

St Austin's Catholic Primary School

Riverbank Road, Liverpool, Merseyside, L19 9DH

Inspection dates

18–19 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils make good progress from their starting points and reach standards which are often well above those found nationally.
- Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage because activities are well designed and capture their interest.
- The numbers of pupils reaching the higher levels at both Key Stages 1 and 2 are higher than nationally. This is an increase on previous years, particularly in writing and mathematics.
- Teaching over time is good and makes a strong contribution to pupils' achievement. Well-focused professional development has led to improvements, particularly in the standard of pupils' writing.
- Relationships are strong and this contributes well to pupils' good attitudes to work.
- Pupils feel safe, are well behaved and show courtesy and respect. They have a good understanding of how to keep safe.
- Pupils are provided with a wide range of extra activities beyond the school day, including sports and arts. They learn Spanish and it permeates the school day, with registration and prayer often heard in Spanish.
- The headteachers have created a united and effective team of staff and governors who are fully committed to the vision for continued improvement. Leadership at all levels has been strengthened, leading to improvements for pupils.
- Governors use their skills well to support and challenge the leaders of the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not yet enough outstanding teaching to improve pupils' achievement even more.
- Marking does not always give pupils enough guidance on how to improve and pupils do not always have time to reflect on any guidance given.
- The progress of some pupils slows because learning support assistants are not always involved in supporting pupils' learning in all parts of a lesson.
- Opportunities to practise mathematical skills in subjects other than mathematics are too few.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 24 lessons or parts of lessons.
- The inspectors listened to pupils from four different year groups reading, and talked with them and other groups of pupils about their lessons and school life.
- Meetings were held with the headteachers, senior and middle leaders, representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documentation relating to pupils' progress and to school management, including the arrangements to ensure safeguarding.
- The inspectors spoke to parents and took account of the 92 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View). They also took account of the 34 staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Vanessa MacDonald, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Mark Williams

Additional Inspector

Peter McKay

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Austin's Catholic Primary is larger than the average sized primary school. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A small number of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and a very small proportion speaks English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also above average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, is below the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The leadership of the school is composed of a headship team of two headteachers (one full time and one 0.6 of a full-time post).
- In January 2013, the school appointed two assistant headteachers.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding in order to raise achievement further by:
 - ensuring that marking across all subjects consistently gives pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work, that they have time to respond to this and that their response is checked
 - increasing the opportunities for pupils to practise their mathematical skills in other subjects in order to help them make faster progress in mathematics
 - making sure that learning support assistants are always involved in supporting pupils' learning in all parts of a lesson so that all groups of pupils are encouraged to achieve as well as they can.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils achieve well through school. Most children start school in the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills in their personal and social development that are broadly typical for their age. However, in reading, writing and understanding the world, about half of the children have skills below those typically expected. They make good and sometimes outstanding progress because of the well-planned and interesting activities that encourage children to try things for themselves and to develop their skills. By the time they start in Year 1, the majority of pupils have skills which are expected of their age, with some working at higher levels than expected.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have a very good grasp of phonics (knowledge of letters and the sounds they make) because of good teaching. These skills continue to develop well across Key Stage 1, with pupils in Year 1 reaching above average levels in the national phonics screening check for the past two years. Work in books shows that pupils apply these skills well in their writing.
- Pupils enjoy reading and read well. Younger pupils use their phonics knowledge well to break down words and older pupils often read with fluency and expression, tackling more difficult words with ease.
- Pupils make good progress across the school and reach standards that are consistently above, and sometimes well above, those found nationally in reading, writing and mathematics at both Key Stages 1 and 2. The proportions reaching the higher levels at both key stages have improved and are significantly above national averages in writing and mathematics.
- The focus on further improving standards in writing is evident in the high quality of work and presentation seen in books and in the good range of opportunities for pupils to write in different subjects.
- The achievement of the most able pupils is good. They make good progress and school leaders have identified where they could further improve. The additional sessions in mathematics, for pupils identified as ready for the challenge of a higher level of work, are improving their rate of progress. In one session, a group of Year 5 pupils were learning how to interpret algebraic sentences with the teaching moving their learning on at a rapid pace. Additional writing workshops, including after school, have also continued to improve the progress of the most able pupils.
- The majority of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, the small number from minority ethnic groups and the very small number who speak English as an additional language also make good progress from their different starting points. This is because of the well-targeted additional support they receive.
- Throughout the school, gaps between the attainment of pupils eligible for the pupil premium, including those known to be eligible for free schools meals, and other pupils are closing rapidly. The attainment of this group in the most recent Year 6 tests was about four terms behind that of other pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. However, a number of these pupils also had special educational needs. School records show that, for the pupils currently in school, the majority are less than a term behind their peers and are often achieving levels similar to their peers'. Their progress is good because of the support they receive. This demonstrates the school's commitment to equality of opportunity.

