

St Mary & St Thomas CofE Primary School

Barton Close, St Helens, Merseyside WA10 2HS

Inspection dates

26–27 February 2019

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Staff share leaders' enthusiasm, ambition and unwavering commitment to pupils and their families. Pupils thrive in a culture where the school motto of 'Achieve, Believe and Shine' weaves through every aspect of the school.
- Governors share leaders' high expectations and aspirations for pupils. They are extremely knowledgeable and use their skills effectively to hold leaders to account.
- Leaders' evaluation of the school is honest and accurate. They acted swiftly to tackle the reasons behind the dip in outcomes at the end of key stage 2 in 2018. As a result, pupils in all year groups make exceptionally strong progress, especially disadvantaged pupils.
- Extremely knowledgeable middle leaders have designed a balanced curriculum that ignites the interests of pupils and deepens their knowledge, skills and understanding in a range of curriculum subjects.
- High-quality teaching is underpinned by teachers' strong subject knowledge. This contributes to pupils' exceptionally positive attitudes to learning across the school.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported extremely well by highly-skilled staff. As a result, pupils make good progress from their individual starting points.
- The imaginative opportunities leaders provide to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are extremely effective. By raising aspirations and broadening horizons, pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- Children in the early years benefit from high-quality teaching in an environment that excites and stimulates them as learners and meets their needs very effectively. Consequently, they make rapid progress from low starting points. An increasing proportion of children are prepared well for Year 1.
- Pupils in key stage 1 use their phonic knowledge extremely well. They are becoming confident, competent readers as a result of the language-rich environment leaders have created.
- In mathematics, in all year groups, pupils solve increasingly complex problems and challenges. However, only a small proportion of pupils do really well in writing.
- Pupils' behaviour and conduct are exemplary. Pupils flourish in an environment where they feel valued and their social and emotional needs are met extremely well.
- Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school and the care their children receive.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build further on the effective strategies to improve pupils' knowledge and skills in writing, so that a higher proportion are working at a greater depth by the end of key stage 2.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- This is the school's first inspection since becoming a member of a multi-academy trust (MAT) in 2015. Outstanding leadership at all levels contributes to the school providing a high quality of education. Leaders' high expectations and ambitions for pupils are shared by staff. Pupils thrive in this aspirational culture. Leaders are highly successful in ensuring that pupils reach their potential academically and in their personal development. The welfare and well-being of all pupils are at the very heart of everything they do.
- Leaders are committed to raising aspirations and improving life chances for pupils. Outcomes for pupils in 2018 were not typical. Leaders accurately identified the reasons for the decline in outcomes at the end of key stage 2. They took swift and decisive action to effectively tackle issues in reading and mathematics.
- Leaders place a high priority on the continued professional development of staff. They demonstrate high levels of professionalism and share their passion for learning with staff and pupils. Staff's subject knowledge is extremely strong as a result of the focused training they receive. Staff at all levels work with others, including colleagues across the MAT, to share their expertise. Staff new to teaching said they are very well supported by leaders and colleagues. Staff are proud to be part of this outstanding school.
- Leadership of English and mathematics is outstanding. Leaders' critical review of the way mathematics was taught identified accurately key areas for improvement. Leaders check that actions for improvement are carried out systematically and consistently across all year groups. They provide additional support for staff new to teaching when necessary. Teachers are regularly held to account for the progress pupils make and they conscientiously refine their plans to maximise the learning opportunities for pupils. Consequently, progress rates are improving rapidly.
- Leaders for English worked with professionals and other colleagues to review the way in which reading was taught. They accurately identified that pupils' weaker understanding of inference and vocabulary knowledge hindered the progress they made in 2018. Leaders also identified that these aspects were impacting negatively on the proportion of pupils who did well for their age in their writing.
- The creation of a language-rich environment throughout the school and changes to the way reading is taught have had a positive impact on pupils' success as readers in all year groups. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in reading is improving quickly. A similar improvement in writing is taking a little longer.
- Leaders have ensured that phonics is consistently and systematically taught from early years. Training for staff has had a positive impact on progress for pupils. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 screening check has continued to improve over the past three years and is broadly in line with the national figure. Leaders ensure that pupils who are struggling are given the additional support they need to catch up quickly. Pupils are becoming confident and competent readers.
- Leaders across the MAT have designed a bespoke curriculum which meets the needs of

pupils extremely effectively. Leaders have identified the knowledge, skills and understanding they want pupils to gain in each subject. Activities build progressively on pupils' prior knowledge in each subject, for each year group. Knowledgeable subject leaders monitor the progress pupils make against the knowledge, skills and understanding they have identified. Evidence seen during the inspection indicates that pupils make extremely strong progress from their starting points.

