

St Austin's Catholic Primary School

Heath Street, St Helens, Merseyside WA9 5NJ

Inspection dates

17–18 July 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
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
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders have put in place many actions for improvement, but they do not currently promote strong enough progress in reading, writing and mathematics in Year 2 and Year 6. Too few pupils reach the expected standard or better in these subjects.
- The quality of teaching is not yet high enough to ensure that almost all pupils achieve good outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teachers do not match work to pupils' abilities with enough consistency.
- Teachers do not consistently provide tasks to challenge the most able pupils.
- There are few opportunities for pupils to develop their mathematical skills further by applying them in other subjects.
- The rates of pupils' absence and persistent absence are above the national average.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have created a caring and nurturing environment, founded in the Roman Catholic ethos of the school, where pupils feel safe and enjoy their learning.
- Leaders' actions to improve teaching and learning are having a positive effect on pupils' progress in reading and mathematics in several year groups.
- Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make good progress.
- Most pupils across the school make good progress in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Children in early years make strong progress by the time they leave Reception Year.
- Pupils' conduct around school is good. Most are polite and confident.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop leaders' strategies for improving the quality of teaching and learning so the proportion of Year 2 and Year 6 pupils who achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics is at least close to the national average.
- Ensure that pupils make consistently strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics across all year groups by:
 - checking that teachers consistently match pupils' work to their various abilities
 - making sure that teachers more regularly provide work for the most able to challenge them and enable them to grapple with more difficult concepts
 - providing pupils with more opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in other subjects across the curriculum.
- Continue with leaders' strategies to reduce pupils' rates of absence and persistent absence, so these are closer to the national average.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The headteacher is an experienced leader who knows the school and pupils well. She and senior leaders have recognised, with honesty and accuracy, that pupils' achievement in recent years in reading, writing and mathematics has not been good enough. Although they have devised suitable action plans for improvement, these have not yet had a consistently strong impact on pupils' progress and attainment in these subjects.
- Leaders do not promote strong enough improvement in some year groups and subjects. Evidence from pupils' work and from available assessment information shows that current pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 do not make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Too few pupils are attaining the expected standard or better.
- Leaders have put strategies in place to improve the quality of teaching and learning in reading, writing and mathematics. These include a revised mathematics scheme and online programmes to accelerate the development of pupils' reading skills. These have had a positive impact on pupils' progress in reading and mathematics in several year groups. Pupils' progress in writing, however, lags behind that in reading and mathematics, and too few pupils attain the standard expected for their age.
- There are suitable systems in place for managing the performance of teachers. Teachers are set targets that focus on improving pupils' achievement, and senior leaders make regular checks on the quality of teaching. Leaders give feedback to teachers, including areas of their practice they need to develop. Although these systems contribute to securing strong teaching in a number of subjects and year groups, the overall quality of teaching is not yet strong enough to ensure consistently good outcomes for pupils.
- There are thorough assessment and tracking systems in place. Senior leaders hold meetings with staff every term to check on pupils' progress. They also use well the tracking system to analyse assessment information. They use their findings to plan a range of support activities for pupils, such as improving their literacy skills.
- The leader of the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has been in post since April 2017. He plans the provision for these pupils well and makes effective use of funding. Pupils benefit from well-planned support. Most make good progress from their starting points.
- Leaders of mathematics and English know their subject well. They carry out a range of activities to check on standards in their subject. They know the areas where there is a need for stronger improvement. They have introduced various measures to secure this. These include providing extra training for teachers in aspects of mathematics, such as mastery, and developing a more structured approach to the teaching of reading. There is evidence that their actions are having a positive impact on pupils' progress in reading and mathematics in a number of year groups. However, this is not currently consistent across the school.
- Leaders of subjects other than English and mathematics have a secure understanding of standards in their subject. They receive effective training to enable them to fulfil

their role. They carry out regular checks on the quality of provision, using methods such as work scrutiny and visits to classrooms to observe teaching and learning. They present reports to the governing body. These actions contribute effectively to the good progress made by most pupils in a range of subjects.

- Leaders have a clear rationale for the use of the pupil premium funding. They have used it to introduce support of various kinds for disadvantaged pupils. These include extra activities for groups and individuals to improve their English and mathematical skills. The progress of these pupils is improving.
- Staff are positive about the school and value the training leaders provide. Morale is high. They typically comment that they are proud to work in the school.
- Leaders make effective use of the physical education (PE) and sport funding for primary schools. They use it to provide coaching for staff to develop their skills. They have sharpened the focus on PE in the school, achieving external recognition through the award of the Gold Mark for school games.
- Leaders have maintained good provision in early years. They ensure that children are well cared for and make good progress from their starting points.
- Leaders ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced and they provide effectively for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They also promote well British values. Pupils enhance their experiences through clubs and educational visits. These include sports clubs such as for judo, and trips to museums.
- The local authority and the archdiocese are clear about the school's strengths and weaknesses and are confident that the headteacher has the skills to bring about the necessary improvements. The local authority has arranged to meet with the school to increase its level of support to match the school's current needs.
- Parents and carers who responded to the online survey, Parent View, or spoke with the inspection team were positive about the school. Typically, they expressed appreciation of the school's caring and nurturing atmosphere.

