

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Birkenhead

Woodchurch Road, Prenton, Merseyside CH43 5UT

Inspection dates

28–29 November 2017

| 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 | Requires improvement |
| Outcomes for pupils | Requires improvement |
| Early years provision | Requires improvement |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Inadequate |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement is improving after a dip since the previous inspection. Even so, a lack of challenge in activities holds back the progress of some pupils, including the most able.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils varies across the school.
- Leaders do not make sure that the curriculum helps pupils understand enough about the cultures of different people and communities.
- Some classrooms and study areas are unenticing and do not support or celebrate pupils learning well.
- Some of the leaders' plans for improving the school are too imprecise to make sure that the right changes happen quickly.
- Children in the early years are not fully prepared for Year 1 because of variability in the quality of teaching.
- The quality of pupils' writing in some classes and activities is not good enough.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders, governors and staff make sure that children and pupils are well protected and cared for. Pupils feel safe. Staff keep the premises secure.
- The most successful teaching in the school is skilful, inspiring and makes full use of staff's knowledge of different subjects.
- Pupils behave very sensibly. They are polite, thoughtful and self-disciplined.
- Senior leaders, governors and the local authority have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are starting to work well together to improve the school after a long period of change and upheaval.
- The new headteacher brings calm and a clear sense of direction to the school. Staff and parents support the changes he is introducing. The morale of staff is good.
- Pupils' learn to read well.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the impact of leaders by:
 - keeping a much closer check on the impact of teaching on pupils' progress in activities and making sure that steps for improvement are identified clearly
 - sharpening leaders' plans and reviews of the school to show precisely how success will be assured
 - enhancing current plans to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils
 - making sure that the school website is up to date with all required information.
- Improve the quality of teaching and make sure that pupils make the best possible progress in all subjects by:
 - giving all pupils, including the most able, challenge in their work that deepens and extends their existing knowledge, skills and understanding
 - making sure that staff give pupils a clearer explanation of what they are to learn
 - enhancing the quality of displays in classrooms and study areas to support learning and better celebrate pupils' good work
 - sharing the best work of staff more widely with other colleagues in the school.
- Improve the standard of pupils' writing throughout the school by:
 - providing pupils with more meaningful opportunities to practise and develop their writing at greater length across subjects
 - making sure that all staff model high-quality writing and support pupils when they make errors
 - inspiring pupils to want to write more
 - developing the expertise and confidence of staff from Nursery to Year 6 in the teaching of writing.
- Make sure that pupils understand the cultures of different people and communities as well as the differences between culture and religion.
- Improve the quality of children's education in the early years by:
 - making better use of information about children's progress to identify priorities to improve teaching and learning
 - giving children more time to think and respond to staff questions
 - making sure that all staff are used to best effect to support activities.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders quickly addressed failings in the safeguarding of pupils identified at the previous inspection. However, relationships between staff and leaders in the school plummeted. The morale of staff slumped. Improvements in teaching and pupils' outcomes, achieved over previous years, declined quickly. The new headteacher, together with other senior leaders, governors and the local authority, is turning around the decline. Pupils are safe and protected well. Staff morale is good, but the quality of pupils' education is variable.
- Senior leaders know the scale of the challenge they face to make sure that children and pupils at St Joseph's achieve their very best. Leaders are knowledgeable and honest in their understanding of what the school does successfully, as much as where further improvement is required.
- Senior leaders are thoughtful in their work to improve the school. They are open to the advice of outside experts. They act sensibly in response to help from the local authority. They engage regularly and carefully with a national leader for education whose advice is making the work of the school better.
- Leaders are introducing many changes that are at an early stage of development. This means it is too soon to see the full impact of these actions. For example, the headteacher and acting deputy headteacher are increasingly helping middle leaders to take action to improve staff's work in different subjects.
- Leaders do not use pupil premium funding well enough to make sure that disadvantaged pupils achieve as successfully as other pupils.
- Leaders' reviews of teaching in the school are not precise enough to spot all the aspects of teaching that staff should improve. Their evaluation of the lack of challenge and the impact on pupils' progress needs further attention.
- Leaders' actions to improve safeguarding make a positive difference to the work of the school. However, their plans for the wider improvement of the school are sometimes imprecise and lack urgency. This means changes do not always happen as quickly as needed.
- Leaders review and develop the curriculum adequately. They are beginning to take action to make even more certain that staff's coverage of the school curriculum is comprehensive.
- Leaders make sure that pupils learn about many spiritual, moral and social aspects of modern Britain. Pupils learn to respect diversity, for example people of different abilities and sexuality. However, leaders do not make sure that pupils learn enough about the cultures of other people and communities. Some pupils and staff are confused about the difference between culture and religion.
- The special educational needs coordinator maintains an appropriate overview of the work of staff, pupils' learning and the use of extra funding. Leaders spend funding carefully, including giving extra help for pupils who have special educational needs

