

St Ambrose Catholic Primary School

Alderfield Drive, Speke, Liverpool, Merseyside L24 7SF

Inspection dates

20–21 March 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders and governors have responded too slowly to the decline in pupils' achievement since the last inspection. This has impaired the progress of all groups of pupils significantly.
- Governors and leaders do not evaluate accurately the school's strengths and weaknesses. Their views of the quality of education that pupils receive are over-generous.
- Assessment practice is weak. Leaders are too focused on attainment and not enough on the progress that pupils make from their individual starting points. As a result, leaders' and teachers' expectations of what pupils can actually achieve are too low.
- Pupils underachieve considerably in English, especially in reading.
- Leaders have not ensured that the curriculum prepares pupils effectively to be successful as they move through their education.
- Pupils in key stage 1 make weak progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Too few pupils meet the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils in English and science was well below the national average for other pupils in 2017. Their progress shows little improvement.
- The most able pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable because teaching does not challenge them sufficiently.
- The capacity of leaders, including middle leaders, to improve the school further without external support is weak. Leaders have not always accessed support in a timely manner.
- Leaders and governors fail to promote equality of opportunity because they do not promote the protected characteristics of individuals.
- Attendance is consistently low. Too many pupils, especially those in in key stage 1, are persistently absent and they miss significant amounts of time in school.

The school has the following strengths

- Children benefit from a good quality of education in the early years.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They conduct themselves well and incidents of poor behaviour are infrequent.

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?

- Take urgent action to improve outcomes in English for pupils in key stage 2 and in English and mathematics for pupils in key stage 1 by ensuring that:
 - progress in reading for all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, is increased rapidly so that it is at least in line with other pupils nationally by the end of Year 6
 - the most able pupils make strong progress, so that a greater proportion attain greater depth and the higher standards by the end of Year 2 and Year 6
 - the proportion of pupils achieving the Year 1 phonics screening check at least matches the national average.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by making sure that:
 - teachers assess pupils' progress accurately across a range of subjects
 - leaders' and teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are high enough
 - teachers plan learning that provides enough challenge to enable the most able pupils to achieve higher standards
 - pupils' progress in science is properly assessed and monitored and the inequalities between disadvantaged pupils and others nationally in this subject are diminished.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - governors hold leaders properly to account for pupils' outcomes and the quality of education that pupils receive
 - the curriculum equips pupils with the knowledge, skills and understanding they need across a range of subjects to enable them to be successful in the next stage of their education
 - leaders rapidly devise and implement assessment systems that focus on pupils' progress as well as attainment, so that all pupils reach their potential across the curriculum
 - when leaders check the quality of teaching, they focus on its impact on the progress of all pupils and the extent to which teaching is enabling all groups to achieve well
 - middle leaders have the time and the professional development opportunities that they need in order to have the necessary impact on pupils' learning
 - governors and leaders prevent discrimination and prejudice by promoting protected characteristics of individuals under the Equalities Act 2010.

- Ensure that pupils get the maximum possible benefit from being in school by reducing the percentage of pupils who are absent, especially those who are persistently absent.

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 the 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

