

# St Basil's Catholic Primary School

Hough Green Road, Widnes, Cheshire WA8 4SZ

## Inspection dates

7–8 March 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	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- The enormous turnover of teaching staff has slowed the school's improvement.
- Progress in reading, writing and mathematics is not consistently strong across the school or for all groups of pupils.
- Teaching is not consistently good across the school.
- Staffing issues have meant that some subject leaders are just beginning to check on teaching and learning in their subjects. As such, the information about progress across the curriculum is limited.
- The school does not do enough to ensure that pupils are adequately prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Attendance is below the national average and persistent absence is high.
- Governors have not been proactive in seeking parents' and staffs' views and showing how they have addressed any concerns.
- Some of the administrative aspects of governors' work, linked to training checks and governors' minutes, are not sharp enough. The school's website is not up to date.

### The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher is committed to ensuring that pupils receive the best education possible. She has high expectations and has not shied away from dealing robustly with weak teaching.
- Teaching and learning are improving quickly. They are currently better than when the headteacher started at the school.
- The senior leadership team supports the headteacher well. It provides strong leadership of English and mathematics.
- Reception children receive a fine start to their education. They develop good attitudes to school and learn well.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons is often exemplary. They listen carefully, try hard with their work and present it well. They are polite and helpful to visitors.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to lead a healthy life and how to keep safe, for example when using the internet.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' progress and attainment in reading, writing and mathematics so that by the end of Year 6 they are well prepared for secondary school. In particular:
  - diminish the differences between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and other non-disadvantaged pupils nationally with similar starting points
  - ensure that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities progress well
  - ensure that the most able pupils are consistently challenged to achieve greater depth in their learning
  - ensure that pupils make strong progress in science and other subjects.
- Continue to improve teaching so that it is consistently good across the school.
- Improve pupils' attendance and reduce persistent absence so rates are at least in line with national averages.
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that pupils have a more explicit understanding of the diversity of families and relationships and of how homophobic behaviour affects victims' well-being and mental health and is contrary to fundamental British values
  - continuing to develop the role of subject leaders.
- Improve governance by:
  - ensuring that governors take a more proactive role in seeking the views of parents and staff and that governors are able to demonstrate how these views have been considered
  - ensuring that records of governors' meetings reflect the questions governors ask about the school's work and performance
  - ensuring that more governors take up training opportunities so that their knowledge and understanding of important school issues, such as safeguarding, is current
  - ensuring that all designated safeguarding leaders update their training every two years
  - ensuring that the school publishes all of the required statutory information and that the school's website is regularly updated to ensure that all information is current.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- Considerable staff turnover and frequent staff absences have severely hindered the school's improvement and the headteacher's concerted efforts to address pupils' underachievement. After a long period of staffing instability, including at leadership level, improvements to teaching and pupils' progress are now clearly evident, but not fully embedded. Staff absence has continued to limit improvements to attendance.
- There are a number of strengths in the school's provision for pupils' personal development. However, leaders and governors have not enabled pupils to develop an understanding of diversity in modern Britain. Consequently, British values and aspects of pupils' social and moral development are not as strong as they should be.
- A significant proportion of parents consider that the school has declined since the current headteacher was appointed. Inspectors did not find this to be the case. The decline in the school's effectiveness became evident in the school's 2014 test and assessment results. These showed weak progress of many groups of pupils during their time in key stage 2. These tests and assessments, taken four months after the headteacher was appointed, reflect a longer period of decline.
- On assuming the leadership of the school, the headteacher acted quickly to identify weaknesses in teaching and learning. Her concerns about the school's effectiveness were substantiated by external evaluations of the school's work, including by the local authority. Not all staff would accept these evaluations or the support programmes to improve teaching. Considerable staff absences and staff turnover followed.
- Through this challenging and turbulent period the headteacher remained focused on ensuring that pupils have the best-quality teaching to improve their achievement and life chances. Checks on teaching have been suitably rigorous. The previous inspection's recommendation to ensure more robust monitoring of teaching, including of education support staff, has been addressed well.
- The parental response to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, shows a concerning degree of parental dissatisfaction, particularly about the way the school is led and managed. Some of these issues came through at the meeting with inspectors, most notably about high staff turnover and the number of temporary and inexperienced teachers.
- The staffing disruptions have been beyond leaders' control. When staff leave the school in the middle of a term, replacing them with experienced teachers is not always possible. Leaders have, however, ensured that teachers at the start of their careers have had strong mentoring by experienced colleagues and good opportunities to develop their skills through training. The impact of their teaching on pupils' learning is carefully monitored to ensure its effectiveness.
- At the meeting with inspectors and on Parent View, most parents expressed satisfaction with their children's progress. The school's termly surveys of over 200 parents show resoundingly positive responses to questions about children's progress. Responses are similarly positive about the management of behaviour, the quality of care and information about pupils' achievements.

