

Inspection of a good school: St Mary's Catholic Academy

Cruso Street, Leek, Staffordshire ST13 8BW

Inspection dates:

4–5 December 2019

Outcome

St Mary's Catholic Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy school. Caring for others is at the heart of the school's ethos. Pupils show great respect for those around them.

Teamwork is important at St Mary's. Pupils help others and are taught to be resilient. They keep on trying, usually succeed, and are well prepared for secondary school.

Pupils are excited by learning. They say that visits and visitors help to broaden their world. They are enjoying getting involved with local business in Leek. During the inspection, for example, pupils in Year 6 eagerly performed their 'dog' jingles on Radio Moorlands. Pupils say that the school's new way of teaching the curriculum through 'vehicles' is helping them to think about what jobs they might want to do when they grow up. Staff are aspirational for pupils who rise to the challenges set for them.

Pupils behave well. They are well mannered and polite. Visitors are quickly made to feel welcome as pupils proudly show them around. Pupils feel safe in school. They say that bullying is rare. Pupils say that, if it does happen, staff help them to sort it out quickly. Parents say that leaders and staff are approachable. Parents say that recent changes at the school have brought improvements.

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

The school is a calm and purposeful place in which to learn. Pupils are enjoying the new curriculum 'vehicles', which enable them to learn about being an artist, geographer or historian. The headteacher is leading curriculum improvements with drive and passion. Leaders are in the process of mapping out each subject to check that new learning builds on what the pupils already know and can do. This is a work in progress with some subjects further ahead than others.

Pupils' interest and pleasure as young artists is ignited by working with professional artists and visits to local art galleries. Moments in learning are eagerly anticipated. During the

inspection, for example, pupils in different year groups worked with glass specialists, a mosaic artist and got involved in life sketches of a real dog in the classroom. Teachers are making effective use of local specialists, businesses and visits to museums. This is helping pupils to link their learning to real life. Pupils enjoy art. They say that it helps their creativity and is a calming thing to do. Pupils behave well in this and other subjects.

Pupils achieve well in mathematics. Leaders check that recent changes in the way mathematics is taught is working for pupils. Teachers are trained by experienced leaders in school and within Painsley Catholic Academy. Staff value the support given to them by leaders. Staff say that leaders take account of their workload.

In mathematics, teachers use practical equipment to help pupils deepen their understanding. Pupils of all abilities are gaining confidence when explaining their thinking about how to solve problems. Pupils say that they work in pairs to help each other. One pupil explained this by saying, 'It is not by telling your friend the answer but by explaining what you need to do and think about that helps you understand and find the answer.' Pupils are enjoying mathematics and like how it is making them think even harder in lessons.

Children in the early years get off to a rapid start. Children are calm, well cared for and safe. They listen attentively to staff. Children quickly learn many different nursery rhymes. Teachers are skilled in getting children excited about new words and spoken language. Phonics sounds are taught through music and dance, which captures the children's imagination. Learning is fun. Children flourish in this stimulating creative environment. In the Nursery class, children are keen to share their photographs and learning in their 'year book'. This book prompts children's memories of special moments from their first year in school.

Pupils are developing a love of reading. They are learning about different authors. Reading for pleasure is promoted well across the school from the Nursery 'busy bags' full of toys and books to the new books in school all the way up to Year 6.

Pupils achieve well in phonics. However, the books pupils read in class and at home do not always match their learning in phonics. For young readers this slows their early progress in reading. Leaders have identified this as an area for improvement and have improvement plans in place.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make do well. Leaders regularly check the programmes for pupils with SEND to see the difference they are making to each pupil. Teaching assistants who support pupils are developing their skills in the new ways of teaching reading, mathematics and other subjects. Leaders recognise that further training is required to ensure that good practice is shared in school.

Pupils and staff say that the headteacher listens to their ideas and is improving the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff make sure that pupils are safe. Leaders challenge all staff to question and be observant. Staff have regular updates and training. Staff are knowledgeable about different types of risks pupils may face. Leaders check that new staff who join the school are suitable to work with children. All new staff and volunteers are trained straight away about how to keep children safe. Staff know what to do if they are worried about a pupil. Record-keeping is well maintained.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Early reading books do not yet match the phase of phonics pupils are learning. Leaders are in the process of introducing new approaches to reading books and the teaching of phonics. Leaders should ensure that all staff are trained in whole-school approaches to the teaching of phonics and early reading.
- The school's curriculum plans for art and other foundation subjects are being developed to ensure that learning builds on what pupils know and can do. This is not in place fully. However, it is clear from the actions leaders are taking that they are in the process of bringing this about.

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 first section 8 inspection since we judged St Mary's Catholic Academy to be good on 28–29 January 2016.

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	138725
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10111776
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	184
Appropriate authority	Board of directors
Chair of trust	Mr Ken Wilson
Headteacher	Mrs Gemma Turner
Website	www.st-marys-leek.staffs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	28–29 January 2016

Information about this school

- The headteacher took up post in September 2018. The early years leader joined the school in September 2019. The special needs coordinator (SENCo) took up the role in September 2019.
- A deputy headteacher has been appointed and will take up their post in January 2020.
- The school provides before- and after-school childcare.

Information about this inspection

- Early reading, mathematics and art were considered as part of this inspection.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, members of the Painsley Catholic Academy Trust and the chair of the local governing board.
- The inspector held discussions with staff responsible for reading, mathematics and art, the early years leader, and the SENCo. Meetings were also held with teaching staff and groups of pupils to discuss the quality of education.
- The inspector visited all classes. The headteacher and subject leaders joined the inspector on lesson visits.
- Checks on safeguarding procedures were carried out. This included looking the school's

record of employment checks on staff.

- The inspector reviewed a range of documents provided by the school, including: leaders' evaluations of the school, implementation plans, documents relating to attendance, behaviour, admissions and leavers. Curriculum documents and the school's website were reviewed.
- The inspector considered the 25 responses to Parent View and 12 free-text responses from parents.
- The inspector took account of the 13 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. Staff views were also collected through conversations with the inspector.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Pamela Matty, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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