

St Mary's Catholic Junior School

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

Inspection dates

5–6 December 2018

| Overall effectiveness | Requires improvement |
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| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Requires improvement |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Requires improvement |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Good |
| Outcomes for pupils | Requires improvement |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Good |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Until recently, leaders and governors have not tackled weaknesses in teaching or leadership and management.
- While the quality of teaching is improving, it remains too variable. On occasion, teachers' expectations are not high enough. They do not support or challenge pupils – including those who are disadvantaged and the most able – to make at least good progress.
- Teachers are becoming more skilful at developing pupils' basic mathematical understanding and have begun to improve pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar skills. However, some staff do not identify and address the gaps in pupils' earlier learning well enough and this limits progress.
- Sometimes, the tasks set for pupils are too hard for the least able and too easy for the most able.
- Although pupils' reading skills are improving, some teachers do not plan learning that widens and enriches pupils' vocabulary well enough.
- The school's wider curriculum does not build progressively on pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Staff with leadership roles are becoming more skilful in leading their areas of responsibility but are not currently as effective as they need to be in raising standards.
- Shared leadership roles with the other school in the federation are not clear enough to enable staff to contribute fully to the leadership of teaching.

The school has the following strengths

- The interim executive headteacher is a highly effective leader. He has an accurate view of the school's performance and has quickly developed a staff team committed to improving standards for all pupils.
- Leadership of governance has strengthened. Governors use a range of accurate information to hold school leaders to account.
- Parents and carers are supportive of the recent changes to the culture of the school introduced by the interim executive headteacher.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. They feel safe and work and play together harmoniously.
- Safeguarding procedures are thorough and arrangements to keep pupils safe are effective.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and thereby outcomes for pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and the most able, by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve in lessons
 - making sure that teachers provide work at the right level of challenge
 - systematically developing basic English skills and enriching pupils' vocabulary
 - increasing the depth of pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in the wider curriculum.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management by:
 - further stabilising the leadership and management of the school
 - eradicating the legacy of poor teaching within the school
 - increasing the skills of leaders to enable them to have a greater impact on the outcomes for pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Over time, leaders and governors have not ensured that the school has maintained the good performance noted at the previous inspection. Leaders were slow to address pupils' declining outcomes. As a result, although pupils are happy and attend school regularly, too few are making good progress and reaching their full potential.
- Since taking up post, the interim executive headteacher has quickly steadied the ship and identified the school's strengths and weaknesses. Under his strong leadership, a more cohesive, well-motivated staff team – with a shared focus on ensuring that all pupils achieve as well as they can – has been established.
- Expectations of what pupils can achieve are rising and staff are beginning to gain a greater understanding of how to improve teaching, learning and assessment. The skills of governors and of staff with leadership and management roles are being strengthened and the school has the capacity to continue to improve.
- Senior leaders carefully check the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They know where teaching is strong and where improvements are required. Targeted support and training are sharpening teaching skills and improving teachers' subject knowledge.
- The curriculum is planned to include an appropriately broad range of subjects. However, the wider curriculum does not build well enough on pupils' previous knowledge and understanding to ensure that they learn successfully. There is a lack of challenge to deepen learning – including for the most able pupils – and, consequently, progress is not consistently strong enough. Plans are in hand to redesign and strengthen the curriculum to better meet the needs of pupils. However, this work is at too early a stage to see the impact on pupils' learning at present.
- The curriculum is brought to life through a range of trips and visitors to the school. Year 5, for example, have been learning how the British court system works by putting the wolf from Little Red Riding Hood on trial. A reporter from the local regional television station helped pupils understand how to write and deliver a report on the outcomes of the court case.
- Senior leaders are aware that checks made by teachers on how well pupils are doing have not been fully accurate over time. Some teachers have been overgenerous when making assessments. This means the information about pupils' attainment and progress has not been fully reliable as an indication of what pupils know and what they need to learn next.
- A new system to monitor progress is helping leaders to keep an accurate check on how well pupils are doing in reading, writing and mathematics. Checks on the wider curriculum are at an early stage of development.
- The roles of many senior, middle and subject leaders are developing. All are keen to support colleagues but there has not been time to fully develop leadership and management skills or see the full impact of their work on the quality of teaching.
- External consultants have provided helpful support for the leaders of English and

mathematics. Both subject leaders are highly committed to their roles and are using their improved knowledge and leadership skills increasingly to support improvements in the quality of teaching.

