

St Mary's Catholic Infant School

Victoria Road, Newton-le-Willows, Merseyside WA12 9RX

Inspection dates

22–23 May 2018

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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- In recent years, outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 have been below the national average, particularly in mathematics.
- Historically, disadvantaged pupils at the end of Year 2 do not perform as well as other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The quality of teaching across the school is variable. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are not always high enough. Pupils are not consistently challenged in their learning.
- Not all teachers are following the school's agreed marking policy.
- Although the proportion of children achieving a good level of development is rising, it is still below the national average, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and boys.
- Some teaching assistants across the school are not always deployed to best effect.
- Some subjects in the wider curriculum are not taught in sufficient depth. Monitoring arrangements for these subjects are not embedded.
- Not all of the school's main priorities for improvement are included in the school development plan. Targets set lack clarity.
- There are no clear lines of accountability in place for teaching assistants.
- Monitoring of the quality of teaching does not focus sharply enough on the learning that has taken place.
- Governors do not hold the school fully to account for all aspects of its work.

The school has the following strengths

- The new executive headteacher is strongly focused on bringing about improvements.
- A wide range of inspection evidence highlights that outcomes across the school are improving.
- Behaviour around the school is good. Pupils feel safe and are safe.
- Most parents are effusive in their praise of the school with regard to all aspects of its work.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, and thereby the progress and outcomes for all groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, by:
 - ensuring that outcomes in phonics, reading, writing and mathematics continue to improve across key stage 1 and these improvements are sustained
 - teaching science, history, geography, art and design and design technology in sufficient depth
 - ensuring that teachers have the highest expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving
 - making sure that all teachers follow the school’s agreed marking policy
 - ensuring that teaching assistants are deployed to best effect across the school, including in the early years
 - ensuring that activities challenge all pupils to do their very best.
- Improve the leadership and management of the school by:
 - incorporating all of the school’s main priorities into the school development plan
 - ensuring that targets in the school development plan are sharp and measurable
 - improving the monitoring of the quality of teaching, by ensuring that it focuses more sharply on the learning that has taken place for different groups of pupils
 - implementing clear lines of accountability for teaching assistants
 - developing the role of middle leaders of subjects in the wider curriculum to ensure that they have a greater impact on teaching, learning and assessment in order to improve outcomes further for pupils
 - ensuring that governors challenge all aspects of the school’s work with more rigour.
- Improve outcomes in early years by ensuring that:
 - the proportion of children reaching a good level of development continues to rise, particularly for boys and those who are disadvantaged
 - children are consistently challenged in all aspects of their learning, with a particular focus on activities in independent play areas.
- An external review of the school’s use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The school has been through a period of turbulence and instability in recent years. Since her appointment, the executive headteacher has dealt with a number of significant staffing issues, which has resulted in the creation of a virtually new staff team.
- Working together, this new staff team are beginning to turn the fortunes of the school around. However, because the quality of teaching and learning across the school is variable, and outcomes are not good, the leadership and management of the school requires improvement.
- The executive headteacher shows a steely determination to improve outcomes in the school. Her self-evaluation is honest, accurate and insightful.
- The school development plan focuses on most of the school's priorities for development, but not all. It makes no mention of improving outcomes for boys in the early years. In addition, the targets set are not sharp or measurable. This makes it more difficult for senior leaders and governors to monitor, with accuracy, the progress that the school is making toward achieving its goals.
- Appropriate checks are made on the quality of teaching. Training opportunities are closely linked to school priorities. Monitoring of the quality of teaching does not focus sharply enough on what different groups of pupils have learned or the progress they have made. In addition, there are no opportunities for teachers to observe their colleagues to learn from the good practice in school or at other schools in the locality.
- The lines of accountability are not clear with regard to the performance management of teaching assistants to monitor the contribution they make towards improving outcomes for pupils.
- Senior leaders have a clear awareness of the barriers to learning that disadvantaged pupils face. However, in recent years, the pupil premium funding has not been used effectively to support this groups of pupils. This trend is beginning to reverse, but not quickly enough.
- Equal coverage is given to all areas of the national curriculum to ensure that it is broad and balanced. However, the middle leaders who have responsibility for science, history, geography, art and design and design technology do not give teachers clear guidance about what pupils typically should know and be able to do by the end of the year in each of these subjects. Consequently, there is no clear progression in pupils' key knowledge, skills and understanding. Monitoring arrangements for these subjects are at an early stage of development and these subjects are not taught in sufficient depth.
- The middle leaders of English and mathematics have a secure overview of their subjects and areas of responsibilities. As a result of recent initiatives, outcomes in phonics, reading, writing and mathematics are showing signs of improvement. For example, high-quality texts have been purchased to ignite children's enthusiasm to read, write and explore the wider curriculum. The library has been restocked with books which appeal more to pupils' interests. Staff have had additional training in phonics and pupils are now taught in ability groups to ensure that teaching is matched

to their needs. Staff have received training in mathematics to develop their subject knowledge. A calculations policy has recently been devised and shared with staff. There is a clear focus on developing staff understanding of mastery in mathematics.

