

St James' Catholic Primary School

Lonsdale Road, Millom, Cumbria, LA18 4AS

Inspection dates 29–30 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Children enjoy their start to school in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They make particularly good progress in their personal development as they settle easily and quickly become confident learners.
- Pupils continue to make good progress across Key Stage 1 to reach standards that are average, particularly in reading and writing. This good and sometimes very good progress continues across the school, particularly in Year 6. By the time they leave the school they reach standards that are above and sometimes well above average.
- Teaching is consistently good and usually outstanding in Year 6. Pupils make good progress in their learning as teachers use questioning effectively. Lessons are planned with activities which promote pupils' deeper learning. Teaching assistants provide good support to pupils with specific needs so they also make good progress.
- Pupils are polite and behave well throughout the school. They participate keenly in lessons and are eager to learn. Strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development contributes to pupils' personal growth.
- The school promotes many opportunities for pupils to understand how to keep safe. Consequently pupils have a good understanding of how to manage risk.
- The headteacher provides strong and rigorous leadership. She is supported very well by a committed team of staff. They have worked relentlessly to improve the quality of teaching and improve pupils' achievement across the school.
- Governors are extremely knowledgeable about the school as they visit regularly. They support and challenge the school to improve the quality of teaching and rigorously question the school about pupils' achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not outstanding as teachers do not always mark pupils' work consistently well. Teachers also do not always give pupils sufficient information to check on their own learning and progress.
- Achievement in mathematics is not good enough in the Early Years Foundation Stage or Key Stage 1. Play is not always challenging for younger children and pupils' problem-solving skills are not fully developed at Key Stage 1.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 20 lessons or parts of lessons, of which two were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Inspectors observed groups of pupils, as well as individual pupils, working with teaching assistants. They listened to Year 2 pupils read, and heard pupils in other year groups read in lessons.
- Inspectors talked to a range of pupils about their work and play in school, including the school council. They also studied a range of pupils' work across the school.
- Meetings were held with five governors as well as teaching staff, including middle leaders and the headteacher.
- Inspectors observed the overall work of the school and studied a number of documents including the school's data about pupils' current progress. They also examined documents relating to safeguarding, governance, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors took account of 24 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View). They also considered the school's pupil, parent and staff questionnaires.
- Inspectors looked at school displays, its website and a range of other evidence relating to the wider work of the school.