- Leaders have been unable to prevent the school's decline since the last inspection. They have not implemented secure assessment systems and they focus too much on pupils' attainment rather than the progress that pupils are capable of making from their starting points. Leaders have not made use of the information available to schools to help them test out their view of what constitutes good progress. Their view of how well pupils are doing is therefore overoptimistic, and their expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low.
- Leaders, governors and teachers are too ready to view the poor outcomes for pupils as the result of the context of particular cohorts of pupils, rather than of the quality of education that the school provides.
- Instead of addressing poor performance directly, governors and leaders have made staffing and leadership restructures. Key responsibilities have been reallocated very recently to inexperienced middle leaders. These leaders have not been given the support or training that they need to make a difference to pupils' outcomes. This has limited the capacity to bring about the necessary improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders have been too slow to access external support. When the local authority offered a review of the school's effectiveness in 2016, leaders chose to defer it because of low staff morale. Consequently, support, when it arrived, has been too late to have a positive impact on pupils' outcomes in 2017.
- Leaders accept that significant improvements are needed to reverse the decline in pupils' achievement in English. They have used resources, including the pupil premium funding, to implement recent changes to the ways in which reading, writing and phonics are taught. However, their plans do not set out clearly exactly what actions will be taken when, or precisely how funds will be spent. As a result, governors are unable to check whether the decisions that leaders have made have resulted in the improvement needed.
- Governors and leaders have not taken steps quickly enough to make sure that pupils' progress in science is properly assessed. This has had a particularly negative impact on disadvantaged pupils, who do far less well in science than other pupils nationally or other pupils in the school. The newly appointed subject leader is working hard to bring about improvements to the way in which science is planned. However, she is hampered in her efforts because she does not have enough time to carry out her role effectively.
- Leaders monitor the quality of teaching. However, these checks focus too closely on what teachers do, rather than on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. Leaders' views of the quality of teaching are therefore too positive. This has led to underachievement for many pupils, including the disadvantaged and the most able, who make inadequate progress.
- The curriculum has not enabled pupils to gain the skills, knowledge and understanding that they need to make a successful start on the next stage of their education. Pupils' progress in the wider curriculum, including subjects such as history and geography, is

uneven. Their achievement is not properly assessed. As a result, leaders are unable to judge accurately the impact of teaching upon pupils' learning in these subjects.

- Pupils develop socially, morally, spiritually and culturally through a range of activities that leaders provide. For example, they learn about the importance of friendship and take part in activities to support charities.
- The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Governance of the school

- Governors have not held leaders to account for the lack of improvement in pupils' outcomes in 2016 and 2017. The lack of detailed assessment information means that they have not had the information that they need to enable them to see that pupils are not making good progress.
- Leaders and teachers recognise their responsibilities in relation to equalities and have accessed appropriate training in order to address them. However, they have been unable to secure approval from governors to implement the changes needed to fulfil their obligations in relation to the Equality Act 2010, especially in relation to the promotion of the protected characteristics of sexual orientation and gender reassignment. Consequently, leaders are not doing all that they can to prevent prejudice or discrimination and the school does not currently comply fully with the Act.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Governors and leaders have established a culture of safeguarding in the school. The school has effective systems for keeping pupils safe and keeps appropriate records of their work with other agencies.
- Staff are vigilant and report their concerns promptly. They know how to identify when a pupil may be at risk of neglect, abuse or exploitation because leaders have made sure that they are properly trained.
- Leaders have been trained to follow the right safeguarding procedures for recruiting staff to work with children. They carry out all necessary checks. In the past, on a very small number of occasions, leaders did not obtain references in a timely manner, but procedures have been changed so that this shortcoming no longer occurs.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Teaching over time has failed to improve pupils' progress. Expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. Assessment practices are weak, especially in reading and writing, because they focus too much on attainment rather than the progress pupils should make from their starting points. Consequently, teachers do not have accurate assessment information to plan activities which meet pupils' different needs.
- Leaders have made improvements to the way pupils learn about phonics in the early years and key stage 1. Teachers follow the agreed format and pupils are taught to recognise particular letters and groups of letters. However, teachers do not always identify possible misconceptions. As a result, teachers' responses to understandable

mistakes are not always correct, and do not always help pupils to learn to apply their phonics knowledge accurately.