- Leaders ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted extremely well through a wide range of opportunities, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. The '50 things to do before you leave St Mary's and St Thomas' programme enriches the curriculum further; including, for example, the opportunity to play a brass instrument, trips to the theatre and inspirational visitors to school. A range of extra-curricular activities also broadens opportunities. Pupils gain an appreciation of the community in which they live and how they can contribute positively to helping people less fortunate than themselves. As a result, pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- The special educational needs coordinator shares her high level of expertise effectively. As a result, staff have the skills to identify quickly pupils who are struggling. Programmes of support are put in place to help pupils to catch up. Leaders evaluate the impact of the help that pupils receive and make changes when necessary. Leaders work effectively with outside agencies and other professionals to provide training so that pupils and their families have the help and guidance that they need. The additional funding for SEND is used effectively. As a result, the high proportion of pupils with SEND, including pupils who are supported by an education, health and care (EHC) plan, make very strong progress from their individual starting points.
- The additional funding for physical education and sport is used effectively. For example, the school has been mapped for orienteering and training for staff enables them to run friendly competitions between schools in the MAT. Coaches develop teachers' skills in a variety of sports. Pupils benefit from the high-quality training that they receive to hone their own skills as rugby players, archers and gymnasts.
- Leaders ensure that the funding for the most vulnerable pupils and their families is used extremely well. The support provided for disadvantaged pupils is exemplary. Leaders know pupils and their families and understand the challenges faced by many. Barriers to learning for individual pupils are swiftly identified. Highly skilled staff are deployed effectively to provide pupils with the support they need, particularly for their social, emotional and well-being development, in the carefully designed 'Rainbow room'. Progress for disadvantaged pupils is strong because of the support they receive which develops pupils' resilience extremely well.
- Parents speak highly of the care guidance and support their children receive. Parents appreciate the workshops they can attend so they know how to help their children at home academically. They commented favourably about the opportunity to improve their own knowledge about how to cook healthy meals. A parent who spoke to the inspectors said, 'Staff support the whole family and they are always there to listen.'

Governance of the school

- There are clear roles and responsibilities within the structure of the trust. Experienced governors have a comprehensive understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas for further improvement. Governors have the experience and knowledge that allows them to challenge leaders and hold them to account. They themselves are held to account by the trustees.
- Governors understand the challenges facing the local community. They share the same passion and commitment seen from all who work at the school. Training ensures that they keep up to date with new initiatives. They collaborate effectively with other governors within the trust to share ideas and expertise.
- Governors are kept well informed through detailed reports from leaders. They understand clearly how well pupils are doing compared to other pupils nationally. Governors seek clarification when there are any changes to the progress pupils are making. Governors check the accuracy of information and review the impact of actions taken to improve outcomes for pupils by talking to staff and to pupils about their learning.
- Trustees commission external reviews from a number of nationally recognised organisations and professionals to ratify the judgements of leaders.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are extremely effective and are a strength of the school. Leaders' work in keeping pupils safe is of the highest standard. This includes online safety and applying the filters necessary to keep pupils safe on the internet. The curriculum is carefully planned so that pupils know how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations. There is a strong culture of vigilance. Pupils thrive in a safe and nurturing environment, feeling valued and cared for.
- All safeguarding arrangements, protocols and practices are fit for purpose. Checks are in place to ensure that adults are suitable to work with children, including students, visitors and those volunteers who help in school regularly. All records relating to safeguarding are maintained thoroughly.
- Leaders identify the potential areas of risk for pupils. Teachers receive high-quality training that is updated regularly. They have a good understanding of how to identify potential signs of abuse and neglect. Concerns are acted upon appropriately by highly skilled staff. Staff work very effectively with local charities, agencies and other professionals. They ensure that families receive the help, guidance and support they need.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Deep understanding about how pupils learn, and strong subject knowledge, enables teachers to plan learning opportunities that ignite pupils' imagination and inspire them as learners. The high-quality teaching seen consistently in all year groups, and in all subjects, contributes to pupils' substantial and sustained progress. Pupils who spoke to inspectors said that teachers make learning interesting and fun. Pupils take pride in their work and their considerable achievements.