Inspection team

David Shearsmith, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Sheila Mawer	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is a smaller than average-sized primary school.
- A below average but increasing proportion of pupils is known to be eligible for the pupil premium which is additional funding for those pupils eligible for free school meals, children in the care of the local authority and children of service families.
- An above average proportion of pupils is supported at school action. An above average proportion of pupils is supported at school action plus or has a statement of special educational needs.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school has achieved the Investors in People award, Sports Active Mark and Healthy School status.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage is taught as a separate Reception class.
- The school has experienced some turbulence in staffing over the past few years.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is outstanding by:
 - improving consistency in the marking of pupils' work so they have a clear point for correction and time to correct it
 - ensuring that pupils understand what it is that they have to learn and know how to be successful, in order that they can deepen their learning and accelerate their progress.
- Improve achievement in mathematics in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage1 by:
 - ensuring that, through play, children have sufficient challenging opportunities to develop their mathematical skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage
 - making sure that pupils develop their mathematical problem-solving and investigation skills more fully in Key Stage 1.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' achievement is good as the school rigorously tracks their progress. Meetings which discuss pupils' progress each term, and teachers' knowledge of each individual pupil's performance, have improved achievement. Clear identification of any pupils who may be falling behind, and a rapid response to this, ensure that all pupils have an equality of opportunity to achieve well.
- Children enter the school with skills that are typically below what you might expect. Some children have weaker literacy and mathematical skills. Despite this, they make generally good progress across the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly in their personal development and literacy skills. Children's mathematical skills are relatively weaker by the time they join Year 1.
- Pupils make good progress across Key Stage 1. They reach standards that are broadly average overall in reading and writing and just below average in mathematics by the time they move to Year 3. Good and sometimes very good progress continues across Key Stage 2 with accelerated progress in Year 6. Consequently, by the time pupils leave the school, they reach standards that are above and sometimes well above average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school has developed a very rigorous approach to teaching reading, with new reading books and the relocation of their library. The teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) is very systematic and has had a particularly positive impact on pupils' skills. In the 2013 reading check, pupils performed above the national average, which was a significant improvement on the previous year.
- Literacy is taught well across the school and consequently pupils' achievement in writing is good overall. Pupils often reach standards that are well above average at Key Stage 2. Performance at Key Stage 1 has been variable in writing, but it is picking up rapidly and Year 2 pupils are on track to be above average this year.
- Pupils perform well in mathematics at Key Stage 2 and achieve standards that are above average. Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 do not achieve as well in mathematics as they do in other subjects. Mathematical play is not challenging enough. It does not provide enough opportunities for the children to apply their skills. Consequently at Key Stage 1 pupils do not possess the skills needed to investigate and solve mathematical problems and their achievement is relatively weaker.
- Pupils supported by the pupil premium, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, typically make good and sometimes outstanding progress, particularly at Key Stage 2. The school makes good use of its funding. Teaching assistants provide support in the classroom as well as individual teaching sessions. Consequently, these pupils attain at least as well as their peers at Key Stage 2 and the gap is closing rapidly at Key Stage 1.
- The most able make good and sometimes better progress at Key Stage 2. They reach high standards in their work, particularly mathematics. They make good progress in the other key stages, particularly in reading and writing.
- Teaching assistants support disabled pupils and those with special educational needs well. They use individual and small-group teaching, providing tasks and activities that contribute to these pupils' good progress. As a result, they achieve as well as their peers, particularly at Key Stage 2.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is stronger at Key Stage 2, but typically good overall. In Year 6 it is usually outstanding. Pupils respond well in lessons because teachers plan inspirational lessons. Pupils are encouraged to tackle activities that help deepen their understanding and stretch their learning over time. Pupils enjoy answering the well-structured questions that promote the development of a variety of skills as well as checking their knowledge and understanding.

- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage thoroughly enjoy their learning as staff enable them to develop a variety of skills through play. Careful questioning enables children to develop their speaking and listening skills. In the stimulating classroom they also gain a good understanding of different places, how things change over time and how things work. The children were enthralled by the way the teacher presented a book to develop their literacy skills. This was followed up by writing activities that engaged the children and promoted writing. Consequently, the children's literacy skills were developed and a love of writing encouraged.
- Pupils are usually keen to learn and participate. In a Year 2 writing session about improving description, pupils were encouraged to contribute ideas by carefully structured questions. They were then prompted to share these with a partner, which promoted deeper understanding and stimulated them to learn at a brisker pace. They understood what the task entailed, including how to be successful, and were able to start writing with confidence. Consequently, pupils made good or outstanding progress in developing sentence composition and writing skills. In some lessons pupils are not always aware how to be successful with the work in hand so they can check on their own learning. Therefore, pupils are not always able to accelerate their own learning and progress.
- Pupils were fascinated in Year 4 with finding lines of symmetry and making different shapes. They were encouraged to investigate this problem, which they did with great enthusiasm, by the shrewd questioning of the teacher. Pupils were further encouraged to review their learning. Their exploration of the properties of different shapes and discussions about area and perimeter really extended their learning and understanding. All pupils made at least good progress. Some made outstanding progress as opportunities were provided to allow them to extend their understanding to a higher level.
- Pupils respond well to marking, particularly where they are given clear points for improvement and time to act on them. When pupils do not have marking that identifies misconceptions or are not given guidance on how to improve writing, progress is slower. Year 6 pupils were able to improve their work greatly on report-writing by the clear guidance and the reaffirmation they were given during the lesson. Pupils were able to use their marking independently to make the final draft of their newspaper report. Pupils made outstanding progress in their writing and benefitted from this well-executed lesson.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good as pupils enjoy coming to school. Relationships are strong and everyone shows mutual respect for others across the school. Pupils are well-mannered and are proud of their school. Staff, parents and pupils are very positive about how well pupils behave.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning. They take a pride in their well-presented work. They contribute well in lessons and enjoy sharing their ideas.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong feature of the school and contributes to pupils' development as well-rounded individuals. Pupils relate well to each other and are very clear about right and wrong. The behaviour of pupils in the playground and in the dining hall is good.
- Sport is strength in the school and the primary school sport funding has been spent wisely. Pupils enjoy a wide range of sporting activities, including visits to a climbing wall, which promotes good physical well-being.
- The school has a rigorous approach to attendance and punctuality. A number of parents continue take pupils out of school during term time. Consequently, despite best efforts to maximise pupils' learning time in school, attendance is only average.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe is good. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe. They know how to manage risk in a number of different situations as the school is effective in ensuring pupils know about fire and water safety and also how to keep safe on the Internet. Pupils say they feel safe in school. There are good systems to ensure the school is safe and secure. Governors are particularly diligent in this regard.

