

Inspection of St Stephen's Catholic Primary School

Sandy Lane, Orford, Warrington, Cheshire WA2 9HS

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 October 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

This school was last inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 14 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between graded inspections under section 5 of the Act. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Stephen's Catholic Primary School is a welcoming place to be. The school provides a nurturing environment where pupils can learn well. Staff foster a keen sense of pride among pupils, ensuring that they feel happy, safe and secure.

The school has established clear expectations for the behaviour of pupils, including for children in the early years. Pupils are polite and respectful to each other and to staff.

Pupils are aspirational for their futures. They enjoy learning and they are keen to participate fully in lessons. Staff have high expectations of pupils' learning. They support pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to achieve consistently well across the curriculum.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of enrichment experiences, such as sports activities, board games and crochet clubs. Pupils have ample opportunities to develop their leadership skills and to learn how to work as part of a team. They thrive on earning badges for their achievements.

Pupils are eager to take on a range of responsibilities within school. For example, some act as librarian leaders and relish the opportunity to help younger pupils select exciting books. Other pupils act as digital leaders or as members of the school council. Pupils enjoy supporting their community, for example by raising money for the local hospice.

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

The school's curriculum is suitably ambitious and, for the most part, delivered well by highly skilled staff. In most subjects, pupils, including children in the early years, benefit from carefully constructed learning activities that build on what they already know. At the end of Year 6, pupils, including those with SEND, are well prepared for secondary school. Nevertheless, the school is finalising the knowledge that pupils should learn in a small number of subjects. This means that, on occasion, some teachers find it more difficult to design learning that helps pupils to gain important knowledge. At times, this leads to gaps in some pupils' learning in these subjects.

The school has ensured that teachers have benefited from appropriate training. This is evident in their strong subject knowledge and in the way in which they present new learning to pupils. Staff use assessment strategies well to identify where pupils have gaps in their knowledge. However, at times, the school's approach to assessment does not support teachers to check that pupils have learned aspects of the intended curriculum. Now and again, this prevents teachers from identifying and addressing the gaps in some pupils' learning swiftly enough.

The school has prioritised the teaching of early reading. As a result, pupils develop a love of reading from an early age. For instance, some pupils said that reading takes

them on an adventure and helps them to look after their mental health. The school ensures that high-quality books form an essential part of pupils' learning.

The school has made certain that staff teach the phonics programme well. Staff ensure that the books that pupils read closely match the sounds that they have learned. This means that pupils experience success when reading. As a matter of routine, staff check on what sounds pupils know and understand. Staff provide extra support for those pupils who find reading more difficult. This helps these pupils to keep up with their peers. Added to this, the school communicates well with parents and carers about how to support their children's reading at home. Most pupils become confident readers by the end of key stage 1.

Staff identify the additional needs of pupils with SEND with accuracy and in a timely manner. Teachers successfully adapt the delivery of the curriculum so that pupils with SEND can learn successfully alongside their peers.

Children in the early years settle into school quickly. They form secure relationships with adults and with their friends. Pupils in key stages 1 and 2 build on this positive start. On the rare occasion that a pupil forgets to follow the school rules, staff quickly and sensitively remind them how to behave.

Attendance is a high priority for the school. Staff apply the school's attendance policies and procedures consistently. The school has raised expectations for pupils' attendance and punctuality through ongoing communication with parents. The school provides an appropriate balance of support and challenge for families when pupils do not attend as regularly as they should.

All pupils, including children in the early years, experience a range of opportunities to enhance their personal development. Pupils develop a deep and meaningful understanding of British values, such as democracy and tolerance. They understand how to demonstrate these values in their daily lives. Staff encourage pupils to keep themselves healthy. For example, pupils spoke fondly about the nourishing breakfast that the school provides for them. Pupils said that starting the day with something warm to eat helps to be ready to learn.

Governors have a secure understanding of the schools' priorities. They provide effective support and challenge to the school. Staff appreciate the guidance that they receive from leaders to help them to manage their workload, look after their well-being and deliver the curriculum with confidence.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a small number of subjects, some teachers are not sufficiently clear about the important knowledge that they should teach and when this content should be taught. This hinders teachers in designing learning and prevents some pupils from gaining the depth of knowledge that they should. In these subjects, the school should finalise its curriculum thinking so that teachers are well informed about how to design learning for pupils.
- In a few subjects, the school's assessment systems do not support teachers well to check that pupils have learned the knowledge outlined in the curriculum. From time to time, this prevents teachers from remedying the gaps in pupils' learning swiftly. The school should ensure that teachers are fully supported to use assessment strategies well to identify and address the gaps in pupils' learning.

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	111310
Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	10242364
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	208
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Joanne Lawton
Headteacher	Steven Hatton
Website	www.ststephenscps.com
Date of previous inspection	5 February 2009, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a Roman Catholic school that is part of the Archdiocese of Liverpool. The last section 48 inspection took place in January 2020. The school's next section 48 inspection is due before January 2028.
- A new headteacher and chair of the governing body have been appointed since the previous inspection.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

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

- Inspectors conducted deep dives in early reading, mathematics and art and design. They met with subject leaders and teachers. They visited lessons, looked at examples of pupils' work and talked with groups of pupils about their learning. The lead inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors considered other curriculum areas. They met with leaders and pupils and reviewed pupils' work in these subjects.
- The lead inspector spoke with members of the governing body, including the vice chair of governors. She also spoke with representatives of the local authority and the archdiocese.
- Inspectors talked to staff about their workload and well-being.
- Inspectors met with the leaders who are responsible for attendance, behaviour and pupils' personal development.
- Inspectors looked at a range of policies and documents related to pupils' welfare and education. They observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils.
- Inspectors met with parents at the start of the school day and took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses.

Inspection team

Helen Friend, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Valmai Roberts

Ofsted Inspector

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