- Pupils' attention in writing in key stage 1 is not always maintained because the work that teachers have planned does not engage the interest of pupils. Teachers do not use opportunities to build upon what pupils already know, such as the use of adjectives. Teachers do not plan effectively for the work of teaching assistants, which limits their impact on learning and on pupils' ability to concentrate.
- As a result of very recent changes to the teaching of reading and comprehension, teachers now plan lessons in key stage 2 to develop pupils' vocabulary. However, most of the pupils observed in Years 3 and 4 finished tasks in their workbooks quickly and few of those observed needed to correct their work. Pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they find the work easy.
- The most able pupils in Year 6 now have extra reading activities. Older pupils in key stage 2 say that they enjoy reading the current 'class book' in guided reading lessons. However, teachers do not routinely use time effectively in lessons, for example to check pupils' understanding of why one word is more suitable than another rather than simply suggesting other similar words. Leaders accept that further guidance and training is required to support staff and improve the teaching of reading.
- Teachers' questions, especially in reading and writing lessons for older pupils in key stage 2, do not always allow enough time or scope for pupils to explain their own ideas. Consequently, pupils are not always able to show teachers what they know and, as a result, assessment of what they can do without adult support is limited. This means that many pupils in all ability groups, including those who are disadvantaged, do not make enough progress or reach high enough standards, especially in reading.
- The teaching of mathematics is improving, and this is evident in pupils' outcomes in key stage 2. However, it is not fully effective, especially in key stage 1. Teachers provide activities which help pupils with reasoning and problem solving. They provide opportunities for pupils to discuss mathematics problems and this helps teachers to correct any misunderstandings. However, pupils are not always sufficiently challenged by the activities provided. In some cases, they already know the answers to problems because the work is too easy.
- The teaching of science over time has not enabled pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding that they need to succeed in this subject. Leaders have recently invested in the purchase of new teaching resources but it is too early to see an improvement in pupils' achievement in this subject.
- Teachers plan carefully for the needs of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Leaders provide advice where extra support is needed. Pupils are supported in group activities, as well as while working alongside other pupils in class. Teachers assess pupils' progress against individual targets and additional support helps them to achieve their targets and move on to the next steps in their learning. As a result, these pupils are beginning to make stronger progress than in the past.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They know who to speak to if they need help and they understand how to keep themselves safe online.
- The majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View were of the view that their children are safe in school.
- Pupils know what bullying is and they say that it is rare within school. They say that if it does happen, they know that they can tell a teacher and that it will get sorted.
- Leaders have set up a school 'talk about' group to provide pupils with the opportunity to talk through any worries or concerns they may have. Teachers believe that, in some cases, this has improved pupils' resilience and self-esteem.
- Leaders make sure that the school's ethos is well promoted through activities and discussions. For example, pupils learn to empathise with other children who are homeless, and about how it feels to be a migrant.
- Pupils have opportunities to learn about the diversity of nationalities and cultures around the world. However, they have been unable to learn more about diversity within families, including same-sex marriage and sexual orientation, because governors and leaders have not provided them with opportunities to do so.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Pupils are polite to each other and to visitors. They respond quickly to instructions when required and their classrooms are generally calm places in which to learn. Pupils conduct themselves well as they move around school.
- Pupils talk confidently about the school's behaviour charter, and tell the inspectors that 'If you're talking when the teacher talks, you're not learning.' Incidents of poor behaviour are infrequent.
- Although pupils behave responsibly in lessons and are not disruptive, they are sometimes distracted when work does not challenge them sufficiently. There are not enough opportunities for pupils to engage in longer, meaningful discussion of their own ideas. For example, pupils being able to use and practise the vocabulary that they are learning, or to develop curiosity and enquiry skills. As a result, their ability in some lessons to remain focused and engaged is limited.
- Leaders have not done enough to improve attendance at the school. Some pupils are absent persistently, especially in key stage 1, and they miss more time in school than other pupils nationally. This has a negative impact on their ability to learn and to achieve well in preparation for the next stage in their education.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- In 2016 and 2017, Year 6 pupils made weak progress in reading. It was among the worst in the country. Pupils' progress in writing improved in 2017. Nevertheless, too few pupils reached the expected and higher standards in reading and writing by the time they left their primary school. Consequently, pupils were ill-prepared for their move into the secondary phase of their education.
- Pupils' outcomes in reading in the 2017 national assessments in key stage 1 were also below the national averages and have been for the last three years. Similarly, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check has also been below the national average for three years.
- Although outcomes at the end of the early years are improving over time, pupils do not sustain their progress in key stage 1. Outcomes for pupils currently in key stage 1 remain a cause for concern.