- The headteacher's clear vision and ambition for the school's improvement is shared by the core leadership team and the majority of staff. These leaders and the leader for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities provide expert and dedicated support to the headteacher. They have strengthened the school's capacity for improvement.
- Leaders' evaluations of teaching and learning from classroom observations and scrutiny of pupils' work are astute and accurate. The impact of their work on improving teaching and accelerating pupils' progress is clearly evident, including for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders know, however, that more work is needed to diminish the differences in progress between these pupils and other non-disadvantaged pupils nationally with similar starting points.
- Last year, the impact of the school's use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils was not effective. Planned initiatives were severely thwarted by staff absences. Leaders were proactive in commissioning an external review of the school's use of the pupil premium. They are now acting effectively on the recommendations. The school's current pupil premium strategy is thoughtfully planned. However, it could usefully clarify the specific barriers faced by disadvantaged pupils in the school. Evaluations of the impact of initiatives on pupils' outcomes are more rigorous this year than last.
- Leaders acknowledge that the curriculum focus over the past few years has been on improving pupils' reading, writing and mathematics. However, all national curriculum subjects are taught. Humanities subjects have had a higher profile than the arts. However, enhancements are beginning to extend pupils' knowledge, skills and appreciation of music, art and design. Staffing issues have limited the extent to which the full range of subject leadership skills could be developed, but this has begun to be addressed. Leaders are aware of the need to ensure that pupils receive a broad and rich curriculum.
- Effective use of the additional funding for physical education and sport enables pupils to be taught by specialist coaches who work alongside the school's own staff. This funding has also increased pupils' participation in competitive sport and helped to broaden the extensive range of extra-curricular clubs.
- Leaders regularly invite parents into school to see their children's work and attend assemblies. Parents have also attended workshops at the school to help them support their children's learning at home.
- Of the staff who responded to the Ofsted staff survey, most expressed positive views about the school and the way it is led and managed. The majority recorded that they are motivated and supported by leaders. A minority expressed negative views, mostly about leadership and governance.

## **Governance**

- Governors are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses, its priorities for improvement and the issues that have impaired improvement. They understand their role in supporting and challenging school leaders and shaping the school's strategic direction. Governors seek information about the use and impact of additional funding, including the pupil premium, sport premium and funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. These aspects of governors' roles are undertaken effectively.

- There is a clear need to understand the negative views of some staff and parents. Governors have not surveyed staff's views or taken a proactive role in seeking parents' views. They do not address concerns sufficiently well.
- Governors ask probing questions of leaders about pupils' achievement. However, these are not well documented. The range of training that governors have undertaken is not comprehensive enough. Governors have not ensured that the school's website contains all of the required information or that outdated policies are removed. Some policies on the website are not dated or signed to show that they have been approved by governors.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school provides a safe learning environment and has appropriate systems to keep pupils safe. Relevant checks are carried out on members of staff and all individuals who work with the pupils. Supervision of all activities is good.
- The headteacher is the designated safeguarding lead and two other senior staff can deputise for the headteacher in this role. At the time of the inspection not all had received the required two-yearly update training. Other staff training is up to date. The headteacher is the only person who has received safer recruitment training.
- Staff are aware of the systems for reporting any concerns about pupils' safety. A new governor, with expertise in this area, has audited aspects of the school's safeguarding procedures and checked staff's understanding of their responsibilities.
- Where pupils need extra support for their health or well-being, the school involves and works cooperatively with specialist agencies.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