(SEN) and/or disabilities. This support benefits pupils' inclusion in school life and helps them to make steady progress.

Governance of the school

- The link governor for safeguarding keeps a frequent and close check on the work of staff and leaders to protect pupils. She makes sure that other governors are informed of her findings. Governors check the safety of the school premises regularly and thoroughly. They make sure that school funding improves the security of external gates, lighting and fences as well as internal doorways.
- Governors now challenge and debate more carefully what they are told about the work of the school. They have a clear and realistic understanding of the upheaval that the school has experienced since the previous inspection. Governors know what leaders are doing to address issues and improve the school. They know what more remains to be achieved.
- Governors have not made sure that the school website contains all the required information.
- Governors responded positively to an external review of their work conducted since the previous inspection. For example, they now plan much more carefully for the continued improvement of their work and the recruitment of new governors.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Frequent communication with parents, including through social media, underpins the school's work to care for its pupils.
- Staff, including those working at lunchtime, are well trained, up to date and knowledgeable about child protection. Leaders give staff frequent updates about national safeguarding issues.
- Staff are vigilant in recording and reporting any concerns to leaders. Records are comprehensive and kept secure. Leaders keep a careful overview of any emerging issues. They know how to look for patterns among low-level issues that may suggest a bigger concern.
- Links with other agencies to protect and support pupils and their families are good.
- Throughout the school, adults and pupils can see clear displays of information about safeguarding. Staff give pupils many opportunities to learn about being safe, for example in how they use the internet.
- Leaders and staff deal well with issues of bullying between pupils.
- The school's child protection policy is up to date and understood by leaders and staff.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Wider weaknesses in the school in 2016 negatively affected the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders did not make sure that staff kept ahead of large-scale national changes to what pupils must be taught and how they are assessed. This affected the quality of pupils' learning. Senior leaders are beginning to once again improve the work of staff, but the quality of teaching varies from class to class.
- Teachers' use of assessment information to plan for pupils' learning is patchy. Some teaching repeats previous work unnecessarily. This limits the progress that pupils make.
- Weak planning, for example when introducing important mathematical concepts, leads to a lack of clarity for pupils about what they are learning.
- Some planned learning in geography and history fails to challenge pupils. Tasks involve too much cutting, sticking and colouring in. On these occasions, pupils' basic knowledge of the subject improves but their understanding is not deepening.
- Pupils told inspectors that some of their most enjoyable learning has developed from activities such as school trips. Parents say they would like their children to undertake even more such experiences at school.
- The teaching of writing requires improvement. Although some teaching is exciting and inspires pupils to write thoughtfully and skilfully, this is inconsistent. Occasionally, tasks are too basic. For example, when pupils are asked to fill in the missing words on a sheet of paper rather than writing meaningful answers. Simple errors, such as not starting a sentence with a capital letter are uncorrected, so pupils do not learn from their mistakes.
- Displays of information in some classrooms and study areas do not support pupils' learning well. Not enough of pupils' good work is celebrated in displays to encourage them in their studies.
- The teaching of reading is successful and pupils learn to read skilfully. Staff teach reading skills well in group activities. Teachers and teaching assistants have a good knowledge of how to teach pupils the sounds that letters make. Staff enthuse pupils with a wide range of stories and non-fiction in school and for reading at home.
- Teachers foster pupils' positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour. Classrooms are calm and pupils focus on their activities. Teaching assistants play a valued role in helping different groups of pupils to learn. They make good contributions to assisting pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development helps them to respect the views and

