

St Nicholas Catholic Primary School

Ringswell Avenue, Exeter, Devon EX1 3EG

Inspection dates

27–28 November 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have maintained the school's strengths from the previous inspection. They have successfully improved pupils' attainment and progress following a decline in some recent results, particularly in key stage 2.
- Pupils achieve well overall in reading, writing and mathematics. There has been a marked improvement in mathematics recently.
- Teaching is good, encouraging a strong response from pupils. Teachers have benefited from many opportunities to develop their skills further, and they are now held more accountable for pupils' progress.
- Children in the Nursery and Reception are taught well and make good progress.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Pupils enjoy coming to school for lessons and the popular range of additional curriculum opportunities, such as clubs.
- Pupils feel very safe and well cared for in school. Attendance is above the national average.
- Parents greatly appreciate the quality of teaching, care and support for their children, particularly for those who are vulnerable.
- School leaders, including middle leaders, check the quality of teaching and learning, and pupils' progress, thoroughly and accurately.
- The headteacher has overcome some difficult challenges caused by changes in staffing to keep the school's focus on improvement. Senior members of the trust provide expert advice to assist the school's leadership in this.
- Leaders evaluate the school's performance accurately and plan effectively for continued improvement.
- The school gives a high priority to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school's Christian emphasis has a high profile.
- Although most pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics, a minority of pupils achieve less consistently. These are usually lower-attainers and some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Learning for these pupils is not as consistently effective as for others.
- The range and depth of writing in some subjects is not as high as it is in literacy work.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leaders should ensure that:
 - they spread the best teaching practice in the school and make the best use of assessment so that staff consistently meet the learning needs of the minority of lower-attaining pupils and thereby maximise their progress
 - staff plan activities for pupils with SEND that are always focused on providing appropriate challenge and opportunities, to help them make good progress.
- Teachers should provide more opportunities for pupils to transfer the writing skills which they show in literacy lessons to other subjects, so that there is a more consistent standard of quality writing across the curriculum.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- There was a high turnover of staff following the previous inspection. Despite this, the headteacher and other senior leaders have continued to improve the school in some key areas, including the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. As a result, pupils are now better prepared for the next phase of their education at the end of key stage 2.
- Senior members of the trust have assisted the school in becoming more effective by providing support and advice. For example, they have strengthened the school's ability to evaluate its performance accurately and focus on the right areas for improvement.
- Leaders have made staff more accountable for pupils' progress. To facilitate this, they have provided good opportunities for staff to develop their skills. The headteacher and other leaders check the quality of teaching and learning regularly.
- Middle leaders, such as those for literacy and mathematics, also play an increasingly important role in this process. They report on the strengths and areas for development in their subjects periodically.
- Because of these developments, and the enthusiasm and commitment of staff, there have been significant recent improvements in pupils' progress, especially in key stage 2.
- School leaders provide high-quality care and support for pupils, including those who are particularly vulnerable. Parents testify to the strength of provision. A typical comment which a parent made was, 'The caring environment is perfect for growing children.'
- School improvement is focused strongly on those aspects of the school's performance which help it to continue moving forwards. For example, leaders use the pupil premium funding and other funding to provide additional support for those pupils in danger of underachieving.
- School leaders have strengthened the curriculum since the previous inspection. They have reviewed aspects such as the school's approach to teaching reading, writing and mathematics, and have made adjustments. For example, pupils are now more effective readers of challenging and interesting books. They have more opportunities to read in class.
- The school enhances its curriculum with an extensive range of after-school clubs and visits, including residential visits for most year groups.
- Sport is one of the school's strengths. Additional sports funding has bought in specialist sports coaching. The school is successful in inter-school sports, such as football and rugby.
- There is a strong community focus to the school, reinforced by links with the parish.
- There is an emphasis on promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Leaders are developing the pupil voice by setting up more school councils. Leaders encourage pupils to take responsibility around the school. Staff encourage pupils to consider facets of British values, such as the importance of tolerance and the rule of law. Pupils' books show how they tackle sensitive topics,

focusing on different faiths and experiences. Staff ensure that equality of opportunity has a high profile.

- Although overall attainment and progress have risen and continue to improve, school leaders understand the need for further improvement. Expectations of what some lower-attainers and pupils with SEND can, and should, achieve are not yet consistently high across teachers and classes. Although there is high-quality writing in many literacy lessons, staff do not encourage pupils to write at the same range and depth in other subjects.

