

Inspection of a good school: St Helen's Catholic Junior School

Sawyers Hall Lane, Brentwood, Essex CM15 9BY

Inspection dates:

19 and 20 September 2023

Outcome

St Helen's Catholic Junior School continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Liam Daley. St Helen's Catholic Junior Academy is a single-academy trust, which means that other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Barry Fitzgerald.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at St Helen's Junior love their school. Its inclusive, welcoming ethos ensures that pupils are settled and happy. Pupils are kind to each other. They constantly live out the values instilled by the school, such as respect and courtesy.

Pupils consistently meet the school's high expectations. Their conduct is impeccable. Pupils willingly follow the school's behaviour policy and think it is fair. Any behaviour incidents are usually minor and are quickly addressed by staff.

Pupils feel safe at school. They trust each other to behave considerately. Pupils have confidence in staff to keep them safe.

Pupils pay attention in lessons and are keen to learn. They find lessons enjoyable. They work hard and expect to do their best work. Pupils take pride in the high-quality presentation of their work.

Pupils enthusiastically embrace the many exciting things there are to do at school. There is a wide range of clubs before school, after school and at lunchtimes. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 love attending the junior choir. Pupils of all ages are proud to take on responsibilities such as reading ambassador and eco-buddy.

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

The school has brought about rapid and substantial improvements to the curriculum. These improvements are rooted in ambition for all pupils. The school has broadened the curriculum, ensuring that pupils learn a wide range of subjects. The school has identified the ambitious knowledge and understanding that all pupils must learn across subjects. In most subjects, curriculum plans set out small steps of learning in a logical order. This helps pupils retain important knowledge and work towards understanding more complex ideas. Many pupils achieve highly. However, in a few subjects, the curriculum does not lay out clearly enough the specific knowledge that pupils are expected to learn, or how this should progress over time. Where this is the case, pupils' learning does not build in enough depth, and pupils do not remember what they are taught.

The school is determined that all pupils with SEND make the best possible progress from their starting points. The school identifies pupils' needs accurately and ensures that these are met. Pupils with SEND are well supported to access the same demanding curriculum as other pupils and have the same breadth of opportunity.

Reading is a high priority in the school. Pupils who struggle to keep up are quickly identified and given extra help. Staff ensure that all pupils know the sounds they need to read fluently. Therefore, most pupils read confidently and widely. They access high-quality books in reading lessons, classroom book corners and the school library.

Teachers have the strong subject knowledge they need to teach most subjects well. Their explanations are clear. Teachers use effective questioning to make pupils think hard and build their understanding. They frequently check that pupils can recall what they have learned before moving on to new knowledge and concepts. Teachers ensure that pupils have the practice they need so that important skills become automatic. Pupils are confident that they receive the timely help they need to keep up.

Teachers ensure that there is a purposeful working atmosphere in lessons. They manage the behaviour of all pupils effectively.

The school supports pupils' broader development well. The curriculum for personal, social, health and economic education ensures that pupils learn how to become responsible, tolerant citizens. They are taught the knowledge and skills they need to develop a healthy, safe lifestyle. Pupils have the opportunity to debate different points of view. They develop curiosity and confidence through participating in a wide range of experiences, from forest school lessons to archery competitions. They are encouraged to have a go at new things, such as a fitness club for those who do not enjoy sport. Assemblies reinforce a strong sense of community and belonging.

Staff strongly support the direction of the school. They value leaders' investment in staff training. The school is considerate of teachers' workload. Governors support and challenge leaders well. Most parents praise the school highly.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Curriculum plans in a few subjects do not identify precisely enough the small steps of knowledge that pupils need to learn, or how these lead to more complex knowledge. This means that pupils' learning does not grow in depth over time, and they do not retain what they have been taught. The school should set out the specific, well-sequenced steps of knowledge that pupils must learn in each subject to ensure pupils build the complex knowledge they need.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in July 2013.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium](#)

[funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	136977
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10288496
Type of school	Junior
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	354
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Barry Fitzgerald
Headteacher	Liam Daley
Website	www.st-helens-jun.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	8 February 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Helen's Junior Academy converted to become a single-academy school in February 2012. The school has previously been inspected by Ofsted twice as an academy. Members of the board of trustees are referred to as governors by the school.
- The school does not currently use an alternative provider.
- A new headteacher took up post in January 2022.
- The most recent inspection of the school's religious character under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 was carried out in November 2018. The next section 48 inspection is due within eight years.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspector held discussions with five trustees, including the chair of the trust. A separate discussion was held with an education representative for the Diocese of Brentwood.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and art. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, staff and pupils, visited a sample of lessons and reviewed samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector reviewed pupils' work and curriculum plans in a further range of subjects.
- The inspector met with pupils to understand their views about the school.
- The inspector held discussions with the inclusion manager and carried out lesson visits together with leaders to consider the support for pupils with SEND.
- The inspector observed the behaviour of pupils during lesson visits, around the school and in the playground. The inspector looked at behaviour, bullying and attendance records, and leaders' analysis of these.
- The inspector reviewed school documentation, including school development plans and governing body minutes.
- Safeguarding records were scrutinised by the inspector, including the single central record of pre-employment checks and the school's log of safeguarding incidents. A meeting was held with those in the school who have oversight of safeguarding arrangements.
- The inspector considered 56 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and 46 free-text comments. The inspector also considered 33 responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils and 29 responses to Ofsted's survey for staff.

Inspection team

Judith Sumner, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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