faiths of other people. However, pupils' understanding of different cultures is limited, despite work by staff and leaders since the previous inspection.

- Pupils at St Joseph's are self-confident, happy and thoughtful citizens. They understand the importance of effort and working individually as well as in a team.
- Pupils learn to recognise the impact of disability, such as autism, on the lives of other children. They are starting to respect difference. For example, pupils understand the importance of using gesture to communicate with children who cannot make their views known easily with speech.
- Pupils know that it is acceptable to feel happy or sad about aspects of their lives. They know that staff will listen to them if they wish to discuss their feelings.
- Pupils say that bullying is uncommon and addressed successfully by staff. They know how to avoid becoming a bully, for example by not using language that would be homophobic.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, for example when using the internet or social media. They know the risks posed by strangers they meet in their local community. Pupils say they feel safe at school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils respect staff, their classrooms and resources. They listen to advice from adults. Pupils willingly care for their school and other children. In lessons, they listen and participate well in activities.
- Pupils are polite and self-disciplined. They represent their school proudly, for example when meeting with inspectors.
- Pupils behave sensibly, even when teaching is uninspiring. Disruption in classrooms is rare.
- Pupils' attendance at school is average. Levels of persistent absence are low. Even so, some pupils do not arrive punctually to school at the start of the day.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils develop the confidence and positive attitudes towards learning that they need when they move to secondary school. They understand the importance of working independently and with others to debate and solve problems. However, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching mean pupils do not develop all the skills and understanding they need across subjects.
- Leaders are at early stage of introducing new school arrangements to assess pupils. This means it is not possible to fully rely on school summaries of the progress made by each class. To establish current progress, inspectors checked a range of pupils' work and observed learning throughout the school. Inspectors found that pupils' progress varies in some activities.

- In some lessons, pupils, including the most able, do not progress well. This is because pupils' work is not adapted enough to their needs.
- Funding to support the small numbers of disadvantaged pupils is not making enough difference to their learning. Pupils' abilities lag behind those of all pupils nationally, even though they make average progress in their reading, writing and mathematics.
- In 2017, pupils' progress in reading dropped to below the national average. In addition, the proportion of pupils in Year 1 reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check dropped to below the national average in 2017. Leaders and staff are taking determined action to overcome weaknesses in the school. Current pupils make good progress in reading. Pupils are becoming skilled readers who enjoy using a wide range of literature and non-fiction books. They talk about genre and different authors with confidence. Their attainment in reading in Year 6 is above average and some middle-ability pupils make strong progress in their reading skills.
- Pupils' achievement in writing is inconsistent throughout the school. They are not always developing the skill and confidence to develop and refine their ideas when writing.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics is improving but it is not good. Pupils' progress was average in 2016 but dropped to below average in 2017. Some current pupils in key stage 2 told inspectors that their mathematics work is too easy. Inspectors agree because some pupils' work and lessons help them to develop their basic skills but not to think deeply about mathematical concepts.
- Pupils' attainment in science in Year 2 and Year 6 is above average.
- Where teaching in the school is most successful, for example in reading, pupils flourish and make good progress. They enthuse about what they are learning. They show high engagement in lessons and their abilities deepen and strengthen.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make steady progress across the school. This is because staff and leaders focus on adapting support to meet individual pupils' needs.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Children behave well and care for one another and their classrooms. They enjoy school.
- Links with parents are good and help children to settle easily and happily.
- Staff in the early years are caring and their relationships with children are positive and supportive. However, teaching is inconsistent and not enough children make good progress and leave Reception ready for Year 1.
- Teaching requires improvement. The quality of staff's questioning of children is variable. Some staff ask many questions in quick succession, leaving children little time to think or to answer. This holds back children's learning. In contrast, some staff use questioning, listening and thinking aloud to help children to consider, wonder and solve problems.
- Sometimes, staff do not model tasks to children well. For example, when asking them to make sets of a given number of objects in mathematics activities. At other times, the

