

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Crewe

Dane Bank Avenue, Crewe, Cheshire CW2 8AD

Inspection dates

12–13 December 2017

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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- This inclusive and happy school continues to provide its pupils with a good education.
- Under the strong and committed leadership of the headteacher, staff and governors have successfully improved teaching and learning. They are well set to make further improvements.
- Leaders ensure that the school is a place where pupils are valued and motivated to learn. Pupils refer to the school as 'a family where we look after each other'.
- The quality of the school's care, guidance and support for pupils is a notable strength and is outstanding.
- After a period of staffing instability which affected the consistency of teaching standards, teaching, learning and assessment have improved. The quality of teachers' questioning is indicative of the raised expectations across the school.
- Middle leaders contribute effectively to the checking of pupils' work. They are less involved in driving forward improvements to teaching and learning.
- Outcomes in reading and writing declined in 2016 but have recovered well since. Attainment in mathematics is yet to reach the levels that the school aspires to, though progress is improving rapidly across the school.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons is almost always good. They respect each other and are proud of their school.
- Leaders ensure that the provision in the early years is good. Staff are skilled in meeting the many needs of a wide variety of children.
- Most-able pupils have yet to achieve the highest standards because in some lessons teachers do not challenge them quickly enough.
- The school's curriculum is increasingly exciting for pupils. It is especially effective in preparing them for life in modern Britain through well-planned activities which support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the performance of the most able pupils by ensuring that the level of challenge they receive is introduced sooner in lessons.
- Further develop the leadership and management skills of middle leaders so that they are more fully involved in the ongoing improvements to teaching, learning and assessment.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The strong, strategic leadership shown by the headteacher and her team since the last inspection is reaping rewards for pupils. The headteacher has been at the forefront of creating a cohesive and inclusive culture of improvement at the school. As a result, all staff know what they have to do to ensure good provision for current pupils.
- Following the changes to national assessments, leaders were, in their own words, 'bitterly disappointed' with the resulting pupil outcomes. They embarked immediately on a period of change that sought to raise expectations in classrooms and to improve teaching in all subjects. The appointment of a skilled and dedicated deputy headteacher at about the same time was crucial in driving forward these improvements. Results in reading and writing recovered well in 2017, and current progress for pupils in these subjects is strong.
- Improvements to the teaching of mathematics are taking longer to bear fruit and attainment still lags behind national averages. However, progress for current pupils in mathematics has been gathering pace since the last academic year. It is now showing rapid improvement. The school's recent and proven capacity for improving teaching and learning means it is well-placed to accelerate these gains.
- The headteacher and her leadership team, in addition to a deeply committed chair of the governing body, know their school very well. For this reason, the school's self-evaluation is accurate. Leaders make regular checks on teaching and learning. This means that there is strong consistency in the application of policy and practices in the classrooms.
- Middle leaders are growing into their subject-leadership roles, with many new to post over the past 18 months. They are fully involved in evaluative checks and in writing plans for improvement. However, they are less effective in driving forward improvements in teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility. At present, there is too much reliance on the deputy headteacher.
- Leaders support the most disadvantaged pupils effectively. They have produced a detailed plan for each pupil, showing how the pupil premium funding is distributed. This is linked to the progress each pupil is making. Leaders check on these plans regularly and are always looking for different ways to support this group of pupils.
- The school's use of the government's sports funding is effective. Leaders target this funding carefully to ensure that there are increasing opportunities for both participation and competition. Pupils and parents and carers are very satisfied with the variety of sporting and physical education (PE) clubs on offer. The PE lessons seen during the inspection set high expectations for pupils.
- Leaders are ambitious for the curriculum they plan for their pupils. They have demonstrated this by giving pupils a wide range of exciting opportunities to learn through carefully thought-out topics. For example, a talk for Year 5 pupils on the setting up of a local ice-cream business had pupils mesmerised. They created designs and proposals for their new business ideas, showing how teachers skilfully link learning across a range of subjects.

