

St Laurence's Catholic Primary School

Leaside Avenue, Southdene, Kirkby, Liverpool, Merseyside L32 9QX

Inspection dates

31 January–1 February 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The school has faced a great deal of turmoil in staffing, including leadership, since the previous inspection. It has improved, but the improvement has not been as rapid as it needed to be for the school to become good.
- Pupils do not make enough progress in writing. The work in their books shows they do not write at sufficient length often enough or neatly enough to show their writing skills fully.
- Although improving, the pupils' lack of comprehension skills is still holding them back in reading.
- Teaching is variable. Teachers do not give pupils, especially the most able, enough chance to excel. Pupils too often complete work quickly and easily. They do not have to think about how to deepen or extend their learning themselves.
- Leaders do not track the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities well enough.
- Subject leaders do not take a full part in analysing and using information about pupils' progress to help accelerate learning.

The school has the following strengths

- The acting headteacher has focused everyone on speeding up the rate of improvement. She has provided strength and stability in the absence of the headteacher.
- Although teaching, learning and assessment are variable, they are improving, as is pupils' progress.
- The teaching of reading is also improving. Well-structured reading sessions now have a focus on comprehension.
- Phonics and mathematics are taught well. Pupils make good progress in both.
- Pupils behave well in class and at social times.
- Safeguarding is effective. Pupils behave well and they feel safe. Parents say that staff 'go beyond' what they need to do to help them and their children. Attendance is above average.
- Staff plan learning well in the early years so that it takes good account of children's abilities and interests. Children make good progress in Nursery and Reception.
- The governing body is strong. Governors now fulfil their roles well. They understand what the school needs to do to improve faster, and they are determined to ensure that it does.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in reading and writing so that they are consistently good or better by:
 - in writing: giving pupils more opportunities to practise writing at length for sustained periods of time; ensuring that presentation is equally good in all writing
 - in reading: improving pupils' comprehension skills more rapidly
 - in all subjects: ensuring that the work given to all pupils, and especially the most able, is always challenging enough to make them think harder and deepen their learning.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - stabilising the leadership situation as quickly as possible
 - providing subject leaders with the necessary training to analyse pupils' progress in all years and groups, and to identify and tackle weaknesses as they arise
 - swiftly improving the leadership of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and tracking the progress of these pupils more precisely.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because senior leaders have not been able to secure consistently good teaching and learning quickly enough. This is largely due to instability at leadership level.
- The acting headteacher has kept the school on an even keel during the headteacher's absences. She has earned the respect and appreciation of anxious staff and parents, all of whom spoke highly of what she has done and how she has supported them. She, the staff and the governors are all ambitious for the pupils.
- Subject leaders do not participate fully enough in analysing assessment information or in checking teaching and learning, to enable them to identify precisely what needs improving in their subjects. However, the culture for learning is much stronger and there are now clear procedures for recording pupils' progress each half term. Additionally, the acting headteacher meets with staff and holds them to account for the progress of pupils in their class.
- Mathematics is led well and pupils make good progress. Some of the most able pupils benefit from specific projects such as Saturday morning sessions in mathematics at the local high school. Changes in the leadership for English are raising standards in reading, although pupils' comprehension skills need to be improved faster. More remains to be done in writing and in other subjects.
- In the past two years, the several changes in the leadership of what the school provides for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have hindered improvement in this aspect of its work. Leaders track the progress of these pupils but not precisely enough to take account of the smaller steps that they need to take to achieve success. Leaders are using a recent external audit well to sharpen their practice in this area.
- Several new teaching staff have joined the school in the past two years, many as newly qualified teachers. All staff say that they feel well supported by leaders. They value the training they receive and they readily learn from each other. Staff morale is high.
- Leaders have worked closely with other schools to support and improve the work at St Laurence's. They have acted on advice given and to good effect. The local authority and the archdiocese have monitored and supported the school well, providing consultation and arranging additional training as necessary.
- The acting headteacher's no-nonsense approach to checking teaching and learning leaves staff in no doubt as to what they need to do to improve. Areas for improvement are followed up with well-targeted training, for example in reading and mathematics. Consequently, staff are performing better and pupils are beginning to make faster progress.
- Leaders' own evaluation of how well the school is doing is accurate and well founded. The targets set for teachers to improve their performance are linked to accurately identified school priorities. They are regularly reviewed to ensure progress towards them. Pay awards are firmly linked to the targets and therefore to pupils' performance.
- Pupils' learning includes a good balance of subjects, some of which are taught within

themes. Thus, pupils are gaining an insight into how to join their learning up as, for example, in history and geography.