- Leadership of the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is proving increasingly effective. School leaders work well with partner agencies to provide prompt and appropriate support for individual pupils. Parents commented very positively on the difference this support has made to their children's personal, social and emotional development. Checks on the quality of interventions and the impact on pupils' learning are at an early stage.
- The assistant headteacher provides effective leadership for disadvantaged pupils. The social, emotional and personal development needs of this group are met well because their needs are well understood. The pupil premium funding is deployed increasingly effectively. Targeted teaching is beginning to lead to stronger progress. However, these pupils do not attain as well as other pupils nationally.
- Leaders ensure that funding for sports and physical education is spent appropriately. It has been used to help pupils to access a greater range of sporting opportunities. More pupils are now given the chance to represent their school in external competitions. A number of Year 5 pupils, for example, were taking part in a cricket competition during the inspection.
- The school's Catholic ethos lies at the core of its life. The school successfully promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils demonstrate respect and tolerance towards each other and those of other cultures. Displays throughout school promote pupils' understanding of British values. Pupils develop a firm understanding of democracy through a range of activities – including the election of school councillors – and are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The pastoral team provides effective support for all pupils. The school rightly prides itself on the nurturing provision for pupils whose circumstances might make them vulnerable.
- The vast majority of parents who spoke to inspectors or left comments on the inspection questionnaire remarked on how much communication has improved in the past few months. Parents think the academic and social improvements brought about at St Mary's recently have benefited their children.
- The interim executive headteacher has quickly established a number of partnerships with local schools. Teachers have regular opportunities to confirm the accuracy of their assessments and share ideas with colleagues in other schools.
- The local authority and archdiocese have brokered effective external support for the school. The interim executive headteacher is providing part-time senior leadership and establishing closer support of consultants and shared posts across both federation schools.
- Support brokered by the local authority is focused on developing leadership and management of subjects such as English and mathematics and improving the quality of teaching. This is leading to improvements, for example in the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' work in English and mathematics.