## **Requires improvement**

- Teaching requires improvement because it is not yet consistently good across the school. However, teaching is showing good improvement and in each phase of the school some teaching is consistently strong.
- Comprehensive staff training has had a very positive impact on many aspects of teaching. In particular, teachers' subject knowledge for reading, writing and mathematics has strengthened. As a result, the majority of teachers provide clear explanations of new ideas, rules and strategies, using key subject vocabulary.
- Most teachers also make good use of questioning to sharpen pupils' thinking and assess their understanding. Teachers review pupils' work to check the security of their learning and provide helpful feedback in line with the school's marking policy. Teachers give pupils time to fix mistakes or misconceptions and most consider that this is helpful.
- Leaders have established good systems to ensure that teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment are accurate. Assessment information is used to inform leaders' termly discussions with teachers about pupils' progress. The progress of key groups, such as disadvantaged pupils, is always included. Teachers identify pupils who would benefit from additional support or challenge and they provide appropriate intervention. This can include the teaching of small groups of pupils outside the classroom to help them catch up or prepare for new learning. The quality of teaching in these sessions is

strong. As a result, pupils make good gains in their learning.

- Leaders continue to improve the teaching of reading and writing, including grammar, punctuation and spelling. This was seen in lessons about figurative language for key stage 2 pupils of all abilities. Lower-attaining pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities developed an increasingly secure understanding of the comparative nature of similes. The most able pupils produced quality statements, such as 'like an ancient silver birch tree standing regimentally in the forest'.
- While there are strengths in the teaching of phonics, the most able pupils and some pupils with middle prior attainment are not consistently challenged to achieve as well as they might. However, effective teaching has ensured that three quarters of the pupils currently in Year 2 who did not attain the expected standard in Year 1 have now achieved this.
- Although the teaching of mathematics is not yet consistently good, it is improving in response to good training and strong subject leadership. There is a clear focus on teachers providing opportunities for pupils to reason mathematically. There is also an expectation that pupils will apply their prior learning to undertake mathematical investigations. Teachers urge pupils to look for patterns, explain their strategies and prove their answers.
- Teaching support assistants make a much better contribution to teaching and learning than at the time of the previous inspection. Their subject knowledge and teaching skills have improved through effective training.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. They also expect pupils to apply themselves in lessons and produce high-quality work. The supportive relationships that they foster give pupils confidence and are an important part of pupils' enjoyment of school.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

## Requires improvement

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement. This is because the school does not help pupils to develop a full understanding of diversity, such as different types of families, relationships and gender identity. The lack of education on this matter means that pupils do not know the systems for reporting homophobic behaviour and are embarrassed about doing so.
- In discussion with inspectors, pupils explained that they have heard or experienced homophobic name-calling at times. They are aware that this type of language is wrong, but most struggled to explain why. Some were able to say that it made them or their friends feel angry and upset. As with other types of name-calling, pupils explained that if teachers heard homophobic language they would deal with it. However, they said that they have not reported this type of behaviour, which was described as 'rude words' and 'sex words'.
- Pupils have a good understanding of most types of bullying and can explain the difference between bullying and one-off incidents of misbehaviour. They know that bullying often happens to people who are different in some way and are clear about why this is wrong. Pupils are aware of the need to respect people's differences.