- The curriculum is enriched by visits to places of interest and by the many extra-curricular opportunities available to pupils in, for example, sports and the arts. All of these things make a strong contribution to pupils' learning and personal development.
- Leaders set high standards for pupils' conduct, appearance and attitudes to learning. They make sure that pupils reflect on their learning and on their behaviour, and that they understand right from wrong, work well together and are respectful of others, regardless of any differences.
- Staff teach pupils about British values and prepare them successfully for life in modern Britain. Visitors, including from different religions and cultures, open pupils' minds to the wider world. Nevertheless, pupils have few opportunities to mix with pupils of their own age group who come from different religious or cultural backgrounds.
- An external review of pupil premium expenditure has helped leaders to allocate the money more effectively and to track the pupils' progress more precisely. The changes made have helped disadvantaged pupils begin to catch up with other pupils nationally.
- The physical education and sports premium funding is used effectively. The number of sports clubs available to pupils has increased, more pupils participate in a wider range of competitive sport and staff benefit from additional training to help them teach physical education and games better.
- The school does a great deal to involve parents in their children's learning. For example, family workshops take place during the day and in the evenings so that parents can work, play and learn alongside their children.

Governance of the school

- The governance of the school has improved considerably since the previous inspection. It is now effective.
- Governors held an external review of governance and have undertaken a good range of training to help them act upon the recommendations. They visit school regularly, know its strengths and areas for improvement, and they hold senior leaders to account well.
- Governors keep a close check on spending, including additional moneys for particular groups or different aspects of the school's work. They are fully involved in managing the headteacher's performance. They also give due consideration to the headteacher's recommendations on the pay and performance of other staff.
- An area in which the governing body has not been as successful is in securing consistently good leadership of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The governing body is diligent in its responsibilities to keep pupils safe. They ensure that the right procedures are used when new staff are appointed and that the

necessary checks are made on all who come into contact with the pupils.

- Staff also ensure that pupils are kept safe. They have a good awareness of the signs and symptoms of abuse and the procedures to follow should they have any concerns about pupils' welfare. All training is up to date.
- The school site is secure and the identity of visitors is closely checked. Leaders work closely with parents and pupils to ensure that everyone understands what the school does to ensure that all pupils are safe and well cared for.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, while improving, is not yet good enough to raise standards quickly.
- Teachers understand the importance of setting work at the right level for all pupils but they do not always do so, especially when it comes to the most able pupils. These, and occasionally other pupils, sometimes have to complete work that is relatively easy and does not add to their existing understanding or deepen their thinking.
- The quality of teachers' questioning is variable. Sometimes, teachers use questioning effectively to check pupils' understanding and decide whether to move on or recap learning so far. At other times, questioning does not help to deepen, challenge and extend pupils' learning, and progress slows.
- Teaching assistants make a good contribution to learning for less-able pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They break questions down for these pupils so that they can understand them and take a full part in lessons. Occasionally, they do not encourage the pupils enough to think and do things themselves. Staff lack consistently good leadership in this area because of the many changes in the past two years.
- Teachers ensure that opportunities for writing are built into pupils' work in different subjects. They do not, however, give pupils enough opportunities to write at length, as, for example, in stories, extended diary entries and more in-depth biographies. In some lessons, they do not give pupils enough time to write to show what they have learned.
- The teaching of reading is variable. Phonics is taught well. Pupils acquire a good understanding of the mechanics of reading as they learn the relationship between letters and sounds. Comprehension skills are weaker but they are improving because teachers focus on ensuring that pupils understand what they have read in well-organised reading sessions.
- Teachers teach pupils how to gain meaning from the spoken word by paying attention to punctuation and altering their voices to add expression when they read aloud. This was noted in a Year 3 session where pupils were learning to read poetry out loud to engage their audience.
- Good mathematics teaching has ensured that pupils learn basic skills then use them to solve problems. Teachers successfully encourage pupils to think, to reason and to understand the importance of mathematics in everyday life.
- Teachers mostly use the information they gain from checking pupils' work to plan work that is based on what pupils already know. They regularly check the accuracy of their

judgements with each other and with teachers in other local schools.

