

Inspection of a good school: Our Lady's Catholic Academy

Watkin Street, Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST4 4NP

Inspection dates: 19 to 20 May 2021

Outcome

Our Lady's Catholic Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud of their school. They enjoy being at school and this is reflected in their high levels of attendance. Pupils are very welcoming and greet visitors with a smile. They say, 'Everyone is welcome in our school.' Pupils say they feel safe because the staff look after them and the site is secure.

Leaders and staff want the best for all pupils. This has led to positive changes across the school. However, leaders are aware that the school can improve even further. They are determined to pursue these improvements.

There is a calm and orderly atmosphere around the school. Pupils behave well in the classroom, around the school and on the playground. Pupils enjoy learning, but at times they do not always engage fully in lessons. This tends to happen when the work they are asked to do is not matched well enough to their ability.

Pupils understand what bullying is. Bullying doesn't happen very often, but when it does, staff deal with it immediately.

Almost all parents speak positively about the school. They value the level of care that their children receive. Parents also like the fact that the school is a small and intimate setting.

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

In subjects such as mathematics, leaders have thought carefully about what pupils need to learn and the order in which it needs to be taught. This helps teachers to plan lessons that build on what pupils have learned before. Pupils remember and can talk about what they have learned in these subjects with confidence. However, in a small number of subjects, such as geography, new curriculum plans contain too much content. As a result, teachers cannot cover all the content in sufficient depth and some content is missed out.

In these subjects, pupils struggle to remember what they have learned, and their understanding is confused.

Reading is a whole-school priority. Pupils say they enjoy reading. They talk confidently about the books they are studying in their English lessons. The order of phonics teaching is clearly mapped out across the early years, key stage 1 and beyond, if required. Children and pupils develop their early reading skills successfully. This is because nearly all staff teach phonics well across the different groups. Staff provide extra help for any pupils who are falling behind.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge in many curriculum areas. Teachers explain new ideas in a step-by-step approach. They use questioning well to probe pupils' understanding. Teachers encourage pupils to share their thinking and explain their ideas. This helps pupils to remember their learning.

Teachers and teaching assistants support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well. Teachers match work to the needs of pupils with SEND. If required, staff provide additional resources, including practical equipment, to support learning. Teaching assistants step in quickly if pupils need extra help with their work. However, staff also encourage pupils to work independently whenever possible.

Children settle quickly into the Nursery and Reception classes. Staff maintain positive relationships with parents. The early years classrooms and outdoor areas are very well resourced. Children listen well and are excited to learn new things. They are keen to share their achievements with others. Leaders and staff prioritise early reading and mathematics. Children enjoy being with their friends. They play cooperatively, share and take turns. Staff care for the children and parents appreciate this. The effective early years provision helps children to learn and make strong progress.

Leaders are working hard to raise pupils' aspirations. One pupil said, 'The best thing about school is learning and being educated, so when I grow up, I can do whatever I want.' The school's 'Stoke curriculum' increases pupils' awareness of the local area and promotes the cultural heritage that is on the doorstep. Leaders aim to instil a sense of pride in what Stoke has to offer and celebrate this.

Pupils understand how to stay safe when working online. From an early age, they understand the importance of a healthy diet. Pupils miss the wide range of trips, clubs and special visitors that were on offer prior to the pandemic. However, leaders have tried to make up for this by offering alternatives, such as 'Farm in a Box'.

Leaders, supported by staff and the multi-academy company, are working to improve the school further. They have clear plans in place to achieve this. They are supported effectively by those responsible for governance. All these parties are working together for the benefit of the pupils. Staff say that leaders are considerate of their well-being and ensure that all of their work has a purpose.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils' safety is the school's highest priority. All staff attend suitable training and receive regular updates. Consequently, they know exactly what to do if they have a concern about a pupil's welfare. Staff know that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Pupils say they feel safe in school. They say they would speak to members of staff if they were worried about something. When required, the school works with external agencies to provide extra support for pupils. Leaders check staff's suitability to work with children before they start to work at the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum plans in a small number of the foundation subjects, such as geography, contain too much curriculum content. As a result, teachers are unable to cover all the content in sufficient depth and some is missed out. In these subjects, pupils' level of understanding is superficial and often confused. For this reason, the transition arrangement has been applied. In these subjects, leaders need to review and amend curriculum plans, so that the amount of curriculum content is reasonable and manageable for teachers.

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 or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that a good 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 the school to be good on 28 to 29 April 2015.

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 the school and 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	140287
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10184078
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	222
Appropriate authority	Board of directors
Chair of board	Anne Middleton Hill
Headteacher	Karyn Oakley
Website	www.ourladysca.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	28 to 29 April 2015

Information about this school

- The school is part of the All Saints Catholic Collegiate multi-academy company.
- A Section 48 inspection to evaluate the distinctiveness and effectiveness of Our Lady's Catholic Academy as a Catholic school took place on 29 to 30 November 2018.
- The school has a breakfast club and an after-school club operating on the site. This provision is managed by the school.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector held ongoing meetings with the headteacher. He met with six members of the academy committee, including the chair. The inspector met with the senior executive principal of the multi-academy company. He also discussed the school with a representative of the Archdiocese of Birmingham.
- The inspector held meetings with the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