

St Clare's Catholic Primary School

Hawthorn Road, Lache, Chester, CH4 8HX

Inspection dates	6–7 October 2015
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders, including governors, have managed significant staff changes effectively. As a result, there have been improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, attendance and pupils' outcomes.
- The new headteacher has a strong vision for the school, which is shared by all staff and governors. She has created a culture of ambition and has swiftly implemented actions, which have made rapid improvements to teaching and learning.
- Teachers have high expectations and plan work which interests pupils and is well matched to their needs. As a result, pupils make good progress from their different starting points in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Links to topics and opportunities to talk about their ideas has led to improvements in the standard of pupils' writing.
- Parents are very supportive of the school and recognise the positive changes that have been made to improve the environment and learning.
- Pupils feel safe in school and parents agree. Pupils are taught about how to keep safe when using the internet and in their local environment.
- Behaviour is good. Pupils are polite, and play and work well with one another. They enjoy coming to school and, as a result of actions by leaders, attendance has improved.
- Provision in the early years is good. Children quickly settle in the welcoming environment, and they work and play happily together with friends in Year 1. Staff across the early years work closely together to ensure children are well cared for.
- Teaching assistants are used effectively to support different groups of pupils so that they progress as well as their peers.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The guidance given to pupils on how to improve their work is not always clear enough to ensure it leads to improvements. Teachers do not always check that pupils respond to guidance given.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise their mathematical skills in other subjects.
- Teachers do not always check pupils' spelling closely enough so that pupils learn from their mistakes.
- Middle leaders' skills in checking on how well pupils are doing and the quality of teaching are not yet fully developed.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- To build on and further strengthen the improvements in teaching and pupils' outcomes, including for the most able, by ensuring that:
 - teachers consistently provide pupils with clear guidance on how to improve their work and check that pupils have responded to this, in line with school policy
 - teachers consistently check and correct pupils' spellings
 - pupils are provided with more opportunities to practise their mathematical skills in real-life contexts and other subjects.