- Pupils say that they feel safe in school and have a good understanding of how to keep safe when using the internet. They have a comprehensive understanding of how to keep healthy.
- Pupils who had been at the school for some time were able to comment on improvement. Comments included, 'Teaching has varied since we started but is definitely better now', 'We are doing much harder work now', and 'Teachers make this a good place to learn.' In reflecting on their learning, pupils commented that they feel they are getting better at reading, counting and 'doing hard maths'. They are very positive about the help and support they get from the teaching staff.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because attendance is below average and persistent absence is high for some groups of pupils – specifically, disadvantaged pupils, boys and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school's work last year to improve the attendance of these groups was not successful because staff absence stopped planned initiatives from being implemented.
- To date, current rates of attendance and persistent absence are more positive than those published in the school's performance data. However, this was also the case this time last year, yet attendance subsequently deteriorated. Therefore, it is not possible to say that attendance has yet shown sufficient improvement. Improving attendance is a school priority. Governors have appointed a pastoral officer to assist leaders in making the necessary improvements.
- Most pupils are proud of their school and understand the school's expectations of good behaviour. The majority of pupils who completed the pupil questionnaire think that behaviour is good most of the time. Pupils report that while there is a small amount of bullying, teachers and staff are good at dealing with this.
- Pupils know and understand the school's rules and routines. They adhere well to these. As a result, the classroom working environment is purposeful and positive. Behaviour in lessons is often exemplary. Pupils listen respectfully to teachers, try hard with their work and present it well.
- Pupils move around the school sensibly and are polite and helpful to visitors. At break times they play and chat amicably. Pupils say that they enjoy the staff getting involved in their games and they appreciate the range of activities offered at lunchtime.
- Pupils behave very well in assemblies, which promote their spiritual development well. Pupils listen respectfully and reflect on ideas, such as the value of encouragement. In acts of worship and reflection, they show reverence. Pupils sing tunefully and enthusiastically.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Requires improvement

- The school's historical performance for both key stages does not reflect a positive picture of pupils' achievement over time. The progress of most groups of pupils was adversely affected by historically weak teaching and the staffing issues that troubled the school over an extended period. The progress of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was weaker than that of other pupils. Too few pupils were well prepared for secondary school. In the Year 1 phonics



screening check, disadvantaged pupils and boys have not attained as well as other pupils.

- This situation has left gaps in current pupils' learning. However, leaders' work to stabilise the staffing situation has now had a positive effect on pupils' progress. More pupils are now on track to reach age-related expectations this year.
- Leaders are using the pupil premium effectively to improve disadvantaged pupils' achievement. Interventions and additional support for these pupils have a positive impact across the school. Pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, are making up lost ground. The school's assessment information shows that most disadvantaged pupils now make at least sustained progress. It is too early to determine if progress gaps compared with non-disadvantaged pupils nationally are diminishing.
- The progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, many of whom are also disadvantaged, is tracked carefully. This includes the impact of additional support programmes, for example to address speech and language difficulties. The special educational needs coordinator explained that pupils' progress suffered in the past due to poor teaching. However, current systems provide for more supported learning and greater involvement of class teachers and support staff in reviewing pupils' progress. While this is having a positive impact, progress is not yet consistently good for all pupils. The impact of funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is now more effective than in previous years.
- Current pupils are now making better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Across the school, pupils' books show that they produce a range of writing. At both key stages some teachers challenge the most able pupils to achieve greater depth in their learning, but this is not yet consistent. At key stage 2, pupils write fluently in a neat, cursive script. They pay good attention to spelling, punctuation and grammar. Writing skills are reinforced well across the curriculum. In science, geography and history, for example, pupils have produced some quality writing about the environment, how to stay healthy, the Anglo-Saxons and the Stone Age.
- In both key stages, pupils use phonics effectively to read unfamiliar words. Their comprehension skills are developing, but this is an area that still needs work. Lower-attaining pupils answer literal questions about their texts but find it difficult to infer meaning. They try hard to read expressively but often struggle with vocabulary. The most able readers read challenging texts with a good degree of fluency. The good focus on developing pupils' higher-order reading skills is paying off. In reading to inspectors, these pupils were able to infer meaning, predict what might happen next and summarise information well.
- Mathematics books show the strong focus on reasoning. In work on area and perimeter, for example, pupils investigate whether the perimeter can be bigger or equal to the area and whether doubling the area doubles the perimeter.
- In subjects other than English and mathematics, the school does not have comprehensive information to demonstrate the extent of pupils' progress.

