

St Columba's Catholic Primary School

Hillside Road, Huyton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Merseyside L36 8BL

Inspection dates

21–22 February 2018

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	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders have not tackled some aspects of underperformance quickly enough to ensure that pupils make consistently good progress in all subjects.
- At times, senior leaders hold over-positive views about the impact of their actions on the quality of teaching and learning.
- Senior leaders have not ensured that teachers' checks on the progress made by pupils are consistently accurate.
- In lessons, some teachers do not routinely move learning on quickly enough once new learning has been grasped. At other times, work does not challenge the most able, including when they study subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Not enough children in the early years make the rapid progress necessary to overcome the below-typical skills with which they join the school.
- Standards are not consistently good enough, particularly in writing.
- At times, the presentation of pupils' work is untidy and they could achieve more in lessons.
- Pupils' writing skills are variable across the school, including their use of spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- The roles of the subject leaders and subject champions are still developing.
- Differences between the standards reached by disadvantaged pupils and others elsewhere are diminishing, but there is more to do.

The school has the following strengths

- Recent actions taken by senior leaders are starting to have a positive impact on pupils' outcomes, particularly in key stage 2.
- Well-focused training is leading to teachers' improved subject knowledge. Questioning skills are used well to identify misconceptions, particularly in mathematics.
- The new leader of the early years is clear about what needs to be done to bring about rapid improvements.
- Pupils behave well, are happy in school and feel safe. Those whose circumstances might make them vulnerable are cared for very well.
- Pupils find the curriculum's broad and stimulating activities interesting. Underpinned by the school's ethos, it makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development.
- Teaching in some year groups is supporting pupils to make stronger progress.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching in order to promote pupils' better progress so it is consistently good by:
 - improving the accuracy of assessments and ensuring that teachers move learning on, once concepts have been grasped
 - ensuring that teachers provide work which consistently challenges the most able pupils to make their best possible progress
 - improving the quality of pupils' writing, including their more accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar
 - ensuring that teachers demand that pupils consistently present their work well and try their best when they work independently
 - continuing to ensure that gaps between disadvantaged pupils' attainment and/or progress and those of other pupils nationally diminish quickly across the school.
- Increase the impact of leadership and management by:
 - establishing clear expectations with staff of the good progress pupils should make
 - continuing to improve the systems leaders use to accurately track pupils' progress in all subjects
 - making sure that senior leaders and governors carefully evaluate the impact of actions to bring about rapid improvement
 - helping subject leaders and subject champions to better support colleagues.
- Improve early years provision to ensure that a good proportion of children are ready for Year 1 by:
 - improving the accuracy of assessment
 - ensuring that adults intervene to move children's learning on when they work independently
 - providing activities in the outdoor area to enable children to practise what they have learned in adult-led sessions.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Over time, senior leaders have not made sure that the school has maintained the good performance noted at the previous inspection. As a result, although pupils are happy, not enough of them are reaching their full potential.
- Pupils' outcomes have not improved consistently since the previous inspection. Progress is uneven and the proportion of pupils working at the standard typically expected for their age varies across the school. At times, pupils who are capable of working at the higher standard are not doing so, because they are not challenged well enough to help them show a deeper understanding of their learning.
- From the very low standards seen in 2016, senior leaders are rightly pleased with the improvement in the progress made by Year 6 in 2017. However, leaders are aware that there is more to do if pupils across the school are to make the rapid progress needed to reach at least the standards expected for their age.
- Senior leaders are aware that information about how well pupils are doing is not yet fully accurate. Teachers are beginning to develop a shared understanding of what constitutes pupils' good progress in English and mathematics and other subjects. However, this has yet to lead to pupils making good progress in all classes or subjects.
- A new tracking system is helping leaders to keep a rigorous check on how well pupils are doing in reading, writing and mathematics. Assessment information for other subjects is being increasingly gathered.
- Thorough checks on the quality of teaching ensure that leaders know where teaching is effective and where it needs improving. The school development plan identifies those areas in most need of development. However, at times, leaders hold too positive a view of the impact of the actions taken, and improvements do not happen quickly enough.
- Senior leaders have put into place a new teaching programme for mathematics. A themed week, with mathematics as a focus, and a games evening held for children and their families helped develop confidence in this subject.
- The profile of reading has been raised through events, such as 'Bedtime Reading', when pupils shared books with their parents and carers. The school encourages members of the local community to visit the school to read to the pupils. Senior firefighters and police officers are among those who have helped pupils with their reading.
- The headteacher has made sure there are effective procedures in place for managing the performance of teachers and for teaching assistants. Targeted training is provided to help keep teachers' skills sharp and improve their subject knowledge.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are provided for well. The school has recently reviewed the precise needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities to ensure that the additional funding for these pupils is spent effectively.
- The headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, knows what to do to move the school forward. The senior leadership team has been strengthened by the