- Pupils' learning also benefits from well-established classroom routines and strong relationships between staff, pupils and parents.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Parents agree that their children are cared for well. They praise the staff for being approachable, for listening and for helping them and their children.
- Pupils feel entirely safe in school. They report that bullying is extremely rare because it is not tolerated on any level. Pupils learn to resolve conflict themselves and know that there is always an adult to turn to if they feel unhappy about anything.
- Leaders ensure that staff teach pupils how to keep themselves safe and how to use the internet safely and responsibly. Pupils know why it is important to keep themselves healthy, for example by eating healthily and being physically active.
- Pupils value the opportunity to take up positions of responsibility. Through the school council, they contribute to the running of the school. They begin to understand democracy as they elect the councillors and expect them to represent their views.
- Pupils are polite and friendly, and they are willing to help others, including visitors. They work together well in lessons and make a strong contribution to the community, especially through the church. They collect money for a range of different charities and know that it is important to help others.
- Pupils' personal development is not nurtured to the full because, in some lessons, pupils are not given enough opportunities to work things out for themselves to extend their learning. Occasionally, pupils will sit waiting for a member of staff to mark their work, rather than go on to tackle the more difficult tasks that they know are waiting for them.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils enjoy learning and they work hard. They want to succeed and some talk of their ambition to go to university. Disruption to learning is very rare, and pupils respond quickly when reminded to concentrate fully on their work.
- Pupils' conduct on the corridors and in the dining hall is orderly and responsible. Pupils play happily together at playtimes. They are considerate towards each other.
- The standard of presentation in pupils' books has improved since the previous inspection, but the same high standard is not yet evident in all of their work. Writing on display in the corridors is of a much higher standard than that in their books. It has clearly been drafted and edited well, ready for display.
- Attendance is above average. This is the result of the school's determined efforts and its work with parents as well as with their children. Staff chase up any unexplained

absences quickly. Punctuality remains an issue with a small number of families but it, too, is improving.

- The well-attended breakfast and after-school clubs give the pupils who attend them a safe, secure and social start and end to their day. The breakfast club also helps to improve pupils' attendance and punctuality.
- Incidents of poor behaviour are rare but they are recorded accurately. Leaders use these records to inform actions that lead to better behaviour.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Outcomes for pupils require improvement because progress, which is improving in reading and mathematics, is not rising fast enough in writing. Progress in writing was well below the progress of pupils nationally in 2016.
- In key stage 1 in 2016, standards in writing were well below what was expected for pupils in Year 2 and lower than might be expected given where the pupils were at when they left Reception. Pupils in Year 2 this year are already doing better than their counterparts last year.
- In key stage 2, pupils' books show inconsistency in progress. Pupils understand how to write in different styles for different purposes, and they also write in different subjects. These pieces of writing are too short to allow pupils to demonstrate their writing skills adequately. Written work on display shows that they are capable of much more than is evident from their books.
- Standards in writing are improving in key stage 1. In Year 2, pupils were observed using language imaginatively as they created 'Mr Bear's Sound Journey'. Throughout the school, spelling and punctuation are usually accurate. Pupils are gaining the confidence to correct each other's speech and grammar to improve their spoken English.
- Pupils enjoy reading and their progress is becoming stronger. They readily read aloud in class, sometimes coping with difficult language well, as pupils in Year 6 did when reading extracts from Macbeth. Pupils' comprehension skills are improving, but slowly, and this aspect remains a focus for the school.
- Standards in phonics are in line with those found nationally. Weaker readers know how to use their phonic knowledge to sound out unfamiliar words. The most able readers can read fluently, with expression, talk about personal preferences and use texts to justify their views.
- Pupils do best in mathematics. They make good progress in that subject. They acquire good basic skills and understand its importance in everyday life. For example, Year 4 pupils explained how they would use their knowledge of how to calculate perimeter and area to measure for carpets, tiles or windows. Pupils reason out their answers and explain how 'mastery' tasks help to deepen their understanding.
- The difference between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally is beginning to diminish. Given the pupils' starting points, their progress still requires improvement, but it is getting better. The use of pupil premium funding has been reviewed with a view to diminishing differences across the board. Leaders are

acting on the recommendations, to good effect.