Governance of the school

- Governance has become increasingly effective. Governors have benefited from opportunities to develop their understanding, sometimes in conjunction with school staff. For example, they have learned how to measure pupils' achievement.
- As well as being more knowledgeable about the school, governors ensure accountability and challenge the leadership to justify its decisions. For example, they have questioned the allocation and impact of pupil premium funding.
- Governors regularly review performance information, and receive reports from staff.
- Governors are active in school. They take part in activities such as book reviews, and receive regular reports on the progress pupils make in various subjects.
- Governors clearly understand their responsibilities in key areas, such as safeguarding. They get up-to-date training to raise their awareness.
- Governors, in conjunction with the trust, are well placed to help set the direction of the school and assist the leadership in continuing to move the school forwards.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There is a strong culture of safeguarding and vigilance throughout the school.
- All staff and governors are trained in safeguarding and child protection and know their responsibilities. They know, for example, what to do if they suspect that any child is at risk. New staff, such as newly qualified teachers, explained to inspectors their role in safeguarding. All staff are trained in how to tackle the influences of radicalisation.
- Leaders update staff in meetings every week on some aspect of safeguarding, thereby maintaining its high profile.
- Policies and procedures, for example for implementing fire regulations, are secure. Governors and others are trained in the safe recruitment of staff.
- Parents believe that their children are safe in school. Staff, and visitors to the school, give pupils advice on how to keep safe, for example when using the internet.
- The school monitors absences carefully and has procedures to support the few pupils who are persistently absent or who are excluded.
- There is thorough record-keeping. The school works well with other agencies when needed and works closely with parents to enhance pupil safety, for example in the use

of technology.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- There is now more consistency in teaching, particularly in relation to the core subjects. Leaders have made improving teaching one of their priorities since the previous inspection.
- Teachers told inspectors that they feel more confident in teaching some aspects that they had previously found more challenging. For example, they are now more confident in promoting reasoning and problem-solving activities in mathematics. This has contributed considerably to improved progress.
- Teaching assistants have had good opportunities to increase their knowledge and skills, when giving support to specific individuals.
- Parents are very positive about the quality of teaching. This reinforces what pupils told inspectors.
- Teachers are successful in making pupils enthusiastic learners.
- Teachers have improved their skills in the teaching of phonics, as is evident in improving results, particularly in key stage 1.
- Most teachers follow the school policy on giving meaningful feedback to pupils on how well they have done and how they can improve their work. Pupils appreciate this.
- Teachers appreciate the opportunities they have, both from within the school and from elsewhere, to develop their skills and learn from each other. Leaders recognise that the sharing of good practice should be a continuing focus of staff development, as there are still inconsistencies. Some teachers do not use assessment effectively to plan the next steps for their pupils in lessons. Teachers do not encourage pupils to use their writing skills consistently when studying subjects such as history or geography.
- While there is often a good level of challenge in the work that staff give to middle- and higher-attaining pupils, sometimes the match of work for other pupils' needs is less successful. Inspectors saw this in some learning and, occasionally, in pupils' books. The result is that some lower-attaining pupils and those with SEND do not learn as effectively as most pupils do.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. They have a positive attitude towards their learning. This is evident in the pride in presentation of their work. Pupils told the inspectors how much they enjoyed reading.
- Pupils feel very well cared for, and their parents agree. There are good relationships between pupils and staff, who help deal with any anxieties. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe, for example when using technology.

- Pupils develop well as active young citizens. They enjoy taking on responsibilities in the restructured councils, which give pupils a stronger voice in how the school is run. Pupils learn about other faiths and cultures.
- Pupils greatly enjoy the range of activities, including the breakfast club and the after-school club. They enjoy trips and residential visits, for example to London and activity centres.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Although there are occasional lapses in lessons, such as when a minority of pupils call out, pupils behave well, because they like learning and being with their friends. They are confident that when there are incidents, staff deal with them well. Pupils understand the difference between serious bullying and occasional boisterous behaviour.
- The school works hard to support and reintegrate the few pupils who have been excluded from school.
- Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their attendance, which has been consistently above the national average. There is a small number of pupils who do not attend as often as they should. Staff deal with this issue, combining a rigorous approach in emphasising to parents the importance of regular attendance, with care for pupils' well-being, both in terms of progress and their personal development. Staff sometimes undertake home visits to support pupils and their families.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- School leaders were conscious that attainment and progress in recent years had dipped in some respects after the previous inspection. Pupil outcomes were not as good as they should have been by the time pupils left school at the end of Year 6. This was particularly true of mathematics.
- Staff have worked hard to rectify this, and have done so effectively in both key stage 1 and key stage 2. Attainment in the recent key stage 1 phonics check was below the national average, but a high proportion of the pupils involved were pupils with SEND, and they made good progress in relation to their starting points. The inspection confirmed that pupils are making good progress in phonics.
- Achievement in key stage 1 is improving, particularly in writing and mathematics. Progress has improved partly because teachers have come to terms with changes in the curriculum and the use of new assessment criteria.
- Progress has improved in key stage 2. Reading is one of the strengths of the school. Leaders have invested in more reading resources and adapted the strategies for teaching reading. Pupils read with fluency, enjoyment and accuracy, as shown in the most recent end of key stage tests.
- Writing has improved. It is strongest in literacy lessons, as shown in pupils' books, particularly in key stage 2. Pupils take pride in their written work, and write well in

different genres. There are still some inconsistencies, for example some weaknesses in spelling, which the school is addressing. The quality of writing is not as strong in other subjects.