- There is a varied range of out-of-school clubs and trips which broaden pupils' experiences.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is threaded through all aspects of the school's work and reflects its Catholic ethos. British values are well promoted and pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Effective use is made of the special educational needs funding to support pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The funding is utilised to support staff training and purchase bespoke resources to meet the individual needs of these pupils. The school works well with a wide range of outside agencies. The attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has improved, enabling them to achieve to their best.
- Leaders ensure that the sports premium is used well to help pupils to be active and develop a healthier lifestyle. Specialist coaches work with the teachers to enhance their skills in delivering high-quality physical education (PE) lessons. Increased access to competitions and a wider range of sporting opportunities have been enabled through the effective use of this funding.
- Most parents are fully supportive of all aspects of the school's work. They comment most positively on the progress that their children are making across the school, including in early years. Typical comments included: 'St Mary's is a really lovely school with a positive, vibrant community spirit.'
- The local authority have provided the school with good levels of support during this turbulent period.

Governance of the school

- Governors have been through a period of instability and have not been fully effective in holding the school to account for all aspects of its work.
- They are now fully committed to working with senior leaders to drive up standards in the school.
- Governors have a clear understanding of what the school does well. They are aware of the issues that need to be addressed to improve outcomes for all groups of pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged.
- A very recent review of governance has taken place and the report had only just been received by the school at the time of this inspection
- The governing body meets its statutory duties with regard to safeguarding.
- A close eye is kept on the budget to ensure that the school remains sustainable.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- Staff and governors are trained appropriately to carry out their respective roles in keeping pupils safe.
- Staff have a good awareness of the indicators of abuse and neglect. They are fully aware of procedures to follow should they be concerned about a pupil's welfare.
- Staff talk with some confidence about potential indicators of the latest national concerns linked to the 'Prevent' duty agenda.
- Those who have responsibility for safeguarding have been trained at an appropriate level. The executive headteacher is aware of her responsibility to ensure that someone with responsibility for safeguarding is on site when the school is open to deal with any safeguarding issues.
- Pupils' safety is further assured because the school site is secure and visitors' credentials are closely checked.
- The school works well with outside agencies to ensure the welfare and safety of pupils and families facing challenging circumstances.
- All documentation examined during the inspection relating to safeguarding was fit for purpose.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent and as such requires improvement
- Over time, teaching has not enabled pupils to make the progress that they are more than capable of doing. Activities are not consistently well planned to meet the varying needs of different pupils and drive their learning forward at a pace.
- The marking policy, which has been agreed by the whole school, is not consistently followed by all staff.
- On occasions, the presentation of pupils' work is not of a high standard and this goes unchallenged by staff.
- The curriculum beyond English and mathematics is not developed in sufficient depth in some subjects. Pupils do not access a rich skills and knowledge-based curriculum in history, geography, science, art and design and design technology.
- The impact of recent initiatives to improve outcomes are beginning to bear fruit. The quality of teaching in phonics, reading, writing and mathematics are showing signs of improvement.
- Pupils are developing a real love of reading. They read with fluency and some with expression. Most make good use of their phonic knowledge to sound out unfamiliar words. Pupils read regularly at home with an adult. However, books that some pupils are reading are either too easy or too hard for them. A few pupils told inspectors that teachers do not give sufficient advice on how to improve their reading. An examination of some reading records would confirm that this is the case.
- Pupils are keen mathematicians. However, work in pupils' books shows that, at times, an over-use of pre-printed worksheets hinders opportunities for pupils to develop their calculation skills. The school is making a concerted effort to develop pupils' problem-

solving, reasoning and numeracy skills. However, as a result of inconsistencies in teaching, pupils' knowledge and skills with regard to this aspect of their mathematical development are not fully embedded.

- Examples of pupils' writing are well presented around the school through displays. Pupils write for a variety of purposes, such as adventure stories, letters and reports. However, planned writing activities are, on occasions, overstructured, which limits opportunities for pupils to write with flair, imagination and creativity. In addition, the use of worksheets with small boxes prevents children from writing at length and in greater depth, particularly those who are more able.
- Most teaching assistants are used to good effect to support pupils with their learning. However, at times, a few overdirect pupils instead of encouraging them to think for themselves.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Most pupils are proud of their school and keen to learn. They look very smart in their school uniform.
- Pupils feel safe and are confident to disclose any worries to a trusted member of staff.
- Pupils show respect for adults and each other. At lunchtimes, they sit in the hall chatting to each other about the events of the day. Boys and girls mix well together socially. Meals provided are healthy and nutritious.
- Pupils are considerate of the needs of others and regularly raise money for a wide range of charitable causes to support others who are facing difficult situations. For example, they raise money to support disadvantaged schools in foreign countries and make donations to food banks.
- Pupils have a good awareness of the different forms of bullying and the distress that it can cause. Pupils told inspectors that bullying does occasionally happen, but staff soon sort it out.
- Pupils have a secure awareness of how to stay safe when online. They recognise the importance of not disclosing their password to anyone and of keeping personal information private.
- A variety of visitors come into school to talk to pupils about keeping themselves safe and developing healthy relationships.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are polite and well mannered. They move around the school in an orderly manner.
- Overall, behaviour in class is good. However, on occasions, pupils become fidgety when they become disinterested in their learning.

