

St Gregory's Catholic Middle School

Biddenham Turn, Bedford, MK40 4AT

Inspection dates

20–21 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Senior leaders are ambitious for the school. Their focus on positive relationships and secure literacy and mathematical skills for all pupils, regardless of their starting points or background, has been effective.
- Additional funding is managed well to give pupils an equal opportunity to succeed. This is having a marked impact on improving the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.
- Governors use their considerable expertise well to support the school. Their high level of challenge contributes to the school's improvement.
- The spiritual, moral and social development of the pupils is promoted very well. Recent improvements designed to enrich pupils' cultural development show that school leaders are adding to pupils' memorable experiences.
- Teachers' planning enables pupils to learn quickly. Activities are often the same for pupils with different needs but the individual support, group work, questions asked in class and teachers' marking all contribute to pupils' good progress.
- Pupils are courteous, considerate and caring. Their good behaviour in lessons and around the school contributes to pupils feeling safe and supported.
- Pupils are particularly positive about their learning in English and mathematics because they understand the importance of these subjects for their futures and make good progress.
- Many pupils start the school behind in their reading, writing and mathematics but they catch up or do better than their peers in other schools. This includes those supported by pupil premium funding.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Improvement is too dependent upon senior leaders. Subject leadership is less well developed.
- Pupils' work is not always analysed rigorously enough when evaluating the quality of teaching.
- The range of teaching and learning approaches, although increasing, is not wide enough to engage all pupils equally well.
- Homework is not used sufficiently or imaginatively enough to help pupils build on their good learning in lessons.
- Pupils sometimes produce untidy work. They do not always correct inaccuracies identified by their teachers.
- Whilst there are examples of good quality work pupils do not always persevere or refine their skills enough to reach the highest levels.
- Attendance is average.
- Pupils' achievement is not equally high across their different subjects. This reflects weaker aspects of teaching and subject leadership.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 22 lessons, including three seen jointly with the headteacher and assistant headteachers. Registration, workshops and an assembly were also observed.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, six representatives of the governing body including the executive headteacher, and a representative of the local authority. A telephone discussion was held with a representative of the diocese.
- There were insufficient responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View, to analyse. However, inspectors took account of the school’s most recent questionnaire and comments made by parents and carers at the end of the first day.
- Inspectors talked with many pupils about their learning and life at the school. They held meetings with the school council, a group of pupils in Years 5 and 6 and a group in Years 7 and 8. They reviewed their work in English, mathematics and a range of other subjects.
- Inspectors took account of responses to a questionnaire completed by 30 staff.
- The inspection team observed the school’s work, reviewed current data about pupils’ achievement, examined records relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, and looked at documents used by leaders in monitoring and evaluating the school’s work
- During this inspection, inspectors asked additional questions about the school’s work on government changes to the curriculum and assessment and on the use of pupil premium and sports funding. This information will contribute to work being carried out by Ofsted to assess the impact of those initiatives nationally.