- Following a summer survey of parental views, parents requested a wider range of extra-curricular activities. The school has responded positively. Both at lunchtime and after the school day has finished, the school is busy with a range of learning opportunities. For example, a group of Year 6 pupils chatted excitedly about a recent performance of 'Cinderella' which the French club had performed. Pupils performed the whole play in French.
- The school is particularly successful in providing pupils with the chance to learn about being a British citizen. During the visit of the local Member of Parliament, pupils compared the differences between rules and laws, and the importance of making the right choices. A 'child rights' project led to each class producing a set of values which are appropriate to their age. These are displayed prominently in classrooms. Such good practice promotes effectively pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.
- Leaders' have created a highly inclusive culture and this assists greatly in ensuring that all children are treated as unique individuals and are kept safe. Systems for the safeguarding of pupils are robust.
- Leaders use the funding for children who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities wisely and review how they spend it regularly. The leader of this area is very knowledgeable and experienced. Her advice to staff about the best ways to provide appropriate support means that individual programmes of support for pupils lead to good progress. Parents are fully informed about any individual provision that their children are receiving.
- Since the last inspection, the school has received timely but 'arms-length' support from the local authority. This is in addition to helpful support from both an independent consultant and the local diocese. The school uses this wisely to assist in its own evaluation and its checks on teaching and learning. This is indicative of the school's open and honest approach to school improvement.

Governance of the school

- Governance is effective because the governing body maintains a relentless focus on standards. Governors are not afraid to challenge leaders if they feel improvements are required. Working alongside the headteacher, they took quick action to halt a decline in outcomes in 2016, and have closely monitored the changes to teaching and learning ever since.
- For example, a half-termly 'discovery morning' allows governors to come together and find out more about the school's work. Throughout the morning, governors talk to pupils and staff and engage in school activities. Such opportunities, in addition to regular presentations from leaders at meetings, help governors to be well informed about provision at the school.
- The chair of the governing body provides assured leadership. She is ambitious for the school community and about 'opening as many doors as possible' for pupils as they move to the next stage in their education. As a number of other governors are new to the role, she is aware of the need to develop further capacity and expertise.
- The minutes of meetings show that governors ask searching questions and challenge leaders. They also offer strong support, both to the headteacher and to staff and pupils. For example, many come into school regularly to help pupils with their reading.

In addition, governors are fully committed to the headteacher's vision and values.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders are thorough with their checks on staff who come to work at the school. They ensure that records are up to date and stored safely. There is a regular cycle of training for all staff and any concerns about pupils' welfare are followed up quickly and sensitively.
- Leaders 'go the extra mile' to assure pupils' welfare and care. Throughout the year many pupils are admitted to the school from other countries and speaking many different languages. The school successfully establishes strong links with families and support services. The vast majority of parents say that their children are cared for very well.
- Governors provide regular checks on safeguarding documentation. They maintain up-to-date training in safer recruitment.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is good across the school. This is because of teachers' command of their subjects, their detailed knowledge of the pupils and the increasingly high expectations they have of pupils. It is particularly effective in contributing to the good progress made by older pupils in the school.
- Some teachers' questioning enables pupils to deepen their thinking. For example, in a science lesson the teacher questioned a group of pupils about the purpose of having a switch in a circuit. She challenged them to think in more detail about their answers by asking, 'How do you know?' or 'Can you explain?'
- Teachers are skilled in modelling what they expect of pupils. In Year 6, a teacher showed how complicated grammatical structures could improve their writing. Later observations of the pupils' work showed how they had successfully improved their writing as a result of this clear guidance.
- Focused and precise feedback in books leaves pupils in no doubt about how they can improve their work. Pupils enjoy the 'fix-it' time, now common across the school, where pupils can take time to learn from the advice they have been given.
- Teachers are quick to change the course of lessons if they feel that pupils require more, or less, support. They pay particular attention to the needs of those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and the large number of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- Pupils are busy learners and are proud of their work. Handwriting and presentation are always acceptable and often very impressive across all subjects. There has been a deliberate effort by leaders to develop pupils' resilience. This is meeting with some success for older pupils, but the school still has work to do in developing the skills of reasoning, enquiry and self-reflection for other pupils across a wide range of subjects.
- There are rigorous systems for the assessment of pupils' work. Teachers' judgements

about how well pupils are attaining are largely accurate. This means that, increasingly, they set pupils activities which challenge them according to their level of ability. However, for the most able pupils this challenge arrives in lessons too late and limits their opportunities to achieve as well as they could.

