

Inspection of a good school: St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Rainford Road, Windle, St Helens, Merseyside WA10 6BX

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 July 2024

Outcome

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending this vibrant and caring school. They benefit from a vast array of activities, which the school organises for them beyond the school day. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about everyone having a chance to perform for others, including in high-profile venues. They appreciate being able to choose between so many sports and regularly competing within and outside the school at their own level.

The impeccable conduct of pupils and strong attitudes to learning throughout the school begin in the Nursery Year. Children learn to listen intently, follow instructions, share with others and discuss in pairs and groups. Pupils' very positive behaviour is underpinned by their understanding and demonstration of the school's values, including cooperation. Pupils spoke knowledgeably about showing respect for people who are different from themselves.

Pupils benefit from staff knowing them very well as individuals. They are confident that if they have any worries, there is always an adult in the school who will listen and help.

Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), understand that staff expect them to work hard and produce work of high quality. They rise to these expectations and achieve well. They enjoy helping each other and learning from each other.

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

In recent years, the school has improved the curriculum. In all key stages, the curriculum is ambitious for all, including for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. In most subjects, the school has clearly set out what pupils should learn and in which order. However, in some subjects this information lacks detail, with too much being left for individual teachers to decide. This makes it difficult for the school to monitor the impact of its intended curriculum on pupils' achievement. The lack of detail in some subjects also

results in some unnecessary repetition and some gaps in learning as pupils move up the school.

Staff who teach early reading have the knowledge and skills necessary to implement the reading curriculum expertly. In the Nursery Year, children enjoy listening to stories and following words and pictures in books. Staff make sure that the books that pupils read match their phonics knowledge. They regularly check pupils' learning and use this information to help those who are struggling. By the end of Year 1, almost all pupils read with confidence, accuracy and understanding.

The school has made sure that pupils read for pleasure from a wide variety of texts. Pupils benefit from exciting reading-related activities, including guessing which member of staff is the 'masked reader'. Visitors, including a local rugby league player, tell pupils about their own love of reading.

For some pupils, the early writing curriculum does not develop their fundamental skills sufficiently well. Some pupils, even when they read very well, struggle to write accurately and legibly. In late key stage 1 and early key stage 2, this hinders their written communication in subjects such as geography and history.

Teachers have a comprehensive knowledge of the subjects that they teach. They are infectiousy enthusiastic. All staff undertake regular training in how to implement the curriculum. These opportunities include teaching alongside subject specialists, for example a sports coach. Staff make lessons exciting and enjoyable for pupils. They choose activities which fully match what they expect pupils to learn.

The school quickly identifies the needs of pupils with SEND. It seeks advice from external specialists. Staff give pupils with SEND all the help that they need to follow the same curriculum as their peers and to participate in everything that the school provides.

The school has created a culture of mutual respect. Relationships are very positive. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes enhance their learning. They listen attentively, work well independently and collaboratively and persevere when they encounter difficulties.

The school provides very well for pupils' wider development. There is a well-devised programme for personal, social and health education. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet and in relation to potential dangers such as grooming and inappropriate touching. The school provides many opportunities for pupils to develop their talents and interests, for example in debating and gardening. Pupils are proud to take on responsibilities such as being trained playleaders and members of the pupils' governing body.

Staff enjoy working at this school and feel proud to do so. They appreciate the efforts that the school makes to ensure their well-being. Staff said that the school considers the impact on their workload when making changes. The school's governors bring extensive experience to their role. They have had a very positive impact on the school's development.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the school's curriculum leaves too much for staff to decide individually. This results in some gaps in learning and some unnecessary repetition as pupils move up the school. It also makes it difficult for the school to review the impact of the intended curriculum on pupils' achievement. The school should review the curriculum information that it gives to teachers in each subject. This information should be sufficiently detailed to facilitate monitoring and to ensure that pupils can better build on prior learning.
- In key stage 1, some pupils do not learn well enough how to write accurately and legibly. In late key stage 1 and early key stage 2, this hinders the quality of their written communication in some subjects, such as geography and history. The school should review its approach to developing foundational skills in writing so that pupils communicate consistently well in writing across the curriculum.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2020.

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	104809
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	10347909
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	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of the governing body	Kevin Brown
Headteacher	Lyn Rawlinson
Website	www.st-thomasofcanterbury.st-helens.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	3 and 4 March 2020, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school's governing body runs an on-site nursery offering 16 places for three- and four-year-olds. This provision is operated under the community powers of section 27 of the Education Act 2002.
- The school does not use alternative provision for any pupils.
- This is a voluntary-aided school in the Archdiocese of Liverpool. The last section 48 inspection, for schools of a religious character, was in February 2023. The next section 48 inspection is due to take place before February 2028.

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 her evaluation of the school.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: 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 of safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspector had discussions with the headteacher and other members of the leadership team.
- The inspector held a meeting with governors, including the chair of governors.
- The inspector had a discussion with a representative of the local authority and a school improvement partner provided for the school by the Archdiocese of Liverpool.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and physical education. As part of this process, she had discussions with subject leaders, visited lessons, had discussions with pupils, listened to pupils reading and looked at their work in books. She also scrutinised the curriculum and pupils' work in books for some other areas of the curriculum.
- The inspector had a discussion with the acting special educational needs coordinator to help evaluate provision and practice for pupils with SEND.
- The inspector had discussions with groups of pupils about their experience of school. She also observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at social times.
- The inspector considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments, and Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys. She spoke to a cross-section of staff about their workload and well-being.

Inspection team

Liz Kelly, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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