skills of teaching assistants are under used.

- Leaders' work with the local authority is helping to improve the quality of the early years at the school. For example, raising staff expectations and improving the accuracy of assessment. Even so, leaders and staff have more work to do to make sure that the curriculum helps all children to achieve well in their writing.
- Leadership requires improvement. Leaders review the attainment of some groups of children at the start and end of their time in the early years. They use this information successfully when planning for improvement. However, they focus too much on attainment rather than the progress of children. This means that teaching is not always sharply focused on children's needs. Some children start school with skills below those typical for their age and leave the Reception class without catching up.
- Children have access to a wide range of attractive stories and non-fiction books. Book areas are cosy and attractive for children. Stories are shared frequently by staff but children's books reflect little of the diverse world of modern Britain.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 105092 |
| Local authority | Wirral |
| Inspection number | 10044020 |

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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| 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 | 375 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Annette Roberts |
| Headteacher | Alex Turner |
| Telephone number | 0151 652 6781 |
| Website | www.stjosephscatholicprimarybirkenhead.co.uk |
| Email address | schooloffice@stjosephs-birkenhead.wirral.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 19–20 April 2016 |

Information about this school

- St Joseph's is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- Since the previous inspection, the school Nursery has changed to offering morning sessions only. Some children start school in the Reception class.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for support through the government's pupil premium funding is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is average.

- The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is below average.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been several changes of staffing. The assistant headteacher is acting deputy headteacher. A new headteacher was appointed in June 2017.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum requirements for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about governance, the curriculum or pupil premium strategy on its website.
- The school receives support brokered by Wirral local authority from a national leader in education.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning throughout the school and made joint observations with the headteacher and acting deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors checked the safety of the school premises at different times of the day. They observed arrangements for pupils' arrival at school. Inspectors observed pupils at breaktime and as they moved around the school.
- Inspectors checked pupils' work to see what learning and progress have been like this year. Inspectors also reviewed a sample of pupils' work in English, geography and history with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors listened to some pupils from Year 2, Year 3, Year 5 and Year 6 read.
- Inspectors held a number of meetings with the headteacher and deputy headteacher to consider their reviews of the school and their plans for improvement.
- Inspectors met some parents as they dropped their children off at school. There were too few responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, from which to draw any conclusions. Inspectors considered information from a telephone call by a parent to Ofsted during the inspection.
- Inspectors reviewed information about the progress and attainment of pupils.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in classes and around the school. Inspectors spoke with a random sample of 16 pupils from key stage 2.
- Inspectors met with the school leaders for English, mathematics, special educational needs and the early years.
- Inspectors reviewed responses from 10 staff to an Ofsted questionnaire. The lead inspector met with a sample of five staff on the first day of the inspection.
- The lead inspector met with a representative of Wirral local authority and with a national leader in education who is supporting the school. The lead inspector met with the chair of governors and with the link governor for safeguarding.
- Inspectors conducted a range of activities to evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding at the school. These included: discussions with staff, pupils and parents; a check of school safeguarding records; a review of information displayed around the school; a review of checks made on the suitability of staff and governors to work with pupils; and a check of the school's child protection policy.

Inspection team

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Tim Vaughan, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| David Deane | Ofsted Inspector |
| John Shutt | Ofsted Inspector |
| Louise Smith | Ofsted Inspector |

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