- Attainment in mathematics has improved, largely due to a sustained effort by the school to address previous weaknesses in aspects such as reasoning. These efforts have paid off, as staff have increased their level of subject knowledge and confidence.
- Pupils achieve well in other areas. Inspectors saw some thoughtful, reflective work in religious studies. This contributes to the strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the school. Physical education is another strength of the school.
- The extent of pupils' progress still shows some variability. The school's assessment demonstrates that those pupils who have spent the whole of their key stage 2 experience in the school make better progress than the several pupils who have joined the school other than at the usual transition points. Some pupils with SEND benefit from additional support and make good progress. However, others of this group make less progress, usually when the in-class teaching does not cater fully for their learning needs.
- There are relatively few disadvantaged pupils in the school. However, some of these pupils are making good progress in relation to their starting points, while some others could achieve more.
- Higher-attainers and many middle-attainers make good progress, benefiting from the improved teaching. Leaders are aware that there are still some inconsistencies in progress between different classes. However, overall progress is now stronger than two years ago, and continues to improve.

Early years provision

Good

- Children in early years make good progress, both in the Nursery and in Reception. The proportions of pupils achieving a good level of development have varied in recent years. This reflects changes in the cohorts rather than deficiencies in teaching or in provision. In some years, most children joining the school have done so with skills and knowledge typical for their age, whereas at other times the entry profile has been lower. Also, the numbers on roll in early years have varied considerably from year to year.
- Most children, whatever their level of ability, make good progress and are prepared well for entry to Year 1. Achievement is often strongest in English and mathematics, so staff work hard to build up children's other aspects of knowledge, skills and social development.
- There is good leadership of early years. The early years leader is experienced and provides support for early years in three other local schools. She has a good awareness of how early years provision will develop further in the school.
- Children make good progress in personal development. Inspectors saw this when children in the Nursery and Reception played together well, and carried out a range of group and individual activities, such as painting and construction. Occasionally, staff missed opportunities to develop children's curiosity and engagement further.

- Children make good progress in phonics and writing. Inspectors saw this both in its early and later stages, as it was evident in books from the past 12 months.
- Children feel safe in school. They respond well to staff, and even early in this school year several showed the confidence to talk to inspectors and explain the task in which they were engaged.
- Staff assess and record children's progress accurately. They make effective use of both the indoor and outside resources.
- The school encourages parents to come into the classroom and look at and share their children's work regularly. There are good links with local pre-schools and with Year 1, so that children make a good transition both into the Nursery and Reception and then later into Year 1.

School details

Unique reference number	139394
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10047872

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	339
Appropriate authority	Plymouth CAST
Chair	Luke Robinson
Headteacher	Angela Folland
Telephone number	01392 445 403
Website	www.st-nicholas-exeter.devon.sch.uk/
Email address	admin@stnics.uk
Date of previous inspection	25–26 February 2015

Information about this school

- St Nicholas Catholic Primary School is part of the CAST multi-academy trust. The headteacher has led the school for several years, but there have been several changes in staffing, both at the leadership and other levels since the previous inspection.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above the national average.
- The headteacher and other school leaders provide support for some other local schools.
- The school has a Nursery.
- The school runs both a breakfast club and an after-school club.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited several lessons throughout the school, sometimes with members of the senior leadership accompanying them, in order to observe pupils' learning.
- Inspectors carried out an extensive review of pupils' work. For much of the time, they did this jointly with staff.
- Inspectors held meetings with several staff, including senior and middle leaders and newly qualified teachers. The lead inspector met a group of governors. He met with representatives of the multi-academy trust, CAST, and had a telephone conversation with the director of the trust.
- Inspectors talked with pupils throughout the school, and an inspector met with a group of key stage 2 pupils. Inspectors listened to pupils from several year groups read.
- The inspection team looked at a range of documentation. This included the school's evaluation of progress, the school development plan, school policies and the school's assessment of pupils currently in the school. Inspectors reviewed a range of documents about safeguarding, including the school's single central record.
- Inspectors met several parents in and around the school. They considered the 72 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. The lead inspector also read 71 free-text responses from parents.

Inspection team

John Laver, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
David Shears	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Ivermee	Ofsted Inspector
Paula Marsh	Ofsted Inspector

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