Inspection team

Ian Middleton, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Shahed Ahmed

Additional Inspector

Margaret Eldridge-Mrotzek

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Gregory's Catholic Middle School is of average size in relation to other middle schools.
- The school converted to become an academy on 1 April 2013. When Ofsted last inspected its predecessor school, also known as St Gregory's Catholic Middle School, it was judged to be satisfactory. Although it is an academy, staff, pupils and parents refer to St Gregory's as a school, as does this report.
- St Gregory's is part of the St Francis of Assisi Academies Trust with St Joseph's Catholic Lower School, St John Rigby Catholic Primary and St Thomas More Catholic Upper School.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is high in relation to national figures at nearly four in every five
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is also high at nearly two thirds.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported through the pupil premium (extra government funding to support looked after children or pupils known to be eligible for free school meals) is above national figures at nearly two in every five.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, at over one in five, is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching is consistently good or better in all subjects by:
 - increasing the range of teaching and learning approaches used
 - intervening in all subjects where pupils' achievement could be higher still
 - using homework more regularly and imaginatively
 - making sure that pupils learn how to check and refine their work.
- Build on pupils' current achievements by:
 - increasing the proportion of pupils who reach the higher levels in English and mathematics
 - supporting pupils in developing their writing and mathematics in different subjects
 - making sure that pupils take pride in their work
 - helping pupils understand how different subjects might be applied in the world of work.
- Widening the impact of leadership and management on the school's performance by:
 - strengthening the role and accountability of subject leaders
 - giving more attention to pupils' work when evaluating the quality of teaching
 - keeping up-to-date with regard to safeguarding requirements.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and assistant headteachers have worked effectively to make the school a caring community in which pupils and staff can succeed. As a result, pupils' attitudes and achievements have improved markedly since the predecessor school was last inspected. The school's improvements are reflected in the rise in standards and the positive comments made by staff, pupils, parents and carers.
- Pupils of all abilities and from all backgrounds are treated with respect. School leaders manage the resources available to increase equality of opportunity. For example, use of the pupil premium to fund individual and small group intervention in English and mathematics has enabled disadvantaged pupils to catch up or do better than their peers.
- Decisive and effective action to tackle weak teaching and rising standards both contribute to the view of senior leaders and governors that teaching is outstanding. However, not enough monitoring and evaluation focuses on pupils' work or on how well improvements in teaching are consistent across all staff. As a consequence, pupils do not always reach or sustain an equally high standard of work within or between their different subjects.
- Although the quality of teaching and subject leadership is not of an equally high standard it is mostly good because the management of staff performance is secure. Since the last inspection of the predecessor school, a high proportion of teachers and other adults have been replaced. In subjects such as English and mathematics the school improvement plan is providing a clear basis for further improvement because actions that are planned are subject-specific and based on comprehensive evaluation.
- The good quality of subject leadership in English and mathematics is not replicated across all areas of the curriculum. However, the school's growing reputation in subjects such as physical education, complemented by judicious use of primary school sport funding to improve swimming, shows the benefits when subject and senior leaders work together. Staff questionnaires show strong support for the leadership of teaching and learning.
- The school provides pupils with a suitably broad and balanced range of subjects. This contributes to the quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. However, school leaders rightly see strengthening pupils' cultural development as a priority, having accurately evaluated this as a weaker aspect of provision. The improved participation of pupils in activities such as work with a visiting poet and theatre visits show that pupils are beginning to benefit from the school's actions. Strategies to improve life skills such as swimming are also working well.
- Good collaboration between the schools in the multi-academy trust eases transition for pupils as they move through their education. Their decisions about which courses to take in the upper school are guided by suitable careers information and advice. Pupils fully understand the importance of English and mathematics for their futures but they are less clear about how other subjects contribute to employability.
- The local authority considers the school requires minimal support and uses its leaders to inspire others in Bedford. For example, one of the assistant headteachers is sharing his innovative approaches to assessment without levels. However, the local authority's too-generous endorsement of the school as outstanding is largely based on data analysis. For example, the local authority was not aware of the process or findings of the school's 'focus' monitoring and evaluation weeks, which have identified weaknesses that align with inspection findings. This limits the impact of the local authority on the school's improvement.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is committed to the school and understands the school's pivotal contribution to the all-through education provided by the trust. Governors are confident when challenging the school because they are directly involved in reviewing the school's work and analysing its performance. They are well informed about pupils' attainment and progress, and about the quality of teaching. They award

pay increases only where staff performance is good. Regular reports enable governors to contribute to strategic decisions. Their involvement in using funding efficiently contributes to this strong aspect of management. The check the use and impact of pupil premium, catch-up and primary sport funding effectively. Governors review their own development regularly and support other governing bodies through the work that two governors who are National Leaders of Governance. The school's improvements are supported through committees that draw on the considerable expertise of governors. Governors ensure that legal requirements for safeguarding are met and consult others when additional expertise is necessary. However, advice given by the local authority to governors about the safer recruitment of staff did not meet national requirements on the first day of the inspection. While amended by the end of the inspection, this nevertheless identifies a gap in training and development.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. This view is shared by most of the parents and carers who responded to the school's questionnaire, most of the staff who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire and the pupils who contributed to discussions. Behaviour records indicate that school leaders have successfully established an ethos in which good behaviour is the norm.
- School records show continuous improvements in pupils' attendance, which is now average.
- Pupils move around the school purposefully and arrive at lessons punctually. They are polite to each other, to members of staff and visitors. They contribute to the care of the school environment, for example by disposing of litter thoughtfully and by treating school property with respect. Pupils take the responsibilities they are given seriously and would like more. For example, pupils told inspectors that they would like to organise more activities in the playground and offer more support for pupils who are less confident.
- In lessons, pupils are keen to learn. Discussions engage the majority of pupils. Pupils' books show that they work hard when teachers' expectations are high. However, books also show that pupils do not take enough pride in their work, for example by checking for accuracy or presenting work carefully. Too often, pupils move onto the next piece of work before they have responded to teachers' marking or they consider a piece of work finished too quickly.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Parents and carers believe the school looks after its pupils well. The clear presence of staff at social times contributes to pupils feeling safe. Staff receive regular training and updates relating to the safeguarding of children. The school's policies were amended during the inspection to conform to national requirements with regard to the safer recruitment of staff.
- Pupils show a clear understanding about different types of bullying and discrimination and the harmful effects they can have. This includes the dangers associated with social networking. As a consequence, records show very few incidents of bullying or discrimination and this reflects pupils' confidence in the school. Pupils trust staff and the systems in place to protect them and any issues that might occur are resolved quickly and fairly.
- The school makes effective use of internal and external resources to ensure that pupils whose circumstances might make them vulnerable feel well looked after.
- Pupils are proud of their school community and the ethos of tolerance and mutual respect that is promoted. They show respect for the different beliefs and cultures represented in the school. In addition, senior leaders communicate clearly to pupils, parents and carers the British values associated with democracy, the rule of law and individual liberty. In a history lesson about Cromwell, for example, a teacher contrasted government at Cromwell's time with democracy today.

The quality of teaching is good

- Good relationships in classrooms contribute to a positive climate for learning. Collaboration between pupils contributes to the success of group or paired activities that staff manage well. Individually, the interest of most pupils is captured quickly, often through the use of imagery and discussion as a starting point. Staff are using the professional development provided on these themes to refine their teaching.
- Teachers use their knowledge of pupils effectively to direct questions and to provide additional support where it is needed. Although activities are often the same for the whole class, the follow-up provided for individual pupils enables them to catch up if they are falling behind. Teaching assistants work collaboratively with teachers to provide good support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Teachers' planning and questioning show that challenge for more able pupils is improving.
- Good teaching over time contributes to the good progress pupils make, particularly in English and mathematics. In these subjects, high expectations of what pupils can achieve makes learning busy and builds successfully on pupils' knowledge and skills. Teachers give extra attention to the areas of learning where assessments show there are gaps. This contributes to the standards pupils are able to achieve when tested.
- Teachers give pupils accurate feedback when marking their work. However, marking is not always frequent enough and does not always expect pupils to take action to improve their work. This includes work that is poorly presented or in need of correction. Examples of clear and conscientious marking in some books contrast with some across all subjects that does not use clear enough language to help pupils respond. This means that some pupils make slower progress than they could.
- Teachers make clear to pupils the purpose of each lesson. This contributes to pupils' motivation and in some cases, their understanding about how their skills might be applied in their future lives. This approach works well where good subject knowledge enables teachers to emphasise skills of particular importance to the subject taught. For example in English, pupils in Year 7 understood the value of deduction when analysing images of the Hillsborough disaster, in preparation for their own writing.
- Although teaching successfully engages most pupils in their learning, some activities contribute much more than others. Across the school, homework is not used frequently enough to support pupils in preparing for or following up classwork. As a consequence, pupils are not taught how to continue their learning in order to develop outstanding achievement. While teachers' displays contribute to the positive learning environment, there is not enough distinction between good and top-quality work to inspire pupils to reach the highest levels.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils join the school in Year 5 having reached average or below average standards in reading, writing and mathematics when tested at the end of Key Stage 1. As a result of effective teaching, pupils make good progress to reach or exceed the standards expected at the end of Year 6. Teacher's assessments, checked with the upper school, indicate that pupils sustain their good progress in English and mathematics to leave the school at the end of Year 8 well prepared for their next stage of learning.
- Disadvantaged pupils make at least as much progress as other pupils at the school. The gap between their progress and that of pupils nationally has closed in English and mathematics. Systematic tracking of pupils' progress and well-targeted intervention provided by experienced teachers are contributory factors. In 2014, disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 were just ahead of other pupils in reading and about a term behind them in writing and mathematics. They were about a term behind similar pupils nationally. By the end of Year 8, disadvantaged pupils catch up.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make progress in line with that of their peers. The school's strategies include small group work for pupils who find learning difficult and tailored support for individuals in the classroom. Catch-up funding is used similarly to give extra support to pupils who have not reached the expected level in English. Assessment records indicate these pupils are making good progress.

- Pupils' reading skills and enjoyment of books are areas of particular success. The school has given a high profile to reading. Teachers in most subjects promote reading when opportunities arise. The school library is an attractive and stimulating environment which hosts popular extra-curricular reading activities. Pupils' reading records are conscientiously completed and show how revisiting skills regularly at school and at home has accelerated achievement.
- The proportion of pupils who start at the school in Year 5 having attained the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics is lower than national figures. Although the gap is narrower when pupils leave the school, leaders have rightly focused on raising expectations of more-able, gifted and talented pupils in order to raise their achievement further.
- Pupils' progress in subjects other than English and mathematics is mixed. For example, pupils' work shows that their progress in history is significantly better than in geography. Similarly, pupils make better progress in resistant materials than in other aspects of design and technology. This reflects inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and subject leadership.

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	139547
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	449931

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	354
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christopher Donnellan
Headteacher	Frances Topa
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
Telephone number	01234 268649
Fax number	N/A
Email address	enquiries@st-gregorys.beds.sch.uk

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