

Inspection of an outstanding school: St John's Catholic Primary School

Fountains Road, Kirkdale, Liverpool, Merseyside L4 1UN

Inspection dates:

21 and 22 June 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils and children in the early years thrive in this calm school. Pupils told the inspector that their school is 'amazing' and 'kind'. This year, leaders have raised attendance levels. Pupils understand how important it is to attend regularly. Most pupils attend school happily each day.

Staff know pupils extremely well. Pupils feel that staff listen to them. Leaders deal with any incidents of bullying swiftly. This makes pupils feel safe at St John's.

Leaders and staff have consistently high expectations of the achievement and behaviour of all pupils from the Nursery class to Year 6. Pupils rise to these expectations. They work hard and achieve well. Pupils' behaviour is exceptionally good. They are friendly, polite and courteous. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), learn the curriculum content successfully.

Pupils benefit from carefully considered opportunities that enrich the curriculum. For instance, they visit a World War II bunker, a safari park and a nearby forest. Children in the early years love learning in the woodland area. Leaders allow pupils to undertake many leadership roles. For example, there are attendance ambassadors, play leaders, school councillors and a head girl and head boy. Pupils are spoilt for choice with a vast array of extra-curricular clubs. Uptake of these clubs is remarkably high. Pupils are prepared effectively for life in modern Britain. They value diversity and are proud that their school community is accepting of everyone.

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

Leaders are aspirational about what they want their pupils to learn. To this end, they have designed an ambitious and bespoke curriculum from the Nursery class to Year 6. Leaders

have embedded the curriculum securely throughout the school. They have pinpointed exactly what the pupils need to learn and when. Leaders have highlighted how the curriculum builds on prior learning and how it secures a foundation for future learning. This helps pupils to connect key concepts. Teachers use different methods to help pupils to secure key knowledge. They use assessment strategies effectively to check when pupils are ready to move on to new learning.

Leaders have invested in subject-specific training for staff. Consequently, staff have strong subject knowledge. They are passionate about the subjects that they teach. Similarly, pupils are keen and enthusiastic learners. Across most subjects, pupils, including those with SEND, learn well.

Leaders have promoted a positive reading culture that begins in the two-year-old provision. For instance, children in the Nursery class join in enthusiastically with story time. Pupils make regular use of the well-stocked school library. This helps them to read widely and for enjoyment.

Children learn phonics from the start of the Reception class. In the Nursery class, they learn to recognise initial sounds. Staff match the books that pupils take home to read to the sounds that they know. At times, they do not implement the phonics programme as leaders intend. For instance, pupils are not given enough time to practise the sounds independently. This hinders some pupils from learning the sounds as quickly as they should. Leaders identify those pupils who are struggling to keep up with phonics. They put support in place. However, at times, this is not as effective as it could be in helping pupils to catch up quickly.

Staff have created calm and purposeful environments where pupils can learn free from disruption. Pupils behave impeccably in lessons and at social times. They act respectfully towards adults and towards each other. Right from the start of early years, children learn to follow well-established routines.

Leaders have constructed a carefully designed programme to enhance pupils' wider development. They have considered how to help open doors for pupils' futures. For example, pupils participate in a children's university. This raises their aspirations. Leaders invite many visitors, from local sporting heroes to archaeologists. They also make pupils aware of current affairs. Pupils engage enthusiastically in debates. They also show empathy towards others.

Leaders work closely with parents and carers and external agencies to identify any additional needs a pupil may have. They involve pupils with SEND fully in school life. These pupils follow the same curriculum as their peers. Leaders successfully tailor support for pupils with SEND. In most subjects, this group of pupils achieves well.

Staff are happy working at the school. Leaders are considerate of their workload. Staff appreciate leaders' open-door policy. The governing body is highly experienced and effective. The governors use their expertise well to support leaders in their relentless drive for improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff diligently follow the robust safeguarding procedures that leaders have put in place. Staff are extremely vigilant about keeping the children and pupils in their care safe. They undertake regular safeguarding training and act on it. Staff are alert to signs of potential abuse and neglect. They report concerns to leaders, who, in turn, act swiftly and appropriately. Staff work collaboratively with outside agencies to secure the help that pupils and families may need.

Leaders have an acute awareness and understanding of local safeguarding issues. Pupils learn about healthy relationships in an age-appropriate way through the personal, social and health education curriculum. They learn how to make positive, safe choices. For example, pupils understand how to protect themselves from potential harm when using the internet.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is variability in how staff teach the phonics programme. Some staff are not as confident in implementing it as leaders intend. As a result, some pupils are not becoming accurate and fluent readers as quickly as they should. Leaders should ensure that staff have the expertise to implement the phonics programme as intended.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in January 2016.

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 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	132796
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	10199490
Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	540
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Joanne McNeil
Headteacher	Denise Mawdsley
Website	www.stjohnskirkdale.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 and 13 January 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has provision for two- and three-year-olds at St John's Day Nursery. It is based in Fountains Children's Centre, Fountains Road, Kirkdale, Liverpool L4 1QH.
- Since the last inspection, there is a new chair of governors.
- The school is part of the Archdiocese of Liverpool. The last section 48 inspection was carried out in September 2022.
- Leaders do not make use of any alternative providers for pupils.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in her evaluation of the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, she discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- The inspector checked on leaders' safeguarding procedures. She spoke to leaders, governors and staff, and checked how well they understood their safeguarding responsibilities. She observed dismissal at the end of the day.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, other leaders and staff. She met with representatives of the governing body, including the chair of governors. The inspector met with a representative of the archdiocese. She also held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector listened to pupils in key stage 1 and key stage 2 read to a familiar adult.
- The inspector observed breaktime and lunchtime. She spoke to pupils about their experience in the school, including their views on behaviour and bullying.
- The inspector considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View. She also spoke to parents to gather their views about the school.
- The inspector considered the responses to Ofsted's pupil and staff surveys.

Inspection team

Jenny Jones, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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