- Teachers have created an environment around school and in classrooms that celebrates pupils' achievements and supports their learning. Displays are of the highest quality, reinforcing pupils' sense of pride in themselves and their school.
- Teachers and staff know the pupils extremely well. They understand the many challenges that a high proportion of pupils face. Teachers' high expectations contribute to pupils' exemplary behaviour, their positive attitudes to learning and the excellent progress that they make.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge has successfully contributed to the systematic teaching of phonics from early years. Pupils tackle unfamiliar words in their reading successfully. Pupils are confident when reading and talking to each other and adults about their books. Highly skilled support staff work with pupils in small groups to ensure that pupils who are struggling catch up swiftly.
- Pupils enjoy reading, especially the high-quality books that have been carefully selected, in the classroom libraries. Changes to how reading is taught have been highly successful in expanding pupils' vocabulary. For example, pupils who read with the inspector were able to explain why the author had chosen specific vocabulary to describe the colours in the rainbow. They confidently gave other examples of when the same vocabulary might also be used.
- Activities to improve pupils' vocabulary knowledge impact positively on their creative writing. Carefully selected texts are used effectively by teachers to enrich pupils' understanding of inference. A higher proportion of pupils are working at a greater depth in Year 2. Older pupils apply their spelling, punctuation and grammar knowledge with increasing accuracy. Consequently, the proportion of pupils working at a greater depth by the end of key stage 2 is improving rapidly.
- Mathematics is taught consistently and systematically in all year groups because of the high-quality training teachers receive. Teachers work with colleagues, including colleagues in other schools, to share their knowledge and expertise. Teachers use assessment very effectively during lessons to identify pupils who are struggling with basic calculations. Pupils use a range of resources and strategies to support their learning. Opportunities to consolidate knowledge and skills are reinforced effectively by teachers. Pupils apply their knowledge to solve increasingly challenging problems. Staff use questions skilfully to develop and probe pupils' understanding. Pupils who spoke to inspectors explained their reasoning very eloquently and accurately.
- Teachers use assessment information to plan activities that meet the needs of pupils exceptionally well. Support staff are deployed extremely effectively to maximise learning opportunities, particularly for pupils with SEND. They use questions to encourage pupils to reflect and refine their explanations. This is particularly successful in supporting pupils to compose their writing and contributes to the strong progress this group of pupils make.
- Pupils' work in other subjects is planned well to build on pupils' prior knowledge and understanding. For example, pupils who spoke to the inspector about their learning in history confidently explained the research they had done following a visit from a 'Viking' to school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding, particularly for the most vulnerable pupils. Positive relationships fostered within school are strong. Pupils feel valued and cared for. They wear their uniform with immense pride. They spoke confidently about how there will always be someone to talk with if they have any concerns. Older pupils understand the important responsibility they have in supporting other pupils as well-being champions and peer listeners. The school motto, 'Believe, Achieve and Shine', is a thread that weaves through the school.
- The well-being of pupils is given the highest priority. Strategies to develop pupils' confidence and resilience are promoted extremely well by dedicated, highly skilled staff. For example, pupils who spoke with inspectors said, 'Massage sessions help you to be calm and ready to learn.' Pupils develop strategies to solve their own problems when facing new challenges, for example during opportunities to go camping and on residential trips.
- Leaders work very closely with other agencies and charities to support young carers. Through the additional activities and opportunities, pupils feel valued. They know there is someone they can turn to in school and during the holidays.
- Pupils understand the different forms that bullying can take. They say that bullying is rare, and should it occur it would be dealt with swiftly. Teachers develop pupils' respect, tolerance and understanding effectively through the work they do with UNICEF.
- Pupils understand that with rights go responsibility. They are extremely proud of their community. Pupils work with local charities and support groups. They raise funds and collections for local people less fortunate than themselves. For example, older pupils visit local community projects and help prepare meals. Pupils demonstrate a high moral responsibility in caring for others.
- Through an exciting range of enrichment experiences, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, broaden their horizons and raise their aspirations. Examples include opportunities to play an instrument or take part in sporting competitions. Visits provide pupils with opportunities to experience life beyond their local community, for example visits to the theatre, to museums and to Liverpool to see the giant puppets.
- Staff's training enables them to promote personal safety very effectively. Leaders work with several national charities to develop pupils' personal strategies so that they know how to keep themselves safe in challenging situations, including online. For example, pupils understand why it is important not to share personal information on social media sites.
- Leaders use every opportunity to raise aspirations and expand pupils' horizons. For example, parents and past pupils visit school to talk about the jobs they have and their roles in the community. Pupils who spoke with inspectors shared their own aspirations for the future to be dentists, members of the armed forces and game designers. During 'enterprise challenge week' pupils successfully plan events and initiatives to raise funds for local and national charities, as well as outdoor resources for school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils are polite and well-mannered. Their conduct around school and behaviour in lessons are exemplary. Pupils are attentive and work hard. Their extremely positive attitudes to learning contribute significantly to the excellent progress that they make.
- There are very few incidents of inappropriate behaviour. Pupils speak confidently that should any occur, it is dealt with appropriately by adults. Pupils who struggle to make the right choices about how to behave are given the help and support they need. Staff successfully use a range of strategies to help individuals with their social and emotional development. This has improved behaviour and progress rates for these pupils. Pupils have a good understanding of how their behaviour affects others.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. They enjoy learning and thrive in the calm and nurturing environment. All ages socialise well and play harmoniously together. They have high levels of respect towards each other and adults in the school.
- Very few pupils are persistently absent from school. Staff take swift action to follow up when pupils are absent, particularly the most vulnerable pupils. Pupils' attendance is consistently above the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- The published data does not reflect what is happening in the school. There were justifiable reasons why pupils' outcomes dipped in 2018. These circumstances were fully explored and accepted by the inspection team.
- Attainment for pupils at the end of key stage 1 is above the national average for reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of pupils reaching the national average has increased consistently over the last years, including the proportion working at a greater depth.
- The school's assessment information for current pupils shows that a high proportion of pupils have the knowledge and skills typical for their age, including disadvantaged pupils. This is supported by the work that inspectors saw in pupils' books. The majority of pupils make extremely strong progress.
- Phonics is taught systematically from Nursery. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1 has improved consistently. This represents excellent progress from their starting points and is in line with the national average. Pupils who are struggling are given the help they need to catch up quickly in Year 2. This is having an extremely positive impact on the strong progress pupils make. Pupils are very well prepared for the key stage 2 curriculum.
- Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are becoming confident and competent readers because of the effective way in which reading is taught.
- Pupils' written work is well presented. They apply their grammar, spelling and vocabulary knowledge highly effectively in their writing, including in other curriculum subjects. Pupils who are struggling catch up quickly because of the effective strategies in place to support them. The proportion of Year 6 pupils writing at a greater depth is