Governance of the school

- Governors are aware that, since the last inspection, they have not held leaders fully to account for the school's performance. They did not challenge performance information about pupils' progress strongly enough. As a result, until recently, the governing body did not have a secure understanding of the weaknesses in the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Supported by the local authority and the archdiocese, governors have taken decisive action to strengthen their ability to hold school leaders to account. An audit of the governing body's work has been undertaken, followed by prompt action to strengthen the effectiveness of governors' roles and responsibilities.
- Governors now have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Minutes of meetings show that governors ask challenging questions of leaders and they ensure that they receive accurate answers in response. Governors are ambitious for pupils and are aware that there is still more work to do to improve the school.
- The governing body commissioned a review of pupil premium funding. Governors are using the outcomes to improve the impact of this funding on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- Governors know that there is more to do to stabilise staffing in the school. Senior leadership will be strengthened further when the executive headteacher takes up his post full-time in January. Some leadership posts are shared across the federation. Governors are in the process of clarifying the roles and responsibilities of senior and middle leaders to ensure that these staff play a full role in improving the quality of teaching.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school has robust safeguarding procedures. Records and documentation are kept up to date and stored securely.
- Regular training for staff is undertaken. Staff are vigilant in watching for and tackling any potential safeguarding issues. They know what to do if they have any concern about pupils' welfare or safety.
- Leaders work well with a range of external agencies to protect any pupils who might be at risk. Referrals are made effectively and in a timely manner.
- Appropriate checks are made on staff on appointment to the school. Visitors are informed about safeguarding arrangements on arrival.
- The safeguarding governor meets regularly with senior leaders and checks the range of safeguarding practices.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Over time, teaching has not had a sufficiently strong impact on pupils' learning. This negatively affected their progress in different subjects across the school.
- However, decisive action taken by leaders and staff is proving successful in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Pupils have begun to make stronger progress as a result.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers make clear what is to be learned and build on previous learning. They take careful account of any gaps in previous learning and have high expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving. Work is carefully matched to pupils' needs. It challenges all ability levels. Expectations are high. Pupils rise to the challenge, try hard and produce a good quantity of work.
- However, some teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low at times. Work set does not provide enough challenge, and learning therefore slows. At other times, work set is too hard for pupils, particularly those of lower ability who may have gaps in previous learning. When this happens, progress is hampered as pupils wait for teachers to spot and address the difficulties they are having with their work.
- Over time, the most able pupils have not been given enough opportunities to deepen or extend their learning. This lack of challenge means that pupils find their work too easy at times.
- While teaching covers the requirements of the wider national curriculum, staff do not always plan activities which build on what pupils already know or can do. Opportunities to deepen pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding are sometimes missed as a result, and this limits progress.
- The teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar varies in quality. In some year groups, these skills are developed systematically and used effectively when pupils write independently. In other classes, however, these skills are less well developed and teachers do not address any misconceptions pupils may have as they arise.
- Pupils' love of reading is being fostered well. They enjoy choosing books from the school library and many read regularly at home. Reading skills are being developed increasingly well. This is enabling pupils to read with greater fluency and understanding. However, work in pupils' books shows that many pupils lack a wide and rich vocabulary necessary to bring their creative written work to life.
- Pupils enjoy the way many mathematics lessons start with a challenge. Basic calculation skills are generally being developed increasingly well through regular opportunities to reason and solve problems.
- Teaching assistants support pupils' learning well, particularly when they have been well briefed by teachers about the aims of the lesson.
- Good relationships between pupils and staff are a strength of St Mary's. A strong sense of nurture – built on the school's Catholic ethos – ensures that pupils are well cared for and are kept safe. Pupils work well collaboratively.
- Small-group work – often led by teaching assistants – is helping pupils who need extra support, including those pupils who are disadvantaged or those with SEND. Gaps

between these pupils' attainment and that of others are beginning to diminish but there is more to do to fully eliminate these.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils take a pride in their school and are keen to contribute towards its success. They take their responsibilities seriously, particularly those who are members of the school council or act as head boy and head girl.
- Pupils say that they feel safe. Incidents of bullying are rare and are dealt with quickly when reported to staff. Pupils say that all are welcome at St Mary's. Teachers help them learn about diversity and recognise that everyone is different but equal.
- The breakfast club gets the day off to a good start. Pupils of all ages play happily together until the start of the school day, when they are ready to learn. The popular after-school club is well attended.
- The needs of pupils whose circumstances might make them vulnerable are met very well. This is the strength of the school. Pupils – including those who attend nurture sessions – speak highly of the support they receive from staff.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are well mannered and polite. They listen carefully to adults and each other and respond quickly when adults require their attention. Pupils show great respect for the views of others.
- The school is calm and well organised and has a warm sense of community. Pupils know routines well and show great care for their school environment.
- Pupils are happy and enjoy school. They attend regularly and on time. School rules and reward systems are well understood by all and pupils think that staff apply these fairly.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. They bring an eagerness and commitment to their learning and concentrate well when teachers set tasks with the right level of challenge. However, pupils' attention drifts at times and learning time is lost when tasks lack enough challenge or are too hard. On occasion, teachers accept work which contains careless errors and is untidy and is not the best that pupils can do.
- Pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school. They know how to seek help from trusted adults.
- School records show that behaviour has improved this term. Leaders have ensured that any boisterous behaviour is tackled swiftly and the school's policy for behaviour is applied consistently.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Outcomes require improvement because progress is too variable. Evidence gathered during the inspection – including from scrutiny of work in books and from the school’s own records – shows that, although beginning to improve, too few pupils currently in the school make consistently good progress across a range of subjects, including reading, writing and mathematics.
- Where teaching is strongest – for example in Year 6 – pupils make rapid gains in learning and standards have risen gradually in recent years, particularly in writing. However, there is not enough time in Year 6 to fully overcome gaps in learning caused by earlier weaknesses in teaching. Despite strong progress in Year 6, pupils’ progress over time is not good enough to enable pupils to consistently reach the standards expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.
- In 2018, disadvantaged pupils made less progress by the end of Year 6 than other pupils nationally. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics were below those expected. The school’s assessment information for current pupils shows an improving picture of progress for this group of pupils. However, attainment remains lower than the school expects.
- In 2018, attainment in spelling, punctuation and grammar at the end of Year 6 was below average and too few pupils were working at greater depth. School leaders’ plans show that there is more to do to improve these skills for current pupils and gaps from previous weaknesses in teaching remain to be addressed.
- Progress in mathematics at the end of Year 6 has been well below average for a number of years. Recently, however, targeted training has improved teachers’ subject knowledge and teaching skills in this area of the curriculum. As a result, current pupils are now making stronger progress and more pupils are working at the level the school expects for their age.
- The most able pupils – including those who are disadvantaged – do not make enough progress, particularly in writing and mathematics.
- The decoding and fluency of reading are improving, particularly in Year 6. However, pupils’ comprehension of more challenging vocabulary is developing less well. This limits pupils’ use of interesting vocabulary and complex sentence structure when they write independently.
- In most year groups, pupils’ computing skills are well developed. Pupils confidently use a range of software packages. For example, Year 5 confidently manipulated text and pictures as they recorded facts about the solar system from research undertaken on the internet.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 104816 |
| Local authority | St Helens |
| Inspection number | 10042458 |