- Extend the skills of middle leaders to develop their confidence in checking on the quality of teaching and pupils' learning, to make sure that both teaching and learning continue to improve.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Governors and senior leaders have managed the significant staff changes effectively and the school has improved since the last inspection.
- This improvement has been particularly rapid in the last year, since the appointment of the new headteacher. She has swiftly identified the key priorities for the school. As a result of her decisive actions and the support of staff and governors, there has been an improvement in the quality of teaching, pupils' outcomes and attendance.
- There is a strong culture of high aspiration and shared drive and purpose amongst all staff. A number of parents commented on the noticeable difference to the school both in the environment and the change in expectation and challenge for their children. Parents are highly supportive of the school and of the opportunities to share in their child's learning.
- Leaders check the quality of their teaching closely and set challenging targets. The management of the performance of teachers is regular and rigorous and links closely to pupils' outcomes. Where teaching has been less effective, leaders have tackled any underperformance. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved. Staff work closely as a team and share good practice across the school. External consultants working alongside subject leaders in English and mathematics have led to improvements in the quality and consistency of teaching.
- Many staff, including middle leaders, are new to their roles. Middle leaders have quickly established a firm understanding of the key priorities in their respective areas of responsibility and have implemented changes to practice and provision. However, middle leaders' skills in checking on how well the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes are improving are not fully developed.
- The pupil premium funding is used well to provide additional support for pupils who are eligible. Teaching assistants provide good support for pupils both in class and in small groups. Disadvantaged pupils benefit from curriculum enrichment activities so that learning is promoted across all areas of the curriculum. Thorough checking on how well disadvantaged pupils are doing ensures that the quality and effectiveness of the provision is improving pupils' outcomes and attendance.
- Leaders have looked carefully at the curriculum to ensure that pupils' skills are built upon year on year across a range of subjects. They have identified topics which interest pupils, and planned for activities which will engage and inspire them. Regular checks on the implementation of the curriculum and quality of pupils' learning inform senior leaders about how successful new actions have been.
- Enrichment activities such as trips or visitors are used to bring some areas of learning to life. As part of their 'Where our wellies take us' topic, all the pupils visited West Kirby beach to explore a different environment. Older pupils have the opportunity to go on a residential visit at the same time as the local high school. This promotes good transition to the next stage in their education. These activities support pupils' personal development and progress well.
- The sports funding is used effectively to provide coaches in different sports such as tennis, dance and hockey. Teaching staff work alongside coaches so that their skills also develop. There are a wide range of extra-curricular sports activities on offer and greater involvement in competitions. This has increased pupil participation, and led to success in the hockey competition last year. Governors have also attended sports sessions, clubs and competitions to check on the quality of, and pupil participation in, these.
- Leaders provide pupils with a range of opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills well. Pupils in Key Stage 2 learn to play an instrument and have their own band, performing to parents. Pupils worked with a visiting artist to create high quality art displays based on the school's core values of faith, respect, perseverance and honesty, which are prominently displayed and understood by pupils.
- Pupils are taught about different cultures and religions. The school had two multifaith days where pupils had first-hand experience of different cultures. Pupils collect money for different charities and have had speakers on topics such as refugees. Using the general election last year, older pupils presented their cases for developing their environment, learning about the democratic process. This promotes pupils' understanding of life in modern Britain.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governance is good. Governors have developed their skills through annual reviews, which identify correctly where they might develop further. Governors have managed the changes to staff well and have ensured that recruitment of new staff has been undertaken carefully to strengthen the quality of teaching and promote a culture of ambition. They have been involved in managing the underperformance of staff and in ensuring that pay progression is linked to the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.
- Governors are well informed and have a good understanding of how different forms of funding are used, and how this is improving the outcomes for different groups of pupils. Governors attend school council meetings and parents' evenings to gather views on how well the school is doing. As a result, governors have a good understanding of the quality of teaching and provision, including how safe the school is.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff are well trained and new staff have undergone an induction programme. Leaders engage with parents effectively to ensure their children are safe. For example, the work undertaken around e-safety last year promoted the importance of this to pupils and parents through lessons and parental workshops.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- There have been improvements to the quality of teaching since the last inspection as a result of clear and consistent expectations of teaching, assessment and of pupils' progress and higher outcomes set by the headteacher.
- Teachers use questioning effectively to probe and deepen pupils' understanding of what they are being taught. In Years 1 and 2, pupils were asked to explain how they could improve their writing. In Key Stage 2, pupils had to use their understanding of how to multiply two-digit numbers together to explain their answer when working out a mathematics problem.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this to plan tasks that make strong links with the topics pupils are learning about. This ensures that pupils learn to apply their knowledge in one area of learning in order to increase their skills in another. In a Year 3 class, pupils had learnt about different rocks and their properties. Following from this they had tried to sharpen rocks to make spear heads, relating this to the tools used by Stone Age man. Nevertheless, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematics skills in other subjects or real-life contexts.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils and challenge them to do their best. In each key stage, teachers plan together to ensure that pupils' skills are successively built upon. As a result, teachers ensure that pupils in mixed-age classes are given tasks which are appropriate to their learning needs, and provide a sufficient level of challenge. Occasionally, the most able are not given tasks which are always challenging enough for them to make more rapid progress.
- Teachers swiftly identify where pupils may not fully understand a new piece of learning. Through appropriate intervention, teachers and teaching assistants ensure that any misunderstanding is addressed so that learning moves on well. In Year 4, a group of pupils were learning how a simple multiplication could be shown as equal groups of counters added together. They understood the importance of accuracy in the counting of these to arrive at a correct answer.
- Pupils' reading skills develop well and as they become more confident readers they use good expression when reading out loud. Pupils have developed their skills in understanding and explaining what they are reading about because this has been a focus across school.
- Marking has improved since the last inspection, and there is a systematic approach across school. Pupils understand the colour-coded system, and how this shows them what to improve. However, although there are good examples of guidance, which precisely helps pupils with how to improve their work, this is not consistent across school. Teachers do not always check pupils' responses to the guidance given, which can slow their progress.
- Pupils' books are well presented and pupils' handwriting has improved. Older pupils are encouraged to earn 'pen licences', which allow pupils to write in pen when their handwriting is of a good standard. Pupils have high expectations of their handwriting and presentation. Pupils are writing more complex and interesting sentences, and talk about ideas before writing them down. In Year 1 and 2, pupils were talking about their ideas about 'How to trap a wolf'. In Year 4, pupils were successfully extending simple sentences to make them more interesting, using ideas from the story 'Egyptian Cinderella'.