### Early years provision

**Good**

- Early years provision has improved since the school was last inspected. Good



leadership and quality teaching ensures that the children receive a fine start to their education.

- Most children begin Reception with broadly typical skills for their age, although a significant minority have below typical skills in communication, language and literacy.
- In 2014, only 36% of the children at the end of the Reception Year were ready for work in Year 1 and only 19% of disadvantaged children were ready. This was notably lower than for children this age nationally. Since then, attainment has risen each year.
- In 2016, 64% of children attained the good level of development needed to be well prepared for work in Year 1. This figure was much closer to the national average. Disadvantaged children's achievement also rose during this period but not to the same extent. Boys' attainment also lagged behind that of girls.
- The new early years leader has a very informed view of all the children's starting points and of what they are capable of achieving. Her high expectations are shared by the staff who work together as a cohesive team. Staff continually assess the children's learning and discuss their next steps. Consequently, children are continually challenged to reach their potential.
- This is the rigorous assessment system that underpins the hub of exciting and industrious learning that epitomises St Basil's early years department. The atmosphere is stimulating and magical. Consequently, the children come happily into school and cannot wait to begin learning. Relationships with adults are warm and caring. It is clear from the levels of confidence and independence the children show that they feel safe.
- The children keenly explore the wide range of exciting activities and resources, indoors and outside. So well do these capture their interest that children often become engrossed for long periods, for example, while making cakes in the mud kitchen and discovering how water travels along sections of guttering. Adults are skilled in intervening in children's play to take their learning forward. They know the children well and how to extend their understanding through carefully crafted questions, discussion and challenges.
- There is also good adult-led teaching of early reading and writing, including phonics. Children have plenty of opportunities to practise these skills during the day within their play. In the same way, teaching staff expertly develop the children's skills in counting and their understanding of number, shape, space and measure.
- Children's personal development is promoted continually and well. They learn how to share, take turns and to consider others' needs and feelings.
- The early years leader plans for and manages the use of additional funding for disadvantaged children well. She ensures good sharing of assessment information between staff and good communication with parents. Safeguarding and children's welfare are high priorities.

## School details

Unique reference number	111390
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	10024197

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	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	381
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christine Wilson
Headteacher	Angela Sheppard
Telephone number	0151 424 7887
Website	<a href="http://www.stbasilsprimary.halton.sch.uk">www.stbasilsprimary.halton.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:sec.stbasils@halton-borough.gov.uk">sec.stbasils@halton-borough.gov.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	19–20 March 2013

## Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about its pupil premium strategy, most recent key stage 2 results, accessibility plan, equality objectives, all of the required information about governors and the content of the curriculum for every subject in each academic year.
- The school is larger than most primary schools.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above average.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is below average.

- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- A breakfast and after-school club are provided.
- Since the last inspection there has been a high number of staff joining and leaving the school. All of the senior leadership team are new since the last inspection.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in each class. They checked pupils' work and listened to pupils read. They also reviewed the school's assessment information about current pupils' progress and attainment.
- A range of school documentation was reviewed. This included the school's evaluation of its effectiveness, the school development plan and information about teachers' performance. Safeguarding information and records of pupils' behaviour and attendance were scrutinised.
- Two formal discussions were held with pupils and others were spoken to informally in lessons and at playtime and lunchtime.
- Inspectors held separate discussions with senior leaders, six governors and two representatives from the local authority.
- The lead inspector held a meeting with 13 staff, none of whom were senior leaders.
- The lead inspector held a formal meeting with 28 parents.
- Seventy-five responses to Parent View were considered, including written comments from 37 parents. Inspectors also took account of the termly parental surveys conducted by the school over the past year. Each of these included some of the questions from Parent View and reflected the views of over 200 parents on each occasion.
- Inspectors considered 35 responses to the online pupil survey and 22 responses to the online staff survey.

## Inspection team

Margot D'Arcy, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Barbara Harrold	Ofsted Inspector
Lesley Curtis	Ofsted Inspector
Joan Williamson	Ofsted Inspector

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