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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| 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 | 238 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Vanessa Wells |
| Interim executive headteacher | Darren McCann |
| Head of school | Lisa Cunliffe |
| Telephone number | 01744 678 603 |
| Website | www.federationofstmarys.co.uk |
| Email address | stmaryrcnj@sthelens.org.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 30 April–1 May 2014 |

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized school. The proportion of girls attending the school is higher than average.
- The school is part of a hard federation with St Mary's Catholic Infant School. The federation has a single governing body. The schools in the federation maintain separate budgets. Some members of the federation leadership team have responsibilities across both schools.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is declining and is now below average overall.
- The school provides before- and after-school clubs for the pupils in the federation.

- Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced changes to the senior leadership team. From September 2018, an interim executive headteacher from an outstanding school – St Ambrose Barlow Catholic Primary School – was appointed to the school one day a week following the resignation of the headteacher. The interim executive headteacher was subsequently appointed to the substantive role of executive headteacher of the federation and will take up this post in January 2019. The deputy headteacher of the federation was appointed to the role of head of school in September 2018.
- The post of chair of the governing body has been held by four people since the previous inspection. The current chair of governors was appointed in February 2018.
- St Helens local authority and the archdiocese have brokered support for the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment over time. Learning was observed in all classes and when pupils learned in small groups. Inspectors reviewed samples of pupils' work with the interim executive headteacher.
- Inspectors checked the safety of the school premises at different times of the school day. They observed arrangements for pupils' arrival at school.
- The inspectors talked with pupils informally as they played at breaktimes, visited the dining hall at lunchtime and observed pupils' behaviour as they moved around the school. They met formally with four groups of pupils, including two pupils who showed an inspector around the school.
- Inspectors looked at examples of pupils' work and talked to them about it. They listened to pupils read and observed the teaching of reading skills. Pupils talked to inspectors about the books they have enjoyed and those that they are currently reading.
- Inspectors held a number of meetings with the interim executive headteacher to consider his review of the school and the school's plan for improvement. Inspectors spoke with senior leaders, middle and subject leaders, and other members of the school's staff.
- An inspector met with the chair of the governing body and another governor.
- An inspector met with a representative of the local authority and two representatives of the archdiocese.
- Inspectors spoke to parents at the start of the school day. They took account of 50 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 20 comments by parents provided for inspectors. Inspectors also took account of 19 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 22 responses to the staff questionnaire, as well as the school's most recent surveys of pupils' and parents' views.
- Inspectors examined a range of documents, including information about pupils' progress, the quality of teaching, school improvement plans and external views of the school. They reviewed the school's website and scrutinised records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding completed by school staff.

Inspection team

Lyn Pender, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Kathryn Parkinson

Ofsted Inspector

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