- Pupils' writing skills are developing well across school because teaching has improved and staff build on learning well. However, teachers do not always check pupils' spellings carefully enough to ensure that common mistakes are addressed and pupils learn from their errors.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils show a good understanding of the different types of bullying, including physical and verbal bullying. They say that any derogatory language is very unusual. Pupils are confident that any incidents are quickly dealt with by adults because adults are 'fair', 'honest' and 'caring'.
- Pupils develop their understanding of how to live healthy lives. The additional sports activities provided in after-school clubs have been popular and pupils appreciate the wide range on offer. The healthy cookery club for parents and pupils has provided opportunities for them to learn about making healthy meals.
- Provision for pupils with additional emotional and social needs supports pupils well so their learning can progress successfully. Pupils in Year 4 explained that the 'worry box' in their classroom was 'good' because any worries they might have were quickly sorted out by the teacher.
- Pupils feel safe in school because they are taught how to look after themselves. The local police community support officer works closely with the school. During the inspection, Key Stage 2 pupils were learning how to keep safe on the roads. Elected road safety officers in school regularly share information with the whole school, and organise competitions to reinforce pupils' understanding of how to keep safe.
- Pupils understand how to keep safe on the internet and the dangers of cyber-bullying and the use of social media sites. They know they should not be accessing these until they are older and say parents do not allow them to.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are polite, considerate and well-mannered. They are happy in school and say that behaviour is 'really good', 'brilliant' and 'fantastic'. They talk confidently about the new behaviour system and how important it is to be on, or even above, the rainbow. Pupils feel that this has improved behaviour. They know that sometimes pupils might go on the cloud but that they then have a chance to think about what they have done. Teachers encourage pupils to make the right choices with their behaviour.
- Pupils conduct themselves sensibly around school, in lessons and on the playground. They share play equipment with one another and play cooperatively, inviting one another to join in games. Teachers also support pupils' play, showing them how to use equipment and joining in with football.
- Relationships between adults and pupils are very positive. In lessons, the majority of pupils are attentive and show good levels of concentration and interest. Pupils demonstrate respect for one another and have a good understanding of each other's different backgrounds and cultures.
- As a result of the concerted efforts of leaders to promote the importance of good attendance and punctuality, attendance has improved. Leaders ensure that any pupil whose attendance is not good enough is swiftly followed up. Other agencies are involved in supporting this work. Consequently, only a small number of pupils are frequently absent from school. The prominent display in the main entrance shows the current attendance for each class, and a cumulative total, so that parents and pupils are aware of the improvements.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- The progress of pupils currently in school is good in reading, writing and mathematics. Inspection evidence and school assessment information shows that the majority of pupils make expected progress from their starting points and a good proportion are doing better than this.
- The number of pupils in different year groups varies year on year and does result in some variation in pupils' attainment and progress over time. In addition, there are a proportion of pupils who join or leave the school at times other than those normally found. This was the case in 2015 for Years 6 and 2. This affected end of key stage results as the majority of these pupils had additional needs. Inspection evidence shows that these pupils, and others who have joined in other year groups, make good progress

from when they joined the school.

- As a result of improvements to the way in which writing is taught, pupils are making good progress from their different starting points. There are good opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills in a range of subjects. These opportunities are often linked to their current topic and provide pupils with interesting stimuli. Nevertheless, standards in writing are lower than those found in reading and mathematics.
- Progress in mathematics is good. Changes to the planning and delivery of mathematics have ensured that skills are taught well and pupils have opportunities to apply these to solve problems in mathematics. There are some examples where pupils have opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in other subjects. In a Year 5 and 6 class, pupils used the measurements of a plan of a WW1 trench to change its scale so they could recreate this in the school grounds. However, opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills to real-life contexts or in other subjects are not sufficiently well planned across the school.
- The proportion of pupils who reached the expected level in the Year 1 phonics check has improved since the last inspection and is in line with national levels. A consistent approach to the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) is ensuring that pupils across early years and Key Stage 1 are making rapid gains in their understanding of letters and sounds as well as their reading and writing skills.
- Pupils' attainment and progress in reading has improved across the school since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils reaching the standards expected of them is similar to national standards at the end of Year 6. Pupils have regular reading sessions and enjoy reading a range of different books. In their reading journals teachers provide pupils with clear learning points, which are shared with parents. This enables parents to know what pupils are learning about, and also to support them with their homework.
- The proportion of pupils who make expected progress or better than expected progress from their different starting points by the end of Year 6 has improved. In 2014, all pupils made expected progress in reading and mathematics and almost all in writing. In 2015, the vast majority of pupils made the progress expected of them in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of pupils who made better than expected progress in reading and mathematics was similar to national average.
- Pupils who are disabled and those with special educational needs make good progress from their individual starting points. The recent review of how these pupils are supported in their learning has resulted in provision being improved and well matched to their needs. As a result, their progress has improved.
- Those pupils with English as an additional language are well supported in class and in small groups so that they make similar rates of progress to their peers.
- Pupils who are most able make similar good rates of progress to their peers. Although the proportion of pupils reaching above average levels remains below the national figures, there has been an increase in the number of pupils reaching these higher levels. This is because tasks are increasingly well matched to pupils' needs and abilities. Although overall progress is good, at times tasks given to the most-able pupils are not always challenging enough to accelerate their learning.
- Inspection evidence and school assessment information shows that, from their different starting points, those pupils who are disadvantaged make good progress, which is similar to, and sometimes better than, their peers. As a result, any differences between these pupils and their peers are closing across school. Numbers of pupils who are disadvantaged in each class vary and therefore any comparison with national figures would not be reliable.

