

# Inspection of St Helen's Catholic Infant School

Sawyers Hall Lane, Brentwood, Essex CM15 9BY

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Inspection dates: 5 and 6 March 2024

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Outstanding</b>
Personal development	<b>Outstanding</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Outstanding</b>
Early years provision	<b>Outstanding</b>
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

This school was last inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 13 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between graded inspections under section 5 of the Act. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last graded inspection.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

St Helen's ethos is 'the school is there to serve the children'. Pupils benefit from the relentless drive of all leaders to ensure every pupil succeeds. It is a very inclusive school where pupils are taught in a loving and caring atmosphere. Pupils show the values of kindness and consideration in abundance.

Pupils study a highly ambitious curriculum, which starts in the early years. They work hard without interruptions or distraction. Attitudes towards learning are overwhelmingly positive. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported exceptionally well. Pupils are successful because leaders and staff are highly tuned in to pupils' needs.

Pupils' behaviour is excellent at all times. The high levels of respect seen throughout the school are learned in the early years. The school is calm and purposeful. Pupils know they are very safe while at school.

The quality of pupils' personal development is striking. The school plans carefully how clubs, trips and visits enrich the curriculum and enhance pupils' well-being and develop their character. Pupils enjoy attending clubs such as Spanish, karate and sewing. They are proud to help serve lunch to local parishioners and entertain them. This volunteering allows pupils to become caring and responsible citizens.

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

The school has ensured that the curriculum is highly ambitious and meticulously thought through. It sets out clearly what pupils learn from Reception to Year 2. Leaders are extremely knowledgeable and provide staff with well-considered support. This means that staff deliver the curriculum with expertise. They use appropriate activities that support pupils to build their knowledge over time. Children in Reception develop exceptionally strong learning habits from the start. They are well prepared for Year 1.

The school identifies swiftly and accurately the needs of pupils with SEND. Leaders ensure parents are very closely involved at every step in setting these pupils precise targets. Staff access high-quality training and provide effective support to pupils with SEND. Staff are skilled in adapting learning activities in class and for any specialist interventions. This means pupils with SEND achieve well.

The school has successfully cultivated a strong love of reading. Reception children learn the sounds letters make from the very start. They develop their knowledge of language and vocabulary through a range of carefully selected texts. There are many opportunities for children to practise the sounds they know in their play. Older pupils are very enthusiastic about reading. They especially enjoy choosing a library book to share with their family. They develop their reading fluency as they progress through key stage 1. Staff receive training which enables them to teach phonics accurately. In lessons, staff check how secure pupils are in recalling letter sounds.

They provide timely support for pupils to keep up. Pupils mostly read books that closely match the sounds they know. There are a few occasions where some staff are still getting to grips with which reading books and strategies best support pupils to practise their reading. This means a few pupils have books that contain sounds they have not yet learned. This hinders how quickly these few weaker readers catch up. Leaders are aware of this. Support is in place to address it.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary. They take pride in their work. They are extremely polite and kind to each other. They love coming to school. This is reflected in the high levels of attendance.

The depth and scope of the personal development curriculum is exceptional. Pupils flourish in the wide array of high-quality enrichment activities that are on offer. Most pupils attend a school club. Pupils talk maturely and with age-appropriate knowledge about racism, democracy, equality and fairness. Pupils learn about a range of cultures and religions. They understand everyone is different. A pupil kindly said, 'We may look different on the outside, but inside we all have a heart and soul that deserves love and kindness.' Through the school newspaper, pupils learn about local and national news. They also participate in international events, such as world refugee week. These broaden their understanding of the wider world. Opportunities to take on roles, like liturgy leaders, are purposeful and contribute to school life. Areas such as the 'peace garden' offer quiet spaces for pupils to calm when needed. Pupils are very well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Staff are extremely well supported. Leaders consistently consider staff workload and well-being in decisions. Governors have a very strong and accurate oversight of all aspects of leaders' work. They reflect the high ambition that makes the school so effective.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- A few pupils who find reading tricky do not always practise their reading using books that are matched closely enough to their phonics knowledge. These pupils do not apply known reading strategies independently. This limits the rate that these few pupils become confident and fluent readers. The school should continue to support all staff to have the expertise to select appropriate books and techniques to help these weakest readers catch up as quickly as they should.

## 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 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	115307
<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10288447
<b>Type of school</b>	Infant
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4 to 7
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	209
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Dr Michael Sutherland Harper
<b>Headteacher</b>	Amanda McAuliffe
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.st-helens-inf.essex.sch.uk">www.st-helens-inf.essex.sch.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	5 and 6 July 2011, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Since the last inspection, the school has reduced its published admission number for Reception from 90 to 60.
- A new headteacher took up post in January 2020.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- The most recent inspection of the school's religious character, under section 48 of the Education Act 2005, was carried out in March 2023. The next section 48 inspection is due within eight years.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of the 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, science and design technology. For each deep dive, inspectors spoke to subject leaders, visited lessons, spoke to teachers and pupils and looked at work in pupils' books. Inspectors also heard pupils read to a familiar adult.
- The inspectors spoke with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders, teachers and support staff.
- Inspectors met with leaders and teachers to talk about the curriculum, workload and the behaviour and personal development of pupils.
- They also met with groups of pupils to talk about learning and well-being and to hear about their views of the school. Inspectors held discussions with four governors, including the chair of governors. Separate discussions were held with the school effectiveness partner from the local authority and an independent education consultant who works closely with the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff, pupils and parents; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, plans for improvement and minutes of meetings of the local governing board.
- Inspectors observed the behaviour of pupils during lesson visits, around the school, in the lunch hall and in the playground. Inspectors looked at behaviour and attendance records and considered leaders' analyses of these.

Inspectors considered the 31 online responses to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, including 25 free-text comments. They also considered the 26 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff and the 62 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils.

### **Inspection team**

Karen Stanton, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Ceri Jones

Ofsted Inspector

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