beginning to increase considerably.

- Work seen in pupils' books and learning observed during the inspection confirm the accuracy of the school's own detailed assessment information for mathematics. Pupils in all year groups are making exceptionally strong progress. They apply their mathematical knowledge accurately to solve increasingly challenging problems. The vast majority of pupils are working at the standards expected for their age. The proportion of pupils working at a higher level is increasing, including for disadvantaged pupils.
- Detailed assessment information and the work in pupils' books show that pupils with SEND make strong progress from their individual starting points. The thorough processes for identification ensure that pupils quickly receive the specific support they need to overcome the barriers to their learning. This is particularly true for pupils who receive support for their social and emotional development and well-being.
- In other curriculum subjects, the high quality of pupils' work shows the positive impact of the systematic acquisition of knowledge which builds on pupils' prior learning effectively. For example, in art, displays which exemplify pupils' work in a range of media including watercolours, textiles, clay and natural materials are of a high quality.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Leaders in the early years are highly skilled and knowledgeable about how young children learn. Continued professional development of staff is a priority. This has contributed to further developing the skills of staff in both Nursery and Reception. The provision for the youngest children, across all aspects of the curriculum, is of the highest quality.
- Children enter school with knowledge, skills and understanding below those typical for their age. Staff quickly establish children's very positive attitudes to learning. Leaders accurately identify the main barriers to children's learning and ensure that staff have the skills that they need to help children catch up quickly. Consequently, children make outstanding progress from low starting points.
- Leaders and staff work closely with colleagues, including from other schools in the MAT to share knowledge and expertise. They work with other agencies and professionals to support children's social and emotional development very effectively.
- The development of speech and language skills is a key priority. Staff use questioning skilfully to encourage children to speak and listen carefully. Mispronunciations are corrected sensitively. Staff use conversations effectively to expand children's learning and deepen their understanding.
- A high proportion of children attend other local nursery providers before they start in Reception. Leaders work closely with the largest of these providers with a well-considered programme of visits and activities throughout the year.
- Leaders engage very effectively with parents and carers. Activities in the summer term before children start school allow staff to foster good relationships. Staff help parents to understand what their children will be learning at school and how they can help their children at home. For example, workshops on healthy eating and early reading are very well attended. Parents who spoke with inspectors appreciate the opportunities they