appointment of an assistant headteacher, who has taken on the leadership of the early years. Effective use is made of the expertise of a range of external consultants, most recently, for example, to improve pupils' learning in subjects other than English and mathematics.

- The roles of subject leaders and subject champions are developing. All are keen to support colleagues and contribute to the leadership of the school, but there has not yet been time to see the full impact of their work on the quality of teaching.
- The curriculum is enriched by an extensive range of additional activities, such as residential experiences and visits linked to topic work. The school offers a range of after-school clubs and a well-attended breakfast club.
- St Columba's is an inclusive school. The school's Christian ethos and strong values underpin everything it does. Leaders ensure that British values are promoted well. Pupils are taught to respect the views of others and to value differences. They reflect on challenging issues, such as gender stereotyping, and all contribute to class 'floor books', which record pupils' ideas and thoughts.
- Pupil premium funding is carefully deployed to support the pastoral and learning needs of disadvantaged pupils and, where necessary, disadvantaged pupils receive additional support. The progress of this group is improving, but not all pupils are making the swift progress that is needed to catch up with the standards expected for their age.
- Pupils' attendance is similar to the national average. The attendance team, led by the school business manager, and supported effectively by the parent mentor and learning mentor, ensures that pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and their families, are supported with any issues which might lead to non-attendance.
- The primary school physical education and sport funding is used well. Specialist coaches help pupils develop new skills and develop the expertise of teachers. As a result, pupils are participating in a wider range of sports than previously. Several of the school's sports teams have gained success when playing games against other schools.
- Since the previous inspection, senior leaders and governors have effectively managed challenges brought about by sudden changes in staffing including leadership. The headteacher has been very successful in maintaining the stability and in building the morale of the staff team. All who work at St Columba's are committed to achieving the best for the pupils. Parents hold highly positive views of the school, its leaders and staff.
- Local authority officers and the archdiocese provide effective additional help and support where needed.

Governance of the school

- Governors know their roles and responsibilities well. They have reviewed the focus of their work and have deployed their skills appropriately. This has strengthened their ability to support and challenge school leaders.
- Governors share leaders' ambitions for the school and fully support the values and ethos. They take a keen and close interest in all aspects of the school's work. Minutes of governing body meetings show that they ask questions and hold leaders to account about the information they are given. Governors know the school's strengths and what

needs further work, for example, acknowledging the need for pupils to make better progress, including in the early years.