Governance of the school

- Governors are well trained and knowledgeable about safeguarding. They keep themselves up to date with safeguarding issues in the school by, for example, receiving regular reports from the headteacher. They also ensure that they carry out a regular audit of practice, in collaboration with the local authority.
- Governors are fully aware of the school's strengths and areas for development. They are ambitious to secure better standards in English and mathematics, especially in Year 2 and Year 6. They spoke cogently with the lead inspector about the ways in which they hold leaders to account to ensure that they secure improvement. Although the topics for discussion are recorded in minutes of governing body meetings, there is less detail about the way in which governors challenge senior leaders.
- Governors have ensured that the school's website is now up to date and compliant with the government's requirements.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The designated safeguarding lead makes referrals to external agencies when required and pursues issues if necessary. Records of safeguarding concerns are detailed and thorough.
- The single central record of required checks that the school carries out on members of staff is comprehensive and complies with the government's guidelines.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Leaders train staff well so they know how to be alert to signs of abuse. The school's Roman Catholic ethos informs the establishment of positive relationships at all levels and contributes to an atmosphere of mutual trust.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment does not currently secure strong enough progress for pupils across some year groups and subjects. This is particularly the case in reading, writing and mathematics in Year 2 and Year 6 and in writing in some other year groups.
- Teachers do not consistently provide work that matches pupils' ability. This occasionally leads to a few pupils losing concentration and not focusing on their task. In some year groups, the most able do not tackle concepts, in mathematics for example, that stretch them enough. Pupils of lower ability sometimes lack the necessary support to complete their work. This mismatch of work occurs when teachers do not use what they have found out from their assessment of pupils' skills to plan learning as precisely as they could.
- Teachers provide some opportunities for pupils to apply skills they have learned in English to other subjects. For example, pupils in key stage 2 wrote facts about Vikings in history. However, the way in which teachers organise lessons sometimes limits the most able pupils' depth of learning. There are also very few opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills in other subjects.
- Most teachers have secure subject knowledge. Where teaching over time is most effective, such as in mathematics in Year 5, this results in well-planned lessons that engage and challenge pupils appropriately. In key stage 1, teachers challenge some pupils to write at length or to use their reasoning skills effectively in mathematics.
- Where teaching over time is strongest, teachers ask effective questions that make pupils think hard, especially in mathematics. Teachers make good use of assessment to match the work appropriately. They also deploy teaching assistants effectively to support pupils' learning.
- Teachers expect pupils to behave well and to have positive attitudes to their learning. The majority of pupils live up to these expectations. There is a friendly atmosphere in each class because teachers foster warm relationships.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They know how to stay safe, for example when using the internet, because teachers give them the information they need. They know adults will be helpful and supportive if they have any worries. Staff also help them by providing 'worry boxes', into which they can anonymously place written concerns.
- Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school. They say that teachers make learning fun. They enjoy a range of clubs, such as those for fencing and choir, and they visit interesting places, such as Liverpool's Roman Catholic cathedral. They also have the opportunity to participate in residential trips to experience adventurous activities.
- Pupils know about bullying in its various forms because leaders provide them with events and activities that teach them about it. They say that bullying in school is rare. They are confident that teachers deal effectively with any issues that may arise.
- Most pupils are confident and articulate. They are willing to speak about their work with trusted adults. Leaders develop well pupils' self-esteem. They have various ways of achieving this. For example, there is an annual award assembly celebrating pupils' successes. Pupils in Year 6 wear a more formal uniform than the rest of the school, which emphasises that they are the oldest pupils and encourages them to model positive attitudes for younger pupils.
- Most pupils show positive attitudes to their learning. Sometimes, however, pupils do not show pride in their work, resulting in some untidy presentation.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils show good conduct around school. Teachers manage behaviour well, especially during transitions between different learning activities. Pupils play well together at breaktime and there is appropriate adult supervision.
- Sometimes, pupils lose concentration and misbehave in lessons, but these occurrences are few and are well managed by staff. Pupils typically respond positively to teachers' requests or instructions.
- Leaders have a wide range of actions in place to encourage good attendance. These include rewards for pupils who have high attendance. Leaders also communicate promptly with parents if their child's attendance causes concern. The rate of absence is currently just above the national average. Persistent absence is substantially above the national average. However, the poor attendance of specific pupils, with issues such as mental health needs, has a significant impact on this figure.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- In 2017, pupils in Year 6 performed poorly in tests in reading and mathematics, although they improved on the results they achieved at the end of 2016. Attainment and progress were substantially below the national average. Unvalidated assessment information for 2018 shows that there has been another slight improvement in performance by the current Year 6 pupils compared with 2017. However, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is still considerably below the national average.
- Progress in reading and mathematics in other year groups in key stage 2 is now good. However, progress in writing is less strong. Evidence in workbooks shows that too few pupils currently develop more sophisticated language and structures in their writing.
- The picture of achievement in Year 2 is similar to that in Year 6. Too few current pupils in Year 2 have reached the expected standard for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.
- In subjects other than English and mathematics, most pupils make good progress. Pupils acquire appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills in a range of subjects. In science, in Year 4 for example, they learn how to classify animals. In geography in key stage 1, they find out about contrasting countries and locate the continents of the world.
- Most pupils read widely and with fluency that is appropriate to their age and stage of development. Younger pupils use their knowledge of phonics effectively to read unfamiliar words. Leaders have rearranged the school library so that they can now match books to pupils' ability more readily. This contributes well to the improving picture of reading progress across year groups other than Year 2 and Year 6.
- Current disadvantaged pupils make improving progress because of leaders' actions and their effective use of the pupil premium. The difference in attainment in English and mathematics between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally is reducing rapidly. However, the proportion of Year 2 and Year 6 disadvantaged pupils who attain the expected standard for their age is still below that of other pupils nationally.
- Current pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points. This is because leaders identify their needs effectively and plan helpful activities to support them.
- The teaching of phonics in Year 1 is effective. The large majority of pupils typically make good progress in phonics and reach the expected standard.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years leader is experienced and knowledgeable. She makes effective use of resources, such as guidance provided by the Department for Education, to inform her evaluation of the quality of education in the provision. She gives priority to training and developing the early years staff team. She devises thorough action plans to ensure that staff meet the children's needs. Through a range of activities, staff provide additional support for children who need it. These include developing children's skills in speech