Early years provision

is good

- Children start Reception with skills which vary year on year because of the relatively small numbers in each year. Each year a number of pupils start with skills which are typical for their age, though a significant proportion have skills which are below this. Children's skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and their wider experiences of the world, are not as well developed as their social and emotional skills.
- Since the last inspection, the proportion of pupils reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception has improved and is in line with the national average. Children make good progress from their different starting points and as a result the majority of children are ready for Year 1.
- Children in the Reception Year are in a class with a small number of pupils from Year 1. Children work and play cooperatively with one another. They behave well and quickly learn the routines and expectations of them so that they settle quickly into the setting.

- Adults teach children how to keep safe and follow routines well. The children know to ask for help in getting down from the large play apparatus outside if they need it; one child waited patiently for a teaching assistant to come over. Children use equipment sensibly and know how to keep the environment tidy.
- Parents are encouraged to be part of their child's learning. Parents can access and make comments on the online system for recording what activities their child has done and how well they are making progress. Parents can attend information sessions so that they are well-informed.
- Visits to other settings and homes made prior to children starting school ensure that staff have a good understanding of children's needs straight away. Typical comments from parents support the effective partnership with parents in supporting their child's first experiences of school.
- Teaching is effective. Activities are planned that capture children's interests and promote opportunities for developing their skills across a range of learning. Children were very excited about the rocket that had landed in the playground. This generated lots of discussion about who might be inside and where they had come from. Children explored their ideas verbally, by writing and drawing on paper and on the floor. They used the environment to search for clues, and were encouraged to explain what the clues they had found might represent.
- Phonics is taught well. The consistent approach by teachers and teaching assistants ensures that teaching is matched closely to children's needs. As a result, children make swift progress in learning new sounds and applying these to words. Across each group, observed children were attentive and enjoyed the different ways in which they were being taught; whether that was identifying words from its initial letter, building words using the 'or' sound or reading simple words such as 'pot'.
- Occasionally, adults do not fully maximise opportunities to make links between other areas of learning so that children's skills, particularly in literacy and mathematics, are further developed.
- Adults know the children in Reception well and there are regular checks on how well they are doing. This ensures that any additional needs are quickly identified and support provided. This includes the effective use of additional funding for those pupils who are disadvantaged. As a result, gaps in learning are narrowed, including for disadvantaged children.
- The early years teacher is well supported by the headteacher and other leaders, ensuring that leadership of the early years is effective. They ensure that the provision meets the needs of the children and that any areas for development are quickly identified and addressed. For example, there are increased opportunities to extend children's experiences of the wider world.

School details

Unique reference number	111311
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10002269

This inspection 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	123
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John McCann
Headteacher/Principal/Teacher in charge	Marian Ryder
Telephone number	01244 981110
Website	www.stclares.cheshire.sch.uk
Email address	admin@stclares.cheshire.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12–13 September 2013

Information about this school

- St Clare’s Catholic Primary School is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and the proportion that speaks English as an additional language is smaller than the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils or those with special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is well above the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who start or leave the school at times different to the normal times is above the national average.
- The school meets the government’s current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for pupils’ attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- There have been considerable changes to the teaching staff in the school in the last twelve months. Several teachers are in the early stages of their careers. There have been changes to senior leadership since the last inspection, including the appointment of a headteacher in September 2014.
- Some pupils are taught in mixed-age classes.
- The school provides a breakfast club for its pupils which formed part of the inspection.
- There is a private pre-school on site which is subject to a separate inspection. The latest report can be found on Ofsted’s website.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed a range of lessons or parts of lessons and also looked at pupils' work.
- The inspector listened to pupils from three different year groups reading, and talked with them and other groups of pupils about their lessons and school life.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector observed the school's work and scrutinised documentation relating to pupils' progress and to school management, including the arrangements to ensure pupils are kept safe.
- The inspector took account of the 33 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View), the school's consultations with parents and other communication from parents.

Inspection team

Vanessa MacDonald, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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