

Inspection of a good school: St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School

Hencotes, Hexham, Northumberland NE46 2EE

Inspection date:

12 November 2019

Outcome

St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils like their warm, welcoming school. They talk happily about the many friends they have. Their good manners and respect for each other shine throughout the day.

Pupils behave well. They listen and respond politely to adults' requests. Playtimes are pleasant and happy. Pupils are active. They enjoy skipping, 'jumping jacks' and the daily mile. They know what to do to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Pupils say their teachers are 'kind' and 'helpful'. They can explain what bullying is but say that it is rare at St Mary's. Pupils are confident that teachers will help if they have worries or fall out with friends.

Most pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve well. They present their work with pride. Leaders are, however, changing the curriculum to make it even better. Not all subjects, such as science, are as carefully planned as they should be. For example, some pupils are given reading books and tasks that are not well matched to their needs.

Parents describe staff as 'open', 'nurturing' and 'supportive'. They feel sure that any concerns they raise will be dealt with quickly and without fuss. Parents are confident that their child is safe and well looked after.

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

Pupils get a good deal at St Mary's. They enjoy school, make friends and achieve well. In science, reading, writing and mathematics they do as well as other pupils nationally. In each subject, most pupils reach or exceed the standards expected for their age. This includes disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with SEND. Most pupils are well prepared for what they will learn in the next year group or key stage.

Leaders prioritise reading. They understand its importance for pupils' success in other subjects and in later life. Teachers inspire pupils to read widely. They offer inviting reading areas and many interesting books. Most of the pupils love reading. They talk animatedly about their favourite authors. Teachers support and encourage parents to be partners in their child's reading journey. Pupils say that they read lots at home. However, leaders have not decided which stories they want pupils to know by heart in each year group. Also, some pupils tackle reading comprehension tasks that are too hard. They cannot read these texts fluently. This slows the progress that some pupils make.

Children in Reception learn to read, write and work with numbers right from the start. Their books are neat and tidy. Children form letters in a clear and legible manner. They can spell some words correctly from memory. Many children use their knowledge of phonics to spell trickier words. Some are already writing simple sentences. There are lots of opportunities for children to practise reading, writing and mathematics, outdoors and inside. Occasionally, some children cannot decode the words in their reading books with ease. Books are not always matched closely enough to children's phonic knowledge.

Leaders make sure that pupils enjoy subjects other than English and mathematics. Leaders use the national curriculum to check that they have suitably high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Time is carefully set aside for each subject. Subject-specific training is building teachers' knowhow and confidence. Subject leadership and expertise are developing well. However, improvement plans for some subjects, including science, lack detail.

Leaders' and teachers' own subject knowledge in science is secure. Adults use subject-specific vocabulary correctly. This helps pupils to use the correct words too. Pupils enjoy science. Pupils talk knowledgeably about several aspects of science. For example, older pupils use the right terms to identify and compare solids, liquids and gases. However, teachers' planning does not sequence scientific vocabulary or content carefully enough. Leaders have not identified precisely what it is that pupils should know and remember in the long term. This means that some pupils do not remember the most important scientific concepts as they move through school.

Leaders want pupils to develop interests in all that life and modern Britain has to offer. The curriculum engages pupils. They concentrate well in lessons and conduct themselves sensibly in and around school. There are strong links with local churches. Pupils are inspired by trips, visitors and local community opportunities. The school choir, gardening, sport and cooking clubs excite their interests. Pupils' spiritual, cultural, personal and social development is strong.

Most pupils attend every day and on time. Leaders make sure that pupils and their families know why good attendance is important. There are clear systems in place to follow-up any absence. Staff are helping a few pupils to improve their attendance. The attendance of a very small proportion of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND is too low.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders take the safety and welfare of pupils seriously. Pupils feel safe. They say that adults care and look after them well. Staff understand their role in protecting pupils. They know the risks to do with criminal gangs and county lines.

The designated leader for safeguarding provides regular training. He makes sure that all staff and governors attend. This helps to keep everyone up to date with the most recent child protection guidance.

Leaders plan a programme of work to help pupils know about keeping themselves safe. This helps pupils to identify risks. They learn about personal safety and the safe use of technology. However, leaders' plans do not always show clearly how pupils will build on what they already know as they move through the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders make reading a priority. They understand its place in the wider curriculum and its importance for pupils' success in later life. Pupils love reading. Most pupils read with increasing fluency and confidence as they move through the school. Leaders have correctly identified reading as a priority for improvement. They should agree which books they want pupils to know inside out in each year group. Leaders should also ensure that all children in Reception read books that are closely matched to their phonics needs and check that older pupils' reading comprehension tasks are pitched correctly.
- The school's curriculum is engaging and ambitious for pupils. Pupils do well. They enjoy learning in and across all subjects of the primary national curriculum. Subject leadership is improving apace. Leaders now need to make sure that the most important content in subjects such as science is specified clearly and sequenced well year on year. Subject action plans should be better detailed and fully focused upon equipping pupils with increasingly sophisticated subject-specific knowledge and vocabulary.
- Most pupils attend school regularly and on time. This means that their learning is not disrupted or hindered by absence. Leaders should continue to work with pupils and their families, making sure that no disadvantaged pupils or pupils with SEND are hampered by poor attendance.
- Leaders plan regular personal and online safety sessions for pupils. Pupils feel safe in school. All parents who responded to Ofsted's survey agreed that their child is safe and happy here. However, leaders' plans do not make clear how pupils' knowledge and understanding builds over time. Some sessions are one-off events which may not be repeated or revisited until the following year. Leaders should sequence the content of these sessions more meticulously.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School to be good on 20–21 June 2011.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	122311
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10110806
Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	5 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	114
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Tomas Neeson
Executive Headteacher	Fiona Conley
Website	www.st-marysrc.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24 March 2016

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, St Mary's RC VA First School formed a hard federation with St Joseph's RC Middle School. Some senior leaders, including the executive headteacher and the deputy executive headteacher, subject leaders and staff, work and move between sites.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Compared to national averages, a higher proportion of pupils leave or enter school at times other than the start and/or end of the school year.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher and other senior leaders, governors, including the vice-chair of the governing body, non-teaching staff, teachers, including a newly qualified teacher, subject leaders, leaders with responsibility for safeguarding, the early years and SEND and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked closely at reading, mathematics and science. This involved looking at pupils' work, visiting lessons, speaking with leaders, staff and pupils and examining

curriculum documentation for each subject. Inspectors also listened to pupils read.

- Inspectors visited lessons and looked at pupils' work from each year group in partnership with subject leaders.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of documentation, including the school's development and curriculum plans and records for behaviour and safeguarding.
- The responses from 31 parents to Ofsted's survey and free-text were considered. Staff responses to Ofsted's survey were also taken into account.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. Inspectors took account of the school's own survey of pupils' opinions and met with pupils, formally and informally to discuss their views. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons, transitions and at breaktimes.

Inspection team

Fiona Manuel, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Phil Scott

Ofsted Inspector

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