- Attendance is broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school has reduced considerably. This is due to the high levels of support provided by staff for those families who are more reluctant to send their children to school.
- Exclusions are rare. The school pulls out all the stops and utilises all available support to prevent pupils from being excluded from school.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Over the last two years, attainment at the end of key stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics was below the national average.
- In 2017, attainment in mathematics was in the lowest 10% nationally and attainment in writing had been in the bottom 20% nationally for the last two years.
- The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check was below the national average at the end of Year 1 and 2 in 2017.
- Outcomes in science have also been below the national average for the last two years.
- From looking at work in pupils' books, observing teaching and scrutinising the school's own assessments records on current pupils' progress, it is clear that the tide is turning. Progress and outcomes in phonics, reading, writing and mathematics are improving. However, outcomes still require further improvement. Teachers do not consistently have high enough expectations of pupils and underestimate their capabilities. Activities planned by teachers are, at times, not matched to pupils' needs or abilities and do not consistently challenge pupils from all groups, including the most able.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the school varies year on year. In recent years, disadvantaged pupils have not performed as well as others nationally in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2. As a result of closer monitoring by the recently appointed pupil premium coordinator, outcomes are improving. These improvements are more rapid in Year 2 than in Year 1.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who met the required standard in the phonics screening check in 2017 was above the national average.
- Taking into consideration their very diverse needs, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make strong gains in their learning from their different starting points. This is a result of well-targeted support and effective working with outside agencies to ensure that the needs of this group of pupils are well met.
- Outcomes in science, history, geography, art and design and design technology are not as strong as they could be. This is because these subjects are not taught in sufficient depth. Pupils are not given enough opportunities to develop their subject knowledge, skills and understanding.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Children come into early years with knowledge and skills that are broadly typical for their age. Although rising, the proportion of pupils who achieved a good level of development in 2017 was below the national average. This represents steady rather

than good progress. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils and boys achieving a good level of development was also below the national average. Consequently, the early years requires improvement.

- Significant changes have recently taken place in early years which have been like a breath of fresh air. A new early years leader has been appointed and teaching staff have been replaced. This new staff team are committed to improving outcomes for all groups of children.
- The early years leader has embraced the challenge of improving and developing practice in early years. She is a strong leader and has an accurate understanding of the strengths of the provision and priorities for development.
- In a relatively short period of time, she has transformed the learning environment. She has significantly improved the planning and assessment system and correctly identified that boys are underachieving in reading, writing and mathematics.
- A raft of initiatives has been put in place to address boys' underachievement in reading, writing and mathematics. For example, books and resources have been purchased which appeal to boys' interests. Mathematical and investigative activities are now planned with boys' interests in mind. In addition, 'boy-friendly' writing opportunities are available in all independent play areas, both indoors and outside.
- Under her leadership, outcomes for children are improving quickly, including for boys and those who are disadvantaged.
- Adults are calm, kind and caring and work well as a team. Standards of behaviour are good and children are safe.
- Children are animated and engaged. They access a wide range of exciting activities which cover all areas of their learning. However, on occasions, these activities, particularly those in independent play areas, do not challenge and stretch children. In addition, teaching assistants are not always deployed well, particularly at the start of an activity. As such, the quality of teaching requires improvement.
- Positive relationships have been established with parents, which helps to promote security and consistency in children's lives. Parents are kept well informed about their children's progress, which is closely monitored and tracked.
- Parents are encouraged to take an active part in their children's learning through attendance at 'stay and play' sessions and celebratory events.
- Safeguarding duties are taken seriously. At the time of this inspection, there were no breaches of the statutory welfare requirements.

School details

Unique reference number	104817
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	10042459

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	228
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vanessa Wells
Executive headteacher	Rebecca Dean
Telephone number	01744 678357
Website	www.federationofstmarys.co.uk
Email address	stmaryrcni@sthelens.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 April – 1 May 2014

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the averaged-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is below the national average. There are no pupils who have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school is part of St Mary's Catholic Schools. This is a hard federation and includes St Mary's Catholic Junior School. Both schools share the same governing body.
- The executive headteacher of this school was appointed in September 2015. She is also the executive headteacher of St Mary's Junior School.
- There have been a significant number of staff changes since the last inspection. Almost all of the current staff were not in post at the last inspection.

- A new chair of the governing body has recently been appointed.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in a separate meeting and informally in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in their books in a wide range of subjects and on display.
- Meetings were held with school leaders, other staff, members of the governing body, the local authority and a representative from the Archdiocese of Liverpool.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read from Years 1 and 2.
- Inspectors spoke to parents who were bringing their children to school at the start of the day.
- A wide range of documentation was considered, including that relating to safeguarding, the school's self-evaluation and assessment information on the progress of current pupils in the school.
- Inspectors also took account of 47 free-text responses from parents to the online questionnaire, Parent View. Consideration was also given to 11 responses from staff and to the 72 responses from pupils to the online questionnaires.

Inspection team

Sheila Iwaskow, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Eithne Proffitt

Ofsted Inspector

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