- The governing body checks carefully on the spending of additional funding, including the pupil premium, and understands the impact of the spending decisions on the personal development and achievement of disadvantaged pupils.
- Governors ensure that any safeguarding issues are reported and discussed at every meeting. They understand how teachers' performance is assessed and rewarded.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The culture of safeguarding is strong. School records are carefully maintained and detailed. Staff are vigilant and demonstrate a strong awareness of safeguarding issues. They receive up-to-date training on safeguarding matters, so they know what to do should they be worried about a pupil.
- Appropriate checks are made on staff before they start employment, and visitors to the school are informed about safeguarding arrangements on arrival. Leaders work effectively with outside agencies and parents and carers to ensure that pupils are supported and safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching has not had a consistently strong impact on pupils' learning and progress over time. Progress in different year groups and in different subjects has been and remains, too variable in its quality.
- Leaders are aware that the assessments made by teachers on pupils' progress have not been fully accurate. Some teachers have erred on the side of caution when making assessments and others may have been too generous. This means the information passed on about pupils' attainment and progress has not been fully reliable as an indicator of what pupils know and what they need to do next. As such, it has not been as helpful to teachers as it should be.
- Teachers plan stimulating and exciting activities to introduce new topics across the wider curriculum. These capture pupils' imagination and make them want to find out more. However, the work set does not always stretch and challenge the most able, including those who are disadvantaged, or deepen their thinking.
- A positive and supportive climate for learning in classrooms exists throughout the school. Pupils are keen to learn. They show interest and enthusiasm across a wide range of topics and activities, particularly when they have the chance to talk about their learning together in lessons.
- Relationships between teachers, teaching assistants and pupils are mutually respectful. Teachers know individual pupils well. They make sure that pupils understand that errors and misconceptions are an important part of learning, as is talking about their learning and explaining their thinking when tackling problems in mathematics, for

example. This means that pupils are not afraid to offer their own thoughts and opinions. Teachers allow pupils time to think and to express their own ideas.

- Pupils' grammar, spelling and punctuation have improved as a result of improvements in teaching. In upper key stage 2, in particular, pupils often draft their writing before editing it to improve its quality. However, at times, careless errors litter pupils' drafted work, and they spend more time correcting errors than improving the content and deepening their learning. At times, pupils do not write at length in order to practise and apply their writing skills.
- Much of the work on display throughout the school shows that pupils are able to produce neat, well-presented work. However, work in pupils' books can sometimes be untidy, and at times pupils are capable of producing more work in lessons.
- The teaching of early reading skills is effective. Children in the early years and pupils in key stage 1 recognise letters and know the sounds that different letter combinations make. They use this in their reading to help them work out unfamiliar words. Older pupils read with fluency and expression and talk about what they have read.
- Small-group work, often led by teaching assistants, is helping pupils who need extra support, including those pupils who are disadvantaged. Gaps between these pupils' attainment and progress and that of others are beginning to diminish, but there is more to do to fully eliminate these gaps.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils take a pride in their school and are keen to contribute towards its success. They take their responsibilities seriously, particularly those who act as school councillors and digital leaders.
- Pupils said that they feel safe. Incidents of bullying are rare and are dealt with quickly on those occasions when it is reported. Pupils recognise that everyone is different but equal.
- Breakfast club gets the day off to a good start. Pupils of all ages have a healthy breakfast and play games together until the start of the school day, when they are ready to learn. The separate Nursery breakfast club is very well attended.
- Pupils learn about healthy lifestyles. They understand the benefits of making healthy food choices and the positive impact of regular exercise. Younger children enjoy the lunchtime activities provided for them by the older pupils who act as sports leaders.
- The needs of pupils whose circumstances might make them vulnerable are met very well and this is a strength of the school.
- Pupils' personal and emotional development is well supported because adults know the pupils well. Pupils spoke highly of the support they receive from staff. They reported that it helps them solve problems, both in school and at home.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are well mannered and polite. They listen carefully to adults and each other and respond quickly when teachers or teaching assistants require their attention. Pupils show great respect for the views of others.
- Pupils think behaviour is good. Pupils behave well during lessons, at playtimes and when moving around the school.
- Pupils enjoy school, attend regularly and look smart in their uniforms.
- The school's rules and rewards systems are well understood by all, and pupils think that staff apply these fairly. Staff sensitively help the few pupils who sometimes find it difficult to manage their own emotions and behaviour.
- Pupils concentrate well when teachers explain new work to them or when they talk about their work in small groups. However, at times, pupils could achieve more when they work independently, and sometimes the presentation of their work can be untidy.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Outcomes require improvement because pupils' progress is uneven across the school. From low starting points, pupils are not consistently making fast enough progress to catch up with other pupils nationally.
- At the end of key stage 1 in 2016, standards were lower than average, and particularly so in writing and mathematics. Few pupils reached the higher standard in any subject. In 2017, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standard increased to be in line with the national average. Attainment at the expected standard, however, was again lower than average, with writing now in the bottom 10% of schools nationally.
- The school was pleased with the improvement in progress at the end of Year 6 in 2017, compared with the very low levels seen in 2016. Year 6 pupils' progress in reading, in particular, was well above average in 2017. Attainment at the expected and higher standards in reading and grammar, spelling and punctuation, improved to at least in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining the expected standard in writing and mathematics also improved but, nonetheless, remained below those of reading, and too few pupils attained the higher standard in these subjects.
- The work in pupils' books shows that the standards reached by current pupils, including the disadvantaged, vary considerably across the school. Progress is more rapid in Year 5 and Year 6. Assessment information held by the school did not consistently match what inspectors saw in pupils' books.
- Across the school, the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, do not consistently make the progress of which they are capable. This is because the work they are given, including in subjects other than English and mathematics, is not always sufficiently challenging. As a result, too few of these pupils reach the higher standard in any subject.