and language. Consequently, current children, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged, make good progress.

- Children begin early years with skills and knowledge below those typical for their age and stage of development. The proportion of children who achieve a good level of development is usually in line with the national average. This represents good progress from children's starting points. As a result, most children are ready for Year 1 by the end of Reception Year.
- There is a range of strategies in place to include parents in their children's learning. Leaders give parents information about what to expect when their child starts in early years. Staff keep in regular contact with parents by sending weekly newsletters home. There are two parents' afternoons during the year to provide a formal report on children's progress. There are also regular opportunities throughout the year for parents to attend events, such as 'stay and play' sessions. Parents can also communicate frequently through their child's home-school book. These strategies contribute effectively to the good progress children make.
- Children's behaviour is good. Staff adhere to the school's policy and protocols on safeguarding and they are well trained. Children show that they feel safe through their behaviour. They are confident and willing to talk with adults whom they trust.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Teachers plan activities to excite and interest children. They use assessments well to enable them to provide for children's next steps in their learning. Teachers make effective use of the indoor and outdoor areas to provide a variety of activities that support children's learning. For instance, children engage well with activities using magnets, with some confidently developing scientific language, such as 'magnetic' and 'non-magnetic'.
- Leaders have useful arrangements in place to aid children's transition into and out of early years. For example, they visit private providers before children arrive, ensuring that they have the information they need to assess children's skills on entry to the provision. As children reach the end of their time in Reception Year, adults ensure that they introduce them to staff and the typical activities they will meet in Year 1. These actions help to ensure that most children are ready for Year 1 when they complete Reception Year.
- Staff mainly ensure that they ask questions of children to deepen their learning. However, there are times when the interaction between adults and children involves adults using language that is encouraging and supportive but does not enable children to think hard about their learning.

School details

Unique reference number	104806
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	10045150

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	236
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Bielby
Headteacher	Patricia Wade
Telephone number	01744 678000
Website	www.st-austins.st-helens.sch.uk
Email address	patsy.wade@sthelens.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 April 2014

Information about this school

- This is a Roman Catholic, voluntary-aided primary school.
- The school was inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 in November 2014.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.

- The headteacher is a leader in a local network of schools which focuses on good practice. She is also a trained moderator for key stage 1 and a strategic partner in the local teaching school alliance.
- The headteacher is currently executive headteacher of this school and another local school. This arrangement is due to end on 31 August 2018.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors carried out observations of learning in all year groups. Some of these were joint observations with the headteacher. The headteacher was also present at inspection team meetings.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation summary, action plans for school improvement, records of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, assessment information, minutes of meetings of the governing body, and records connected with the safeguarding of children.
- Inspectors had discussions with various stakeholders, including the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, other members of staff, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, a representative of the local authority, a representative of the archdiocese, and parents and pupils.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and analysed pupils' work in a range of subjects. They also looked at the work of children in early years.
- The lead inspector evaluated 14 responses received through Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, during the inspection. He also analysed 40 responses to the pupil survey and 10 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Mark Quinn, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Howard Bousfield

Ofsted Inspector

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Manchester
M1 2WD

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