

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Infant School

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

Inspection dates: 8 and 9 June 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy to belong to this supportive school community. They benefit from positive and encouraging relationships with each other and with the staff.

Playtimes are a joyful experience for many pupils. The caring staff who play alongside the pupils help them to organise games and make lots of friends. Pupils are keen to talk about the importance of being kind. They understand school rules of 'Be Respectful, Be Responsible and Be Safe'.

Pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), behave well. Although teachers make lessons interesting for pupils, leaders have not clarified their expectations of what pupils should learn in some subjects. As a result, in some subjects, they do not achieve as well as they should.

Pupils told inspectors that they would feel comfortable speaking to any member of staff if they had any worries, including about bullying. Pupils have every confidence that staff would sort out any problems properly. This helps them to feel safe.

By carrying out important roles such as school councillors, eco-councillors or buddies, pupils learn how to make a positive difference in their school and their community. Pupils participate well in the wide range of clubs on offer in order to pursue their talents and interests, including sports and the arts.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders are in the process of reviewing the curriculum to ensure that it is sufficiently ambitious for all pupils, including pupils with SEND. Until recently, leaders have not ensured that their expectations of what pupils, including children in the early years, should learn are clear enough.

In some subjects, such as mathematics, leaders have carefully structured the knowledge that pupils need to learn and the order in which they should learn it. In these subjects, leaders provide clear guidance about what to teach and when. This helps teachers to design learning that builds logically on pupils' earlier knowledge. As a result, in these subjects, pupils develop their understanding of concepts well over time and progress well through the curriculum.

Leaders place a high priority on ensuring that pupils learn to read well. Staff have received training to deliver the carefully structured phonics programme well. Children begin to learn sounds and letters in daily sessions in the Nursery class. Teachers make sure that the books that pupils are given to practise their reading match the sounds they know. This helps pupils to develop their confidence. Leaders carry out regular checks on how well pupils know and remember the sounds they have learned, and they provide appropriate support for pupils who fall behind in reading. Most pupils can read fluently and accurately by the end of Year 2.

In the early years, encouraging staff ensure that children settle in well. Children are happy to take turns and share with their friends. They learn to listen attentively to stories and make a positive start in early reading and mathematics.

Leaders' curriculum thinking in many other subjects is not as well defined. In these subjects, leaders' expectations of what pupils, including children in the early years, should know are not clear enough. This hinders teachers from presenting content in a logical order to help children and pupils gain the key knowledge they need to progress well over time. In addition, some subject leaders do not provide enough guidance for teachers to develop their subject knowledge and deliver curriculums well. Consequently, pupils do not achieve as well as they should in these subjects.

Leaders ensure that pupils with SEND are identified early. Teachers adopt a range of effective strategies to ensure that this group of pupils access the same curriculum as their peers. Pupils are taught to understand that people have different backgrounds and families. They also gain a secure understanding of what can help them to stay fit and healthy.

Pupils are confident and they are encouraged by staff to express their ideas. They are polite and respectful towards each other and to their teachers. Leaders have acted with determination to ensure that more children attend school more regularly. As a result, pupils' attendance has improved over time.

Governors are dedicated, knowledgeable and ambitious for the school. They have a clear understanding of their statutory duties. However, owing to a lack of senior leadership capacity over recent years, they have met with obstacles when trying to fulfil them. Governors and other leaders have done their best to steer the ship through turbulent waters. To some extent, they have succeeded in minimising the impact of the recent leadership instability on the pupils.

Parents and carers hold the school in high regard and appreciate the approachability of staff.

Staff are proud to work at the school and teachers, including those at the early stages of their careers, value the support that they receive from their mentors and colleagues.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff receive regular safeguarding training so that they remain alert to the signs that could indicate that a pupil may be suffering or at risk from harm.

Leaders engage with a range of local agencies to provide the help that vulnerable pupils and their families need. Governors and leaders have also recently invested in expanding the safeguarding team to offer more support to pupils in school.

Leaders provide pupils with helpful guidance to help them to stay safe. This includes learning about online safety and about some of the features of healthy relationships, such as consent.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not finalised their curriculum thinking in some subjects. This includes being clear about the knowledge that pupils, including children in the early years, need to learn and when this should be taught. This prevents pupils from achieving as well as they should in some subjects. Leaders should ensure that teachers are clear about the essential knowledge that pupils, including in the early years, should learn and when. This will enable pupils to know more and remember more of the curriculum and deepen their understanding of these subjects over time.
- Some subject leaders lack the curriculum expertise that they need to design subject curriculums that build effectively from the early years to Year 2. This means that teachers do not receive sufficient guidance to deliver the curriculum well. Additionally, some subject leaders do not check that teachers are delivering the curriculum as intended, so they support teachers as needed. Leaders should ensure that subject leaders can develop their knowledge and expertise to design coherent curriculums and support teachers to deliver these curriculums effectively.
- Leaders do not check the quality of the curriculum carefully enough. This means that they do not have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. It also means that they have not yet decided on the most appropriate actions they need to take to address the weaknesses in the quality of education for pupils. Leaders should ensure that they monitor the quality of the curriculum regularly and set clear priorities to improve the school.
- Members of the governing body are not well informed about the quality of education that pupils receive. This means that they are unable to hold leaders to account as well as they should about how well pupils achieve. Governors should ensure that they have the information that they need to hold leaders to account for the ongoing improvement of the school and pupils' achievement across the curriculum.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	104817
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	10204462
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	212
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Vanessa Wells
Headteacher	John Daley
Website	www.federationofstmarys.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	22 and 23 May 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, there have been several changes to the senior leadership team. This includes the appointment of a head of school and, more recently, an executive headteacher.
- Leaders do not currently make use of alternative provision.
- The school is voluntary aided and part of the Archdiocese of Liverpool.
- The school's last section 48 inspection took place in November 2019.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school has received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the executive headteacher, the head of school and other leaders. They also spoke with subject leaders and members of staff.

- Inspectors spoke with six members of the governing body including the chair of governors. Inspectors also spoke with a representative of the local authority and a member of the Archdiocese of Liverpool.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms, during playtimes and lunchtimes and around the school. They spoke with different groups of pupils to discuss their views of the school, their learning, their behaviour and safety.
- Inspectors checked the arrangements for keeping pupils safe. They reviewed documentation, checked attendance information and spoke to leaders, governors, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, design technology and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and reviewed samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also observed pupils reading to a familiar adult. Inspectors also considered aspects of a number of other subjects on the school's curriculum.
- Inspectors spoke to parents and considered the views of parents and carers shared through Ofsted Parent View. This included the comments received via the free-text facility. They also reviewed the responses to Ofsted's surveys for staff and pupils.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation, shared by school leaders, including the school development plan, the minutes taken at governors' meetings and leaders' self-evaluation document.

Inspection team

Janette Walker, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Keith Pullen

Ofsted Inspector

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