- The work of the many teaching assistants is very beneficial to pupils. They are sensitive to pupils' needs and skilled in developing language for those who have recently arrived in the country. They know pupils well and are quick to intervene in lessons where they see that a pupil needs help.
- Homework is regular and linked to the learning in class. A range of 'booster' classes that take place after school further extend pupils' learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The school's exceptionally inclusive ethos means that pupils have high levels of self-esteem and self-belief. Staff care for pupils very well, but pupils also commented on a number of occasions to inspectors, 'We also care for each other.' This sense of shared responsibility is a key feature of the school's culture.
- Staff seamlessly integrate pupils who are recent arrivals to the country and who represent many different nationalities. They set up a range of support networks for these pupils and for other vulnerable groups. Sensitive procedures are in place to allow pupils to receive particular support, for example the 'post-box' system. Pupils value this greatly.
- Leaders have developed a range of very strong partnerships with local agencies and community groups to augment the support provided in the school. Dedicated training for all staff in supporting pupils' emotional well-being is organised.
- The physical well-being of pupils is promoted extremely well through a wide range of sporting activities. All children have the chance to learn to swim and there are 'top-up' sessions provided for any pupils in Year 6 who have yet to swim the desired distance. Clubs for gymnastics, ball skills and football are combined with targeted lunchtime sessions to assist pupils to lead a healthy lifestyle. The school works closely with parents to improve the quality of diet for pupils when in school. Pupils talked confidently about the impact of this on their physical development.
- Almost all pupils and parents say that pupils are very safe at school. Pupils are taught about staying safe both in school and in the community, for example through the Primary Respect programme. A recent initiative to select 'e-safety champions' has further enhanced the very good understanding pupils have about staying safe online.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are busy and active in the school. The pride they show in being 'a St Mary's

pupil' is evident in the standard of presentation in their books.

- In lessons, pupils respect staff and the rules of the classroom. As a result, behaviour is almost always good. Occasionally, when they are unsure what to do in a lesson, pupils lose focus and waste time not doing the tasks set. However, this rarely interrupts the learning of others.
- Pupils walk around the school with respect and care for their environment. The stunning displays capture the pride that staff and pupils have in their school. In the playground, behaviour is almost always good and pupils report that any incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. Records held by the school confirm this.
- Levels of attendance are at least in line with national averages. The work of the school's learning mentor is instrumental in giving attendance at school a positive profile with parents. The school is not shy of using fixed-term penalty notices in an effort to stress how important attendance and punctuality are.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The actions taken by leaders to arrest the declining standards in 2016 have been successful. There is accelerated progress for most pupils across the school and they are now attaining well in reading and writing.
- In mathematics, the rate of progress has been slower. In 2017, the number of pupils reaching the expected standard at key stage 2 was still below the national average. Both the work seen in pupils' books and the evidence that the school has of current progress in mathematics strongly indicate that this is improving rapidly.
- Current standards in reading are typically good. Inspectors spoke to a range of pupils and analysed their reading records. Pupils love reading and can articulate the strategies they use to understand a variety of texts.
- Standards of grammar, punctuation and spelling have remained above average over time. Pupils' books reflect the accuracy and care they put into their written work. Most pupils use a fluent cursive writing style by the time they begin key stage 2.
- Progress for the most disadvantaged pupils mirrors that of their peers. It is improving quickly in all subjects. Where there are disadvantaged pupils who also have SEN and/or disabilities, carefully tailored programmes of work ensure that they regularly succeed in the personal objectives that they have been set.
- The most able pupils have yet to reach the standards of attainment of which they are capable, particularly in mathematics. Despite improvements in teaching over time, which seek to challenge them more in all subjects, on some occasions this challenge comes too late in lessons.
- The progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is good. The school has detailed records to show how individualised targets are set regularly and are being achieved. The support these pupils receive in class is consistently good because staff know their needs and strive to help them achieve their best.
- Achievement across the rest of the curriculum is also improving so that attainment is good. Pupils' good grammar, spelling and punctuation are evident in their written work across other subjects, for example in science, history and geography. Some skills, such