- Actions taken by leaders to improve the teaching of reading, mathematics and grammar, spelling and punctuation skills are beginning to pay dividends, and pupils' progress in these subjects is generally faster than in writing.
- Progress is beginning to speed up for disadvantaged pupils. In 2017, progress at the end of Year 6 was at least in line with the national average, and it was above average in reading. However, their attainment in most subjects lagged significantly behind that of other pupils nationally. No disadvantaged pupil reached the higher standard in writing and mathematics.
- The proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check in 2017 was broadly in line with the national average. Almost all pupils reached the expected standard by the end of Year 2.
- Pupils' achievement in reading is better than that in writing and mathematics. A number of pupils from across the school read to the inspectors with increasing fluency. Pupils enjoy reading and the 'Read for the Stars' awards, gained every time they complete a book, are highly appreciated. This keen focus on regular reading contributes well to pupils' grammar, spelling and punctuation skills.
- Leaders have taken steps to boost the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Interventions tailored to their particular needs and the support they receive in class, are helping these pupils make better progress.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Over time, senior leaders have not acted quickly enough to address the weaknesses in leadership and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- Children join the school with knowledge and skills below and sometimes well below those typical for their age. The quality of teaching and leadership has not been good enough to help children make the rapid progress needed. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year has shown little improvement in recent years. It is below average and the gap between the school and other schools nationally has widened. Gaps between disadvantaged children's achievement and that of others are not diminishing quickly enough. There is more to do to ensure that children are well prepared for Year 1.
- Senior leaders consider that, at times, assessments made at the end of the Reception Year have not been fully accurate. In 2016, it was judged that the proportion of children reaching a good level of development was in line with the national average. However, senior leaders consider that the assessments made at that time were over positive and that the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development was in fact below that seen nationally.
- The new early years leader has a good understanding of the strengths in the provision and what needs to be improved. She has monitored and given advice to the adults teaching in the early years to help them improve their practice. Staff in the Nursery and Reception classes now work together more closely, and the use of the shared outdoor area is improving.