The quality of teaching is good

- The work in books shows that teaching over time is good and there are some examples of outstanding practice across the school. Pupils are keen to learn and respond to their teachers' high expectations of them. Relationships across the school are very positive, which contributes well to pupils' learning. Pupils spoke very positively about their lessons, with comments such as 'You learn new things' and 'You get educated well.'

- Children are taught well in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The environment is designed diligently and activities are planned carefully; as a result, children and adults work seamlessly across the indoor and outdoor spaces. Opportunities for children to practise their learning are created whenever possible. Children were observed writing words with the 'ow' sound they had learnt, and one child delighted with her word, 'cowgown'. Children talk confidently about what they are doing and how what they have learnt helps them with their task. For example, two boys were 'building a bridge across a swamp'. They explained it was a tunnel bridge and had labelled their drawing 'tunule brij', showing good understanding of letter sounds for their age.
- In Key Stages 1 and 2, good subject knowledge is used well to plan activities that suit the needs of all different levels of ability. For example, in Year 5 pupils made rapid progress in their use of different types of language, such as alliteration and onomatopoeia, in their writing. They shared and developed their ideas in groups, being challenged to improve this further and assessing their work against given criteria.
- The opportunities for pupils to write for different purposes are good. The standard of presentation is very good and work in books shows a good use of vocabulary and punctuation as pupils apply their grammar, spelling and punctuation skills well.
- Marking is regular. There are some good examples where pupils are given clear and specific guidance on how to improve their work, with time to respond to this. However, this is not consistent across all classes or subjects. Occasionally, pupils' responses to marking go unchecked and errors are missed, which slows progress.
- In mathematics, pupils show a good understanding of how to use different strategies to answer questions and sums. Pupils in Year 2 made good progress in applying their understanding of quarter turns and clockwise rotation to negotiate their way around a maze on the computer. However, opportunities for pupils to practise and improve their mathematical skills in subjects other than mathematics are not frequent and so do not provide even more scope for improving mathematical skills.
- Learning support assistants help pupils well during small-group activities and additional sessions that enable them to make good progress, particularly those who are disabled and have special educational needs. However, some pupils' learning slows when learning support assistants are not involved all the time, for instance at the beginning and end of a lesson.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The school provides pupils with a warm and welcoming environment where there are clear expectations of good behaviour and conduct. Pupils are polite and well mannered and conduct themselves well around the school.
- Relationships are very positive and pupils show courtesy and respect to each other and to the adults who look after them. The dining hall is calm and well organised, with pupils sitting sensibly at allocated tables and staff helping younger pupils with their lunches. At playtimes, pupils are well supervised and play well together.
- The majority of pupils show good and sometimes excellent attitudes to their learning. They are eager to learn and enjoy the opportunities to work with partners and in small groups. Occasionally, some pupils lose concentration, which slows their rate of progress.
- Pupils say that behaviour is typically good and the vast majority of parents agree. They know that any incidents of behaviour which is not as good as expected will be quickly dealt with. They say that such incidents, including those of a bullying nature, are infrequent.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the different forms of bullying, including physical and verbal bullying. As a result of the recent 'Safer Internet Day', pupils are particularly well informed about cyber bullying and how they should keep safe on the internet.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say they feel safe in school and the vast majority of parents agree. Pupils are able to explain clearly how to keep safe in school, particularly on the playground and outside areas. One child in Reception, for example, said he thought it was too wet to go in the mud pit and two others were helpfully brushing away the

water into the drain – after they had enjoyed jumping and splashing in it, though! Pupils are reminded about how to be safe around bonfires and on Halloween by the fire and police services but are less sure about other situations of possible danger.