- Pupils were very clear that there was very little bullying in the school. They said that it was usually name-calling and that staff readily helped them to sort out any friendship problems. The school takes anti-bullying very seriously and displays around the school reflect this with comments such as 'Stop. Think. Words Hurt'.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has high expectations and provides strong and determined leadership. This, coupled with the work of a skilled assistant headteacher and a team of teachers dedicated to ensuring that pupils achieve well, has improved the quality of teaching and raised standards.
- Middle leaders who lead subject areas check on how well their subjects are being taught by looking at teachers' planning and work in pupils' books. They provide good support which has enabled the school to improve the quality of teaching and raise standards, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Rigorous checking on how well pupils and the school are performing has been instrumental in implementing change so that pupils' achievement has improved. The school has used a range of development opportunities to improve teaching, and thereby achievement. Teachers have challenging targets and are rewarded appropriately when these are achieved.
- The school's curriculum provides many opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills through other subjects. There are quality musical experiences. Sporting activities are also rich and varied. They include rugby, tennis and gymnastics. Pupils participate in a range of competitions and perform successfully.
- Parents engage with the school well. The school provides a range of opportunities for them to support their children's learning. Several support the school's work by listening to pupils read. This has had a very positive impact. The school provides a very informative weekly newsletter. A group of parents responsible for fundraising has recently been formed.
- The school works well with a range of partners. Good links with the local church and the community have provided several opportunities for pupils to participate in community activities. There are also good links with local businesses and other schools to support middle leaders in their roles.
- Safeguarding fully meets requirements. The governors rigorously check on the school's procedures to ensure that everyone is safe and secure.
- The local authority provides good support for this good and improving school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are passionate about the school and know it extremely well. Minutes of governing body meetings are thorough. They show that governors have a good understanding of the school's data and challenge the school when they believe there may be underachievement. They have an annual day when they visit the school to check on its performance. Governors have a sound understanding of the quality of teaching. They have also successfully steered the school through a period of turbulence in staffing and supported the headteacher in appointing new staff and improving the school. The school uses its pupil premium funding wisely. This has had a positive impact on pupils' achievement through one-to-one and tailor-made activities. The primary school sport funding has also been used suitably and has improved pupils' participation in a range of sports. Governors are well-trained and have specific roles and responsibilities, which they perform conscientiously.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	112351
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	430963

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Rodgers
Headteacher	Nerissa Nicholas
Date of previous school inspection	22 May 2012
Telephone number	01229 772731
Fax number	01229 770237
Email address	head@stjamesrc.cumbria.sch.uk

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