- Teaching is strongest when adults lead learning sessions. Basic reading, writing and mathematics skills are developed increasingly well in these sessions because of teachers' good subject knowledge. However, children do not receive enough guidance about how they can develop these basic skills when they work independently, especially when they learn outdoors. As a result, their progress is not as rapid as it should be.
- Children enter the early years with communication and speech and language skills below and sometimes well below those typical for their age. A clear focus for all adults is to develop these aspects through regular interaction with the children and specialist speech therapy support where appropriate. As a result, children's vocabulary increases well, and many children chat confidently with adults and each other as they play.
- Children are cared for and nurtured well so they feel increasingly confident and eager to join in activities. They are well behaved and concentrate increasingly well on tasks that capture their interest. They enjoy talking with adults and play sensibly and cooperate well. Children respond well to adults' teaching and instructions and are keen to learn.
- Adults' interventions are not always timely in supporting better learning. Questioning is not as probing as it might be. Opportunities to develop children's thinking and deepen their understanding are sometimes missed, particularly when they play and work independently. As a result, progress is not as fast as it could be.
- Where activities capture children's interests, they play happily and purposefully, and learning moves on well. For example, in the Reception class, children enjoyed the 'hospital' created in the role play area. They took turns playing the patient and a variety of healthcare roles. Sound buttons, which provide instructions for children, encouraged them to use the telephone to make emergency calls, which they did with great confidence. The class teacher joined the children to encourage them to talk about the different roles they were playing.
- When activities do not engage or hold children's interests, learning is not as successful. In several sessions during the inspection, almost all the children chose to learn outdoors. Children had a lot of fun and happily played football and used the large climbing equipment. However, the resources provided to build on children's basic reading, writing and mathematics skills, linked to the tale of the 'Ginger Bread Man', did not provide enough challenge to retain children's interests. As a result, few children built on the earlier phonics session they had enjoyed with their teacher.
- Induction arrangements are good. Parents are very positive about how well adults help their children settle in school. Without exception, parents who spoke with an inspector or responded to Parent View said how happy their children are in school. They think that staff take very good care of children and keep them safe. Staff are approachable, and parents feel listened to by staff.
- Welfare arrangements are effective. Adults know the children well and take care to ensure that they are safe and happy. All adults are vigilant in upholding the school policies and procedures for safeguarding.
- Senior leaders and governors are aware of what needs to be further improved, including sharpening assessments and raising the quality of teaching, particularly when children learn independently outdoors.

School details

Unique reference number	104480
Local authority	Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Inspection number	10042455

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	216
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Fleming
Headteacher	Margaret Evans
Telephone number	01514 778360
Website	stcolumbasknowsley.co.uk
Email address	stcolumbas@knowsley.gov.uk
Date of previous inspection	10–11 September 2013

Information about this school

- The school is similar in size to most other primary schools. More girls than boys attend the school.
- Children attend the Nursery class each morning. They attend the Reception class full time. Not all children who attend Nursery gain a place in the over-subscribed Reception class.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the school is very high.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is well above average.
- The proportions of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan are average.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced a number of staff changes. The current headteacher and deputy headteacher took up their

substantive posts in November 2014 and June 2015 respectively. They had undertaken their roles in an acting capacity from December 2013. The assistant headteacher assumed leadership of the early years in September 2017 and was formally appointed to the role in December 2017.

- The governing body has been reconstituted since the previous inspection. The chair and the vice-chair of the governing body have been appointed to their roles since the previous inspection.
- The school provides a breakfast club. There is no charge for this provision.
- The school is a member of the Oaks Teaching School Alliance.
- 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.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment over time. Learning was observed in all classes and where pupils learned in small groups. Some learning was observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Inspectors looked at examples of pupils' work and talked with them about their work. They listened to pupils read and observed the teaching of reading skills. Pupils talked with inspectors about the books they have enjoyed and those they are currently reading.
- The inspectors talked with pupils informally as they played at breaktimes, visited the dining hall at lunchtime and observed pupils' behaviour as they moved around school. They spoke with pupils attending the breakfast club and met formally with three groups of pupils, including two pupils who showed an inspector around the school.
- An inspector met with the vice-chair of the governing body and four other governors. She met separately with the chair of the governing body and with the local parish priest, who is a member of the governing body.
- An inspector met with a representative of the local authority and a representative of the archdiocese. She also spoke by telephone to a member of the local authority safeguarding team.
- Inspectors spoke with middle and subject leaders and other members of school staff.
- Inspectors spoke with parents at the start of the school day. They took account of 14 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and two comments provided for inspectors. Inspectors also took account of 32 responses to the staff questionnaire and the school's most recent surveys of pupils' and parents' views.
- The inspectors examined a range of documents, including information about pupils' progress, school improvement plans, information about teachers' performance and external views of the school. They reviewed the contents of the school's website and scrutinised records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

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Ofsted Inspector

Aleksandra Hartshorne

Ofsted Inspector

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