- Attendance has been broadly average over the last three years and is showing improvement this year. The school works closely with different agencies and families to promote good attendance and punctuality. As a result, the punctuality of pupils at the start of the day has improved. Lessons start on time across the school and pupils arrive ready to work.

The leadership and management are good

- There is a strong team and collaborative ethos at St Austin's. The headteachers are clear about their united vision for the further improvement of the school. This is fully shared by school staff and governors who are committed to ensuring that continued improvements are made.
- The more recent addition to the leadership structure of two assistant headteachers has further strengthened leadership at a senior level. Senior leaders regularly check on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress and have together identified accurately areas for development. This is having a positive outcome on closing any gaps between the performance of different groups and in improving standards and progress in writing.
- The system for tracking how well pupils are doing is comprehensive. The ongoing use of this by all staff, coupled with the regular and rigorous meetings on pupils' progress, ensures that any pupil who is in danger of falling behind is quickly identified. The system has also identified the most able pupils who could be challenged further and so leaders have been able to put in place additional sessions to accelerate their learning.
- The process for checking on the performance of teachers is robust and is aligned with teachers' career expectations and pay progression. Professional development is linked to both school and individual priorities. Some middle leaders, for example, are attending accredited courses to develop their leadership skills further. The projects, undertaken as part of this, have a focus on school priorities such as improving writing and developing the Spanish curriculum. Subject leaders have also attended training on the planned changes to and development of their subjects.
- The curriculum is well balanced and pupils are given a wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities. These include clubs, visitors, trips and residential visits as well as those linked to the strong Catholic ethos of the school. Pupils are immersed in Spanish as part of their curriculum, with the youngest pupils singing songs in Spanish, registers taken in Spanish and prayers spoken in Spanish; timetables even showed 'Spanish maths'. This contributes well to pupils' very strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The primary school sport funding is used to provide pupils with a range of subject specialist coaches who have extended the ranges of sport taught, including dance and lacrosse. In addition, opportunities for pupils to participate in extra-curricular clubs and competitive events have increased. The introduction of these is ensuring that all pupils have good opportunities to develop their skills and well-being. The membership of the local sports partnership provides staff with professional development to extend their skills.
- The local authority has provided light-touch support for this good school. The local authority improvement officer has worked alongside the senior leaders to check on the quality of teaching and in providing training to governors.
- The school works closely in partnership with different organisations. Transition arrangements with the many different nursery providers are good and transition for pupils to high school are also effective, with specific plans in place for those pupils who need this. The school website and newsletters ensure that parents are kept well informed, and parent workshops are run in areas such as mathematics to support parents with their children's learning.
- The close partnership with Liverpool Hope University has provided pupils with additional support to extend their learning with writing workshops, for example. Teachers from St Austin's have also supported staff and students from the university in developing their practice.

■ The governance of the school:

- The governing body has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development because it is provided with regular and comprehensive information on how well pupils are doing and on the quality of teaching. Governors look closely at the skills within the governing body and use these well to support and challenge leaders in equal measure. Financial decisions on the use of funding, such as the pupil premium and sports funding, are targeted effectively to bring about improvements. Governors are regular visitors to the school, checking on both teaching and progress but also aspects of health and safety. They ensure that staff, including the headteachers, meet their targets before considering any recommendations for pay awards. Governors attend regular training to develop their skills, including in developing their understanding of the information about pupils' progress. Governors fully meet their statutory duties, including that of safeguarding.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	104643
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	439540

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	443
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike McGuinness
Headteachers	John Carney and Noel O'Neill
Date of previous school inspection	19 January 2009
Telephone number	0151 427 1800
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