- In 2017, Year 6 pupils fared as well as other pupils nationally in mathematics. Current information indicates that this improvement is being sustained in key stage 2. However, this is not replicated in key stage 1. Leaders acknowledge that pupils do not make enough progress in this subject in key stage 1, particularly the most able pupils, because teachers do not plan lessons that meet their needs.
- The progress of pupils currently at the school is not good enough in a range of subjects, especially in reading. This is evident in pupils' books, which reflect weaknesses in pupils' achievement across a wide range of subjects. Although leaders have introduced new approaches to the teaching of reading, pupils are still not making enough progress in this area.
- Leaders recognise that pupils' achievement needs to improve. However, the targets set by leaders for the current cohort of pupils in reading, writing and mathematics across key stages 1 and 2 are still too low. This is because leaders are focused too closely on ensuring that pupils reach expected standards, rather than on making sure that this represents good or better progress from individual starting points. This has a particularly negative impact upon the most able pupils, who are currently not making the progress that they need in order to reach the high standards of which they are capable.
- Disadvantaged pupils in some year groups, especially in key stage 1, are still not keeping pace with their non-disadvantaged peers in class in reading or writing. The disadvantaged pupils also attain much lower standards than their peers in mathematics. The weaknesses in the school's assessment systems mean that differences in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils across the wider curriculum are not identified systematically.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make progress that is similar to other pupils in school but very few reach the expected standard by the end of key stages 1 and 2. Although this group do not achieve as well as other pupils nationally, there are signs of improvement due to the effective support that these pupils receive.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years leader has made good use of information about children's outcomes in order to improve provision in the Nursery and Reception classes. She has evaluated accurately the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and has used this information to keep governors and leaders informed. As a result, she has secured commitment to the deployment of resources so that the classroom environments in Nursery and Reception offer a wide range of opportunities for children to become absorbed in their learning.
- Most children start Nursery with skills below those typical for their age. By the time they leave Reception, they have made good progress, and almost two thirds have reached a good level of development. The gap between outcomes for disadvantaged children in the school and all children nationally is diminishing. Children are well prepared for Year 1.
- Teaching is effective. Teachers know that their assessments are accurate because they check them with other schools. They record individual observations of what children do and say and use the information to plan appropriate learning opportunities.
- Safeguarding is effective and is underpinned by the school's procedures for child protection.
- A number of initiatives have been established to enable parents to share in their children's learning, including opportunities to 'stay and play' with their children, workshops and assemblies. Comments from parents in response to Ofsted's free-text service are positive.
- Children's behaviour is good because the setting offers them a range of activities that engage their interest. A high emphasis is placed on the display of letters, numbers and labels in the classrooms. Children enjoy taking part in phonics activities. As a result, the proportion achieving the early learning goals in literacy and mathematics is increasing.
- Leaders have recognised that the outdoor environment is not as rich in opportunities to see letters, numbers and labels as the indoor classrooms. They are therefore addressing this so that children who like to play outdoors have the same opportunities to read, write and count as they would have indoors.

School details

Unique reference number	104672
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	10037776

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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	245
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Reverend Edward Cain
Headteacher	Mrs Tracy O'Neill
Telephone number	0151 425 2306
Website	www.stambroseprimary.co.uk
Email address	ambrose-ao@st-ambrose.liverpool.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	21–22 January 2014

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is average.
- The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is average.
- The school did not meet the government's floor standards in 2017, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons and parts of lessons. Some of these were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, school staff and the chair of the governing body. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative from the local authority, and with a representative of the Archdiocese of Liverpool.
- Inspectors spoke informally to pupils in lessons, during breaktimes and at lunchtimes. They spoke to some parents and carers on the playground before the start of school.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work during lessons and work produced over time in a range of their books. They also listened to pupils reading.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at the latest school performance information showing the progress of pupils currently in school.
- Other documentation scrutinised included plans for school improvement, safeguarding information, behaviour logs, attendance records and minutes of governing body meetings.
- Inspectors took account of six responses to the pupil survey and 20 responses to the staff questionnaire. Inspectors considered the 16 responses to Parent View, along with the 16 free-text responses.

Inspection team

Mavis Smith, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Liz Loftus	Ofsted Inspector
Louise Corlett	Ofsted Inspector

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