have to work with their children during 'stay and play' sessions throughout the year.

- Leaders have carefully designed a language-rich environment to support children across all areas of learning. They provide children with lots of opportunity to develop their spoken language, writing and number skills. Activities ignite children's imagination. Children are happy and engaged in their learning. Conversation flows freely with high levels of cooperation seen during the inspection. Children play well together, help each other and share resources.
- Activities are carefully designed to develop children's fine manipulation skills. This has a positive impact on their writing and letter formation, particularly in Reception. Children proudly shared their writing with inspectors and confidently read their own stories. Activities are focused and purposeful. Adults use questions effectively to challenge children's thinking about how to solve problems and extend their ideas.
- The outdoor environment is designed well to support learning. For example, in Nursery, children and adults skipped through the 'woods' to the small cottage that had been created. They confidently acted out the story of Little Red Riding Hood with the appropriate use of language associated with traditional tales. When asked by an adult where she was going on this fine sunny day a child replied confidently, 'I'm off to grandmama's house to take her some lovely fresh fruit.'
- Detailed assessment information gathered from a range of sources is used very effectively to identify the next steps in children's learning. Children with SEND are quickly identified. Leaders ensure that staff receive training from outside agencies and professionals to meet the needs of this group of children. Staff work with children individually or in small groups to give them the help that they need to catch up quickly. Children with SEND make good progress from their starting points because of the extremely effective support they receive.
- Well-established procedures and routines contribute to the children's ongoing safety and welfare. Risk assessments are carried out rigorously, particularly in the outdoor learning environment. All statutory welfare arrangements are met.
- Leaders' high expectations have ensured that the proportion of children who reach a good level of development by the end of Reception has increased consistently over the last three years. An increasing proportion of children are well prepared for Year 1.

School details

Unique reference number	142161
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	10086869

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.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	229
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Margot D'Arcy
Headteacher	Lyndsey Lewis
Telephone number	01744 678 010
Website	www.sm-st.co.uk
Email address	lyndsey.lewis@three-saints.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- This school is slightly larger than the average primary school.
- Pupils are predominantly of White British heritage. There is a small proportion for whom English is not their first language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by an EHC plan is well above the national average.
- The school is a UNICEF Respecting the Rights of the Child school and holds a nationally recognised gold school mental health award.
- The school is a national hub for mathematics and the lead school for the St Helens Teaching Schools Alliance.

- The school became an academy in August 2015 and is part of the Three Saints MAT.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited classrooms to observe teaching and pupils' learning and behaviour. Leaders joined inspectors on these classroom visits.
- Inspectors observed and spoke to pupils during lessons and at playtimes. Inspectors met formally with a group of pupils and heard pupils read.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the executive principal, the interim headteacher, senior and middle leaders and members of staff. They also met with the CEO and lead for the teaching school.
- Inspectors met with members of the governing body and members of the multi-academy trust.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including arrangements for safeguarding. They took account of school information about pupils' outcomes and scrutinised pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke with parents at the start of the school day.

Inspection team

Amanda Stringer, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kathleen McArthur	Ofsted Inspector
Michael Platt	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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