as reasoning, enquiry and practical investigation, are less well developed. For example, in a science lesson children acquired the key knowledge and showed great interest, but had limited opportunities to investigate what they had learned in order to gain a greater depth of understanding.

- The number of pupils who achieve the expected standard in the national phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 is similar to that found nationally. Teaching seen during the inspection showed that confident and skilful teaching leads to good gains for pupils throughout key stage 1.
- The school has a very high proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language. It is careful to ensure that they receive support based on their individual needs so that they typically progress well.

Early years provision

Good

- Children prosper in the Nursery and Reception classes, both through their preparation for later learning and because of excellent systems for ensuring their personal development and welfare. They are happy and busy learners and are ready for their transition into Year 1.
- Pupils make typically good progress across the early years. The proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development is in line with national averages. They achieve this typically from low, or very low, starting points.
- Leadership is good in the early years. This is because staff know the children well and direct resources skilfully to support the myriad of needs within both Nursery and Reception. Early support for those children who speak English as an additional language is especially effective. Leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement within the early years.
- Teaching is consistently good. Both teachers and teaching assistants question children skilfully. They model learning well and this prompts children's investigative skills and curiosity.
- The assessment of children's learning is frequent and thorough. This enables staff to match activities to meet the children's learning needs and plan next steps for progress.
- The behaviour of children is good because they are happy and interested in their learning. They follow the clear routines consistently and a wide range of purposeful activities means children are fully engaged in learning. They share well, collaborate effectively and play together happily, respecting each other's space and choices.
- The indoor and outdoor areas are lively and well resourced. An understandable focus on language means a range of prompts and resources are available or displayed prominently.
- Children are well cared for and every effort is made to ensure their safety. Staff are quick to make connections with wider support services to best assist those children who are more vulnerable.
- Parents are highly supportive of the school's work in the early years. They are involved regularly in the children's attractive learning journeys and are particularly

complimentary about the care and guidance their children receive.

- There are no breaches in the statutory welfare requirements.

School details

Unique reference number	111342
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	10037784

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	634
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Joanne Weston
Headteacher	Mrs S Fau-Goodwin
Telephone number	01270 685174
Website	www.stmaryscrewe.co.uk
Email address	admin@stmarysrc.cheshire.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–4 June 2014

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- This school is a much-larger-than-average primary school.
- Approximately two thirds of the pupils are White British and one third are from a variety of 23 different countries, mainly European. The vast majority of these pupils speak English as an additional language, a much higher proportion than is found nationally.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is lower than the national average.
- The school runs a wrap-around care facility on the school premises. This provides before- and after-school care for its pupils during term time.

- The school meets the government's current floor standards in 2017, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a range of lessons across the school. The deputy headteacher joined an inspector for one of these lessons. Inspectors also took into account the work of the pupils in books, folders and on display.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior and middle leaders. Further meetings took place with members of the governing body, the school's professional development and education adviser, a local authority monitoring and intervention officer and the school's diocesan officer.
- Inspectors met a range of pupils to discuss their work and to listen to them read.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed during lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors took into account a range of school documentation including that related to the safety of pupils, records of their current academic progress, documents relating to the use of the pupil premium and sports grants, attendance records, curriculum plans and information related to the school improvement plan and school self-evaluation.
- Inspectors took into account the 90 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as the school's own records of surveys. Responses from staff and pupil questionnaires were also looked at. Inspectors also talked to a range of parents and noted the contents of their written views in a number of cases.

Inspection team

Jeremy Barnes, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
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Maureen Hints	Ofsted Inspector
Saeeda Ishaq	Ofsted Inspector

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