

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Junior School

Barn Way, Newton-le-Willows, Merseyside WA12 9QQ

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 November 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils help to make this school the friendly and happy place that it is. They readily welcome visitors and are keen to share their learning with them. Pupils are polite, thoughtful and considerate. They are respectful towards each other and to adults.

Pupils know that leaders and staff expect them to behave well in lessons, at playtimes and when they move around the school. Pupils' behaviour reflects these expectations fully. The school is a calm and purposeful place to learn and play as a result.

Pupils know that staff care about them. Pupils welcome extra responsibilities. Those pupils who represent their classmates on the safeguarding council take their roles seriously. They play their part in making sure that everyone feels safe in school. This includes helping other pupils to understand what bullying is and what to do if it should happen. Pupils know that bullying is not tolerated. Staff deal with any concerns about bullying quickly and well.

Leaders have brought about improvements to the curriculum. They have raised their expectations of what pupils can achieve. However, many of the changes that leaders have made are recent. Pupils have not benefited from this improved curriculum fully. Their knowledge is uneven across different subjects.

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

There has been considerable instability in leadership since the school was last inspected. Despite this, leaders have maintained their focus on improving the curriculum. The pace of these improvements has gathered momentum over recent months. Leaders have benefited from working with external consultants. This has helped to develop their curriculum expertise. Subject leaders now have greater clarity about the important knowledge that they want pupils to learn and when this knowledge should be taught in all subjects. This has resulted in a well-thought-out curriculum that matches the ambition of the national curriculum.

In some subjects, teachers use assessment information skilfully in order to ensure that pupils' knowledge is secure before moving on to new learning. However, in other subjects, teachers' checks are less effective. While they do identify what pupils know and do not know, teachers do not design learning that builds on this knowledge well. Some pupils do not achieve as well as they should in these subjects.

Some subject leaders are new to their leadership roles. They have had limited opportunities to check how well teachers deliver their subject curriculums. Other subject leaders have carried out these checks. However, they have not always followed their findings up with sufficient rigour. This means that the curriculum in

some subjects is not delivered to the same high standard by all staff. Pupils' learning in these subjects is less secure within and across year groups as a result.

The disruption to pupils' learning that occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that some pupils in Years 3 and 4 have missing phonics knowledge. Leaders have taken some action to address these knowledge deficits. For example, they have made sure that staff teach pupils to read using the same phonics curriculum used by the federated infant school. However, not all staff are sufficiently well trained to deliver this curriculum. In addition, the books that teachers ask some pupils to read do not consistently match the sounds that they know. This hinders these pupils' ability to read fluently and to access the rest of the curriculum confidently.

Pupils have access to a range of high-quality texts. They develop positive reading habits and a love of reading. Leaders thoughtfully select books to broaden pupils' understanding of how people might be different to themselves. This helps to prepare pupils for the wider world that they will experience when they are older.

Leaders ensure that there are effective systems in place to identify the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, leaders do not ensure that all staff adapt their teaching approaches to support these pupils. This means that some pupils with SEND do not consistently access the same curriculum as their peers.

Leaders carefully consider pupils' wider development. Pupils represent the school in a wide range of sporting and cultural events. This helps pupils, including those with SEND, to build their self-confidence.

Pupils develop into keen learners. Lessons are not disrupted by poor behaviour.

Governors have steered the school steadily through a period of uncertainty. They make effective use of the wide range of information now available to them to assure themselves about the performance of the school. Governors are now better equipped to challenge and support school leaders appropriately.

Staff appreciate leaders' actions to support their workload. Their morale is high.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders make sure that staff know how to keep pupils safe. Staff are vigilant to any signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. They report any concerns swiftly. Leaders have clear oversight of any safeguarding concerns. They take swift action if vulnerable pupils need additional support. Leaders liaise well with other agencies to make sure that suitable support is in place.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to understand how to keep themselves safe. This includes when they are learning online as well as out and about in the community, for example when riding their bicycles. Pupils also learn about how to protect themselves when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Staff do not deliver the school's phonics programme consistently well. This hinders how quickly pupils who have fallen behind in their reading are able to catch up. Leaders should ensure that staff receive the support that they need to help pupils who are behind with their reading to become fluent and accurate readers.
- Leaders do not provide sufficient guidance to teachers about how to check and build on pupils' prior learning effectively across all subjects. Therefore, some pupils do not achieve as well as they should. Leaders should ensure that there are effective assessment systems in place to enable teachers to build on what pupils already know.
- Leaders have not ensured that staff have the expertise that they need to meet the needs of some pupils with SEND. Some of these pupils do not access the curriculum as well as they should. Leaders should ensure that staff understand how to provide the support that each pupil with SEND needs to access the curriculum as well as their peers.
- Some subject leaders do not have enough oversight of the quality of education in their subjects. They do not ensure that teachers implement the curriculum to the same high standard within some year groups and classes. This means that some pupils do not build up their knowledge as well as others. Subject leaders need to make sure that teachers display consistently high expectations for pupils' achievement across the school.

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.

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	104816
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	10241188
Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Vanessa Wells
Headteacher	John Daley
Website	www.federationofstmarys.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	5 and 6 December 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There has been considerable turmoil in the leadership of the school since the time of the previous inspection. The executive headteacher joined the school in January 2022. A head of school has been internally promoted since this date.
- The school is part of the Federation of St Mary's Catholic Schools. The executive headteacher is also responsible for leading another school within the federation.
- The school is part of the Archdiocese of Liverpool. Its last section 48 inspection took place in February 2016.
- Leaders do not make use of any alternative provision for pupils.

Information about this inspection

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

- This was the first routine inspection that the school 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 spoke with the executive headteacher and the head of school. Inspectors met with other school leaders and members of staff.
- An inspector met with representatives of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- An inspector met with a representative of the local authority and spoke with a representative of the archdiocese.
- Inspectors checked the arrangements for keeping pupils safe. They looked at a range of documentation and spoke to leaders and staff. Inspectors also spoke to pupils about whether they feel safe in school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, history and music. For each deep dive inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited lessons, looked at samples of pupils' work, held discussions with teachers and talked with pupils.
- Inspectors also spoke with leaders and pupils about the curriculum in other subjects.
- An inspector listened to pupils read with a familiar adult.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at social times. They spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences at school. There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils for inspectors to consider.
- Inspectors spoke with staff about their workload and well-being. Inspectors also considered the views of staff shared through Ofsted's online survey for staff.
- Inspectors spoke with parents and carers as they dropped their children off at school. They considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View. This included the free-text responses.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation shared by school leaders, including the school development plan, leaders' self-evaluation document and records of meetings of the governing body.

Inspection team

Jackie Stillings, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Peter Berry	Ofsted Inspector
Kate Bowker	His Majesty's Inspector

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