- The progress of the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, is improving but it is not yet securely good. This is because teachers sometimes set work that provides limited challenge for these pupils.
- The progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities requires improvement. Teachers set appropriate work for these pupils, and teaching assistants help them through the smaller steps they need to take to achieve success. Sometimes they do too much for the pupils instead of encouraging the pupils' independence, for example in writing.
- Pupils' progress also requires improvement in other subjects. However, art displays are of a high quality and pupils' work in, for example, science and history reflects their enthusiasm for learning and their desire to do well. Teachers are beginning to assess how well they are doing in other subjects by using information from the new curriculum. Overall, they are adequately prepared for secondary school, except in writing.

Early years provision

Good

- Children start school in the Nursery with skills and abilities below those typical for their age. The systems for assessing children's attainment on entry are well thought out and thoroughly checked. The weakest areas are language and aspects of personal development.
- By the end of Reception, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development is close to the national average. This represents good progress and shows that a high proportion of those who enter school with weaker skills soon catch up.
- Teaching in the early years is consistently good. This key stage is led and managed well. Assessments are frequent, thorough and accurate. Staff use what they learn to plan the next steps for each child, keenly aware of those who might need additional support for learning and those who are disadvantaged. They use questioning effectively to extend children's understanding, and they ensure that children have rich learning experiences, indoors and out.
- From the outset, staff pay particular attention to developing children's phonic knowledge and awareness of number. Opportunities to read, write and use numbers are skilfully woven into other learning. Much is in place to develop early writing skills. Some writing is developed well, with tasks at different levels to suit different abilities, thus giving the children a good start in this aspect of literacy.
- Children are frequently engaged in one of the many exciting activities prepared so that they can learn independently. Occasionally at these times, staff do not interact with them enough and a moment of learning passes unnoticed.
- Boys do less well than girls, particularly in writing. They have to be persuaded to write and sometimes staff do not encourage them sufficiently. Nevertheless, the children's skills in literacy and numeracy, together with their developing self-confidence, prepare them all successfully to embark on their work in Year 1.
- Staff set high expectations for children's behaviour, and consistently reinforce clear routines and boundaries. Children behave well, follow instructions promptly and treat

adults and other children with respect. They play and learn happily together, and help each other with their learning.

- There are rigorous procedures to keep children safe and promote their welfare and well-being. The setting, indoors and out, is attractive and well planned, with vibrant and relevant displays to reinforce learning. Resources are well organised so that children can select them for themselves. Displays constantly reinforce for the children that the written word has meaning.
- Good links between school and parents, together with effective induction procedures, ensure that children settle quickly and are happy at school. Information about their progress and personal development is shared so that both parties can help the children learn well.

School details

Unique reference number	104461
Local authority	Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Inspection number	10024100

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	398
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Holmes
Headteacher	Susan McConnell
Telephone number	0151 546 4733
Website	www.stlaurences.co.uk/
Email address	stlaurence@knowsley.gov.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–12 February 2015

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school. It has breakfast and after-school clubs.
- Nursery-aged children attend part time and reception-aged children attend full time.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above average, as is the proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The school meets current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- There have been several changes in staffing since the previous inspection. A new headteacher took up post in September 2015. Currently, she is absent and the deputy headteacher is acting headteacher. She receives support from the executive headteacher of Our Lady's Catholic Primary School in Prescot.

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in all classes. Some observations were carried out alongside the acting headteacher and the leader for the early years.
- Inspectors examined pupils' work and the most recent information about their attainment and progress. They also sampled a small amount of work from last year to help them reach their judgements.
- Inspectors met with pupils, formally and informally, listened to pupils read and talked with them about their reading habits. They also visited sessions where guided reading was taking place or pupils were learning phonics.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed in lessons and around the school, including at play and lunchtimes. The school's records for behaviour and attendance were also scrutinised, along with documentation for safeguarding.
- Meetings were held with leaders, staff, governors, two representatives from the local authority and a representative from the archdiocese. Inspectors took account of the 22 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff.
- Inspectors examined records relating to governance, the performance of staff, and the provision for special educational needs and/or disabilities. They also scrutinised the school's own evaluation of its performance, as well as its plans for improvement.
- Inspectors spoke with parents as they brought their children to school. They also took account of the 116 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, and the large number of parental comments that were included with them.

Inspection team

Doris Bell, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Joan Williamson	Ofsted Inspector
Mavis Smith	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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