

Inspection of St Mark's Catholic Primary School

Fir Avenue, Halewood, Liverpool, Merseyside L26 0XR

Inspection dates:	22 and 23 October 2024
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy coming to St Mark's primary school. They arrive each day with a happy smile, keen to meet with their friends and learn new things. Pupils appreciate the differences between each other. They welcome everyone warmly to their school. Pupils enjoy the opportunity to support their peers in school. For example, they are proud when they get the chance to be a member of the school council, sports council or a 'worship warrior'.

Pupils treat each other, adults in school and visitors with mutual respect. Relationships between members of this school community are strong. Pupils are kind to each other in school and they play well with each other on the playground. They conduct themselves well when moving around the school. In lessons, pupils listen attentively to their teacher. They learn without interruptions.

There is a renewed focus on the school having higher expectations for pupils' achievement across the curriculum. The school is resolute in doing what it can to ensure that pupils achieve highly. This includes improvements to the design of the curriculum. However, there is still more to do to ensure that these expectations are realised, and pupils' achievement improves. Currently, some pupils do not achieve as well as they should in a few subjects.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Governors are still developing effective systems to ensure that they have a clear and complete understanding of the school's performance. For example, they now receive more, reliable information about how well pupils achieve. However, these systems are recent and need refining. There is still more to do to ensure that governors have a complete understanding of the school's performance.

When children start in the early years, staff form positive relationships with them and their parents and carers. Children quickly settle into clear routines and become confident, happy learners. Skilled staff ensure that children's personal, social and emotional needs are met.

The school has started to take the necessary steps to begin to improve the curriculum offer for pupils, including children in the early years. In many subjects, the school has identified the essential knowledge that they wish pupils to learn and when they should learn it. Many staff are adept at delivering this curriculum effectively. When staff have secure subject and curriculum knowledge, they design activities with better precision to meet the aims of the curriculum. They check on pupils' knowledge and understanding more readily. In these subjects, pupils' achievement is better.

However, there are some curriculum subjects, and areas of learning in the early years, where this is not the case. Staff are not sure about how to deliver the school's curriculum in these subjects. Occasionally, they do not choose the most suitable activities to help pupils to learn effectively. Sometimes, pupils' misunderstandings are not addressed successfully enough. This means that pupils continue to make similar errors. This is

particularly the case with pupils' written work. Pupils frequently demonstrate weak letter formation, poor grammar or spelling errors. In these subjects, particular pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

The school ensures that children in the Nursery learn different rhymes, poems and songs. The school has also recently refreshed its phonics curriculum. It has provided training to support staff's subject knowledge. Overall, staff's subject knowledge has improved. Typically, staff are skilled at delivering the phonics programme.

Even though the delivery of the phonics curriculum has improved, it is not consistently strong. This is because there is some variability in staff's subject knowledge and how the curriculum is implemented. From time to time, checks on pupils' phonics knowledge are not as focused as it should be. This means that pupils miss out on guidance when reading unfamiliar words. On occasion, they read books which are too difficult for them.

The school focuses on ensuring that pupils come to school as often as they can. It carefully examines the reasons why pupils are not in school. The school works with parents to improve pupils' attendance. However, despite the school's best efforts, a high proportion of pupils still do not attend school as often as they should. This means that they miss important learning.

Pupils appreciate the wide variety of extra opportunities available to them. For example, they are proud to represent their school at different sporting competitions. They value the assembly programme that further enriches their knowledge of faith and the wider world outside of school. They have a deep understanding of what makes a good friend and how to be supportive of each other.

The school identifies the wider needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) effectively. Overall, the school supports pupils with SEND effectively. Staff value the school's support for their workload. They appreciate the extra training that they receive in different subjects. They also value the opportunity to have time to develop and improve their areas of responsibility.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Systems that governors use to check on the school's performance are new. This means that their understanding of some aspects of the curriculum is not as secure as it could be. Governors should embed their systems for gathering high-quality information about the school's performance so that they can hold the school more effectively to account.

- Some staff are unsure about how to implement some of the curriculum subjects and areas of learning in the early years. This means that they design activities which are not appropriate for pupils or do not support the intended learning. Pupils do not achieve well in these subjects as a result. The school should ensure it provides effective subject-specific professional development so that staff deliver these curriculums as intended.
- Some staff do not have secure enough expertise to deliver the phonics programme. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could in early reading and writing. The school should ensure that staff receive focused professional development so that staff deliver the phonics programme well.
- Sometimes teachers do not address pupils' errors in their written work. This means that pupils continue to make mistakes in their letter formation, spelling and grammar. The school should ensure that teachers address pupils' errors so that they avoid repeating common errors in their written work.
- Some pupils do not attend school as often as they should. This means that they miss out on important knowledge. It makes it more difficult for some pupils to successfully build up a rich body of knowledge over time. The school should ensure that these pupils attend school as often as possible.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	104469
Local authority	Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Inspection number	10347880
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	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Catherine Ming
Headteacher	Susan Bradshaw
Website	www.stmarkshalewood.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	17 and 18 September 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- A new headteacher and chair of the governing body have been appointed since the previous inspection.
- Some new staff have joined the school since the previous inspection.
- The school is a member of the Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool. The last statutory inspection under section 48 of the Education Act was in May 2024. The next section 48 inspection is due in 2029.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024, will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- An inspector listened to pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors discussed some other curriculum subjects, spoke to other curriculum leaders and reviewed samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. They met with leaders for attendance and behaviour.
- The lead inspector met with members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. He also spoke with a representative of the local authority and a representative of the Archdiocese of Liverpool.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at lunchtimes and as pupils moved around the school building. They scrutinised leaders' records of pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences at the school. They spoke with staff about their workload and well-being.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. There were no responses to the pupil survey.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses.

Inspection team

Stuart Perkins, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Alex Farrow

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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