

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Axminster

Lyme Road, Axminster, Devon EX13 5BE

Inspection dates

21–22 March 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Strengthened leadership and teaching have accelerated current pupils' progress, but have not raised their attainment sufficiently. Pupils' achievement in writing and mathematics has not been good enough in recent years.
- For some time, the high turnover of staff and temporary appointments weakened the quality of leadership and teaching, and led to discontinuity in pupils' learning.
- Until recently, leaders at all levels, including governors, lacked sufficient information about the impact of teaching on pupils' progress. This limited their ability to tackle inconsistency in teaching and progress for pupils of all abilities.
- The improved work of middle leaders has not been in place long enough to have a full impact on raising pupils' achievements.
- The quality of teaching and learning is too variable. Staff do not consistently set the high expectations needed to secure the pupils' good behaviour for learning or follow the agreed feedback policy.
- The school has not checked well enough that pupil premium funding is used to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

The school has the following strengths

- The recently appointed executive headteacher and assistant headteachers promote a clear vision for the school's development. Improvements are already evident in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, safeguarding and pupils' general behaviour.
- A restored spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation exists at all levels of leadership, including governance. Staff are supportive of the new leadership team and share a determined commitment to further improvement.
- Pupils enjoy school, especially the strong provision for music and sports and their good relationships with each other and with adults.
- Governors have successfully maintained the school's inclusive culture despite a period of instability. The staff promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- Good provision in the early years ensures that children make rapid progress and achieve well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and secure pupils' consistently good progress through the school by:
 - sharing existing good practice so that pupils clearly understand how to improve their work in accordance with the school's new feedback policy
 - ensuring that teachers further improve pupils' behaviour by setting high expectations and developing their full commitment to learning.
- Raise outcomes in writing and mathematics by:
 - developing pupils' handwriting, spelling and punctuation skills
 - improving pupils' basic calculation skills and their ability to solve mathematical problems.
- Ensure the effectiveness of leadership and management through:
 - leaders adjusting swiftly actions to improve teaching and pupils' learning where their monitoring shows it is necessary to secure pupils' rapid progress
 - further developing the capacity of middle leaders to contribute fully to raising standards in their areas of subject responsibility across the school
 - making sure that the school's and academy trust's websites fully meet the requirements on the publication of information.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The school has experienced significant instability in staffing, including at leadership level, for several years. During this period, staff leaders, governors and academy trust leaders did not secure an effective quality of teaching and learning. This led to a year-on-year decline in pupils' achievement.
- Initiatives introduced by the recently appointed executive headteacher and leadership team are increasingly improving the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. However, these have not yet been implemented long enough to secure consistent practice. Consequently, current pupils are not yet making equally good progress in all year groups.
- Teachers work well with teaching assistants to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, at times, the next steps in learning presented to pupils vary across the classes and do not improve their progress quickly enough. This includes the use and impact of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils, which are not yet checked rigorously enough by leaders.
- The development of some middle leadership roles and their work in improving teaching and learning has suffered from instability in staffing. Nevertheless, middle leaders are developing their expertise with colleagues in the school and across the academy trust. This is increasingly helping to improve provision and pupils' outcomes.
- The executive headteacher has introduced an effective system of assessing pupils' progress this academic year. Teachers now have an accurate picture of pupils' different starting points and more effectively tackle the writing and mathematical skills that have lacked development in the past.
- Leaders have improved the way they check the work of the school. For example, the executive headteacher has established a well-considered system for managing the performance of staff. Aided by renewed stability in staffing, this is helping to improve the quality of the teaching and support provided for the pupils. Stronger monitoring of teaching is also enabling leaders to evaluate areas in need of development accurately and to drive improvement more effectively than previously.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and includes an appropriate emphasis on developing pupils' interest in learning and skills in English and mathematics. Currently, standards are rising more consistently in reading than in writing and mathematics.
- The curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. For example, pupils participate in music festivals and join with other schools in choral events at Exeter Cathedral.
- Pupils take part in a stimulating and effective range of activities that secure their good understanding of British values and prepare them well for life in modern Britain. These activities include studying different religions and communities in lessons and assemblies. Pupils learn about democracy during class discussions and when electing members of the school council.

- The primary physical education and sport funding is used effectively to develop pupils' fitness and interest in sport. The school employs coaches who enrich pupils' skills, for example, in gymnastics and dance. Staff provide a good range of extra-curricular clubs that are attended by over three quarters of the pupils.
- Most parents praise the way staff care for their children. Parents rightly identify a school where pupils are treated equally and kept free from discrimination.
- Senior staff, governors and academy trust leaders now work more collaboratively and effectively together. Improvements in teaching and pupils' progress are clearly evident, but are not yet consistent enough throughout the school.

Governance

- Governors have worked effectively with academy trust leaders to appoint new leaders and staff, and are helping to steer the school through a difficult period of change.
- Governors engage well in training and have acted purposefully over the past year to strengthen the way they hold leaders to account for pupils' achievement. However, they do not oversee the use and impact of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils rigorously enough. Governors do not ensure that the school's website complies with the requirements on the publication of information.
- Governors support the executive headteacher well in managing and improving staff performance and morale. They have given effective assistance to new leaders in updating safeguarding and assessment procedures, and fully support their determined drive to raise pupils' achievements. Governors play a strong role in promoting the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and in sustaining close links with the church and the local community.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The executive headteacher, assistant headteachers and governors have updated safeguarding arrangements this academic year. School leaders work well with academy trust leaders to ensure that records are detailed and of good quality. Staff training in safeguarding and the safe recruitment of staff fully meet statutory requirements. Staff have been trained and understand how to protect pupils from extremist views. Staff know the pupils well and swiftly liaise with outside agencies to take effective action to deal with any problems.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Instability in staffing has contributed to variations in teaching, learning and assessment and, until recently, inhibited leaders' actions to rectify weaker teaching. Over time, pupils' basic writing and mathematical skills have not been targeted and developed rigorously enough.

- The quality of teaching, although improving, is not consistently good across the school. At times, teachers do not set high enough expectations of pupils' engagement in learning, and do not challenge them to think enough about their work to deepen their understanding. As a result, some pupils wait for extra help from the teacher rather than getting on with their work. Consequently, pupils' progress slows in, for example, spelling, handwriting and calculation in mathematics.
- Not all teachers follow the school's agreed feedback policy. As a result, more often in mathematics than in English, pupils are not clear about how to improve their work, especially to solve problems.
- Teachers are making better use of more accurate assessments of pupils' developing skills to set appropriately challenging work. For example, during English in Years 4 and 5, pupils including the most able responded well to the teachers' probing questions. This helped them to deepen their understanding of how to write persuasively. Teachers are also making better use of teaching assistants and extra teaching to close past differences in pupils' skills. As a result, most pupils including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making faster progress.
- Staff establish positive relationships with pupils and provide stimulating activities that are increasingly capturing their interest. For example, pupils in Year 1 eagerly wrote letters to their mothers about what they saw 'in the land where the Bong Tree grows'.
- Staff in early years and key stage 1 classes teach and develop the pupils' phonics understanding effectively. Teachers across key stage 2 have been successful in improving the teaching of reading this academic year.
- Staff liaise well with parents and encourage frequent reading at school and at home. The pupils read from books with appropriately challenging texts that engage their interest and promote their progress.
- Pupils who have special needs and/or disabilities are well supported and fully included across the range of school activities. They benefit from individual programmes and additional adult assistance. As a result, they make increasingly good progress from their starting points. Parents are particularly appreciative of the good care and guidance that their children receive.
- School and academy trust leaders have provided effective training for staff. This is helping to improve the teaching of writing and mathematics and overcome past weaknesses in pupils' skills.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils enjoy school because of the stimulating learning experiences provided for them. Pupils of all ages respect adults and show good manners when greeting and talking to visitors to the school.

- In line with the school's values, pupils show a genuine consideration for the needs of others and empathy for those less fortunate than themselves. Most pupils value the views of others and, especially in Reception and Years 4 and 5, are deepening their learning by sharing ideas with each other.
- An increasing number of pupils are showing more resilience in their learning and this is helping to quicken their progress.
- Pupils talk knowledgeably about British values and when questioned quickly assert that 'We should treat each other with equal respect.'
- Staff sustain a caring community, which is especially supportive of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those considered vulnerable.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to implement welfare and safeguarding procedures effectively. As a result, when questioned, pupils say that they feel safe and typically comment that 'there is a friendly atmosphere here'.
- Most parents believe that the school provides good care for their children and keeps them safe.
- Pupil members of the school council take their responsibilities seriously. Parents, staff and pupils also emphasise the diligent way that members of the orchestra and choir give of their best when representing the school during concerts.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Some pupils have not adjusted to teachers' raised expectations and, at times, lose concentration when adults move to support other pupils. After discussions, some pupils delay starting their work until an adult offers more support. This weakness in pupils' behaviour for learning impedes their progress.
- Most pupils behave well around the school and conduct themselves in an orderly and respectful manner during morning breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Pupils understand the school rules and are aware of the consequences of poor behaviour. They say that behaviour has improved this school year since the school's change of leadership. School records and staff and parents' comments support this view.
- Pupils have a good knowledge of different types of bullying, such as cyber and verbal abuse. Pupils know how to stay safe and keep each other safe, for example when using computers. They say that bullying is rare and that 'adults help everyone to stay calm'.
- Leaders work supportively with parents to ensure that pupils attend school on time and regularly. Leaders check attendance thoroughly and sustain close links with families and, as necessary, with outside agencies to reduce persistent absence. As a result, pupils' attendance rates continue to be above those found in other schools nationally, which reflects their enjoyment of school.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- In recent years, standards in national assessments at the end of key stage 2, especially in writing and mathematics, have remained below average.
- Although much improved this academic year, the standards pupils achieve across the school are still too variable. In some classes, pupils are not overcoming the legacy of underdeveloped writing and mathematical skills quickly enough. Consequently, teaching has not yet ensured that pupils are fully prepared for the next stage of their education.
- School information, pupils' work and responses in class show much improved progress in English and mathematics this academic year. Pupils typically say that 'teachers are making learning more interesting for us'. This is especially so in Reception and Year 1 and Years 4 and 5 classes, where strong teaching promotes pupils' rapid progress and builds well on their previous skills.
- Over time, an above-average proportion of pupils have achieved the expected standard in Years 1 and 2 phonics screening checks. Currently, teachers are building more strongly on this foundation to quicken pupils' progress in reading.
- Pupils in key stage 1 show confidence in sounding out letters correctly and tackling new words. Frequent reading practice at home and school promotes their rapid progress. Pupils in key stage 2 demonstrate good skills and a clear enjoyment in reading, and relish the challenge to read with accurate expression.
- Over recent years, fluctuations in the level of challenge presented to pupils have slowed the progress of the most able pupils. Current teaching is providing stronger challenges and more stimulating experiences which enthuse pupils of all abilities to engage better in their learning. Increasingly, the completed work of the most able pupils shows their deepened understanding when, for example in Year 6 mathematics books, solving equations.
- In previous years, the progress of the small number of disadvantaged pupils has lacked consistency because their basic skills have not been developed well enough. This year more focused adult support is improving their progress, but still varies in some classes.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made inconsistent progress in the past. However, pupils are now responding well to more effective individual adult support and so making more rapid progress.
- Pupils often make rapid progress and some excel in sport and music, especially when representing the school as members of the orchestra and choir at various events and concerts.

Early years provision

Good

- Strong leadership underpins consistently good early years provision.
- Children generally start the combined Reception and Year 1 class with levels of skill that are typical for their age. Children enjoy their time in Reception and make rapid progress in response to good teaching.

- An above-average proportion of children achieve a good level of development by the end of their time in Reception. This shows that children are well prepared for future learning in Year 1.
- School staff liaise well with colleagues in the privately run on-site pre-school and also work very supportively with parents. They carefully gather information to establish the children's level of development when they start school.
- School staff use assessments of children's skills effectively to get to know them well and ensure that teaching and support accurately target their individual needs. The children's rapid progress and positive response to stimulating learning experiences and effective teaching are clearly seen in their well-presented journals and books.
- Staff in the combined Reception and Year 1 class implement the required welfare and safeguarding procedures securely. They manage the children's personal development and behaviour very supportively and establish very encouraging relationships with them. As a result, children behave well and enjoy school.
- Staff include children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with most ability with equal success in their learning. For example, during the inspection, children of all abilities cooperated supportively and shared ideas confidently when making cardboard boats and houses.
- The staff sustain supportive class routines and provide clear guidance to the children to keep them safe. For example, they teach children how to use steps safely when using the stimulating indoor and outdoor facilities.
- The teacher and teaching assistant work well as a team. They ensure that the level of support and the learning activities provided for the children are pitched at the right level to extend their skills and understanding. For example, children develop their early mark-making and numeracy skills by counting tadpoles, drawing pictures and writing about their development.
- Staff sustain an effective balance between adult-led and supported activity and the learning activities chosen by the children themselves. Adults talk and question children effectively to develop their phonics understanding and enable their freely chosen use of large wheeled toys to develop their physical and social skills.
- The early years facilities provide a stimulating range of activities to support children's learning, but plans to further extend the children's computing skills are not yet fully developed.

School details

Unique reference number	140772
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10024957

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	119
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Mark Burrough
Executive Headteacher	Frances Guppy
Telephone number	01297 32785
Website	www.stmarysaxminster.devon.sch.uk
Email address	admin@stmarysaxminster.devon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about the impact of pupil premium funding on its website.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about accessibility planning for disabled pupils. The academy's website was being re-developed at the time of the inspection.
- St Mary's Catholic Primary School is smaller than the average-sized primary school and is part of the Plymouth CAST multi-academy trust. The trust was formed in April 2014. The school joined the trust and became an academy on 1 April 2014.
- The work of the trust is overseen by a board of directors. The trust is responsible for one nursery, one first school, 32 primary schools and two secondary schools across seven local authorities in the south-west region.

- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and a below-average proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below average.
- Children experience early years provision in a combined Reception and Year 1 class.
- The school does not meet 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.
- A privately-run pre-school operates on the school's site but, as it is not managed by the school's governing body, it is not included in this inspection.
- There have been significant changes in leadership and teaching, and difficulties affecting the recruitment and retention of staff since the previous inspection.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed pupils' learning in all classes, accompanied by the executive headteacher.
- The inspector scrutinised a wide range of documents, including records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance, safeguarding procedures and the school's self-evaluation.
- The inspector examined the school's systems for monitoring progress and records of checks on the quality of teaching.
- The inspector talked to individual pupils and a representative group of pupils about the school and their work. He listened to individual pupils reading and examined an extensive sample of pupils' work. The inspector also talked with pupils during breaktimes.
- The inspector met with representatives of the governing body and an advisor from the multi-academy trust. The inspector met with other teaching staff, mainly to discuss their senior and/or middle leadership roles. The inspector also spoke with teaching assistants and support staff.
- The views expressed in the 30 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were considered. In addition, the inspector gathered the views of several parents during informal meetings at the school and considered parents' written comments.
- The inspector evaluated the school's use of the sport premium and the pupil premium.

Inspection team

Alexander Baxter, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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