in Year 1 and Year 2 with little or no phonics knowledge and who speak English as an additional language have a considerable and negative impact on outcomes in the Year 1 and Year 2 phonics screening checks. Leaders are aware of this issue and have in place effective support mechanisms to help children catch up.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- The early years provision has improved considerably since the last inspection in 2016 and is no longer inadequate.
- The support provided by the local authority has ensured that the early years leader now has a secure understanding of the early years curriculum and has markedly improved the quality of her leadership. However, she recognises that she is on a developmental journey. Effective links to other local schools ensure that she continues to develop her expertise. As a result, leadership of the early years now demonstrates the capacity to sustain improvement.
- The leader has a detailed and accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of her department because of her increased monitoring and evaluation. Staff are

appropriately deployed and the learning environment is much improved and well organised.

- Leaders and teachers frequently analyse assessment information about children's attainment to identify areas of need and inform their planning. However, the assessment system is relatively new and is focused on recording children's attainment against the early learning goals. It does not allow leaders to evaluate easily the progress that children make from their starting points when they join the school. Opportunities for parents to contribute to the assessment of their children's learning are limited.
- Leaders ensure that all welfare regulations are met. The environment is secure, safe and well maintained. The leader has ensured that the quality and the number of resources available have improved considerably. Resources are used well to promote learning. Leaders use the funding available for additional resources carefully to maximise its impact.
- Children are kept safe because well-trained and vigilant staff implement well the school's safeguarding policies and act quickly to address any concerns. Effective partnerships with external agencies exist and staff are well trained. Children receive the appropriate support that they need to thrive and behave well.
- Children quickly settle into Nursery and Reception because of the good relationships and caring attitudes of teachers and other adults working in the department.
- Effective transition arrangements for children transferring from the private nursery on the school's site enable them to make a quick start to learning. Other transition arrangements are limited because many children are international new arrivals or arrive from outside the local area due to their parents moving to study at the nearby universities. Transition out of the early years into key stage 1 is also not as effective.
- Nearly all children begin the early years with social skills, levels of communication, literacy and language skills and understanding of shape and space that are below and, in many cases considerably below, those typical for their age. A large proportion of children have no experience of schooling at all and many speak English as an additional language. Children make secure progress from their starting points. The proportion of children who achieve a good level of development by the time they leave the early years is rising because of the better quality of teaching they now receive. However, it is below the national average.
- The quality of teaching is no longer inadequate. Teachers and teaching assistants frequently use questioning well to probe and develop children's understanding. They make effective use of the much-improved outdoor provision to promote learning by providing interesting and engaging activities for children. Adults actively engage in play to promote learning. However, teachers and other adults do not ensure that activities regularly provide sufficient challenge for the most able pupils.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 104657 |
| Local authority | Liverpool |
| Inspection number | 10044742 |

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.

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| 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 | 194 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Connor Buckley |
| Headteacher | Martin Davies |
| Telephone number | 0151 709 5532 |
| Website | nicholas-ao@st-nicholas.liverpool.sch.uk |
| Email address | admin@st-nicholas.liverpool.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 13–14 September 2016 |

Information about this school

- The school is slightly smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is close to the national average. Very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs 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. A large proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. Considerable proportions of pupils leave or join the school at times other than the usual times.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

- Since the last inspection, there has been considerable change to the senior leadership of the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of lessons or parts of lessons and looked at pupils' work. They listened to pupils reading and talked with pupils about their lessons and school life. Inspectors met formally with a range of pupils and the school's head boy, head girl and their deputies.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and a range of subject leaders. These included the senior leaders responsible for SEN, assessment and the early years. Inspectors spoke with representatives of the governing body and of the local authority, and with archdiocesan school-improvement advisers who work with the school.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documentation relating to pupils' progress and to school management, including the arrangements to ensure that pupils are kept safe.
- Inspectors spoke with parents and staff and took account of the 45 responses in the most recent parent survey undertaken by the school. There were too few responses to the online parent questionnaire, Parent View, to allow any analysis.

Inspection team

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|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| John Nixon, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Stephen Rigby | Ofsted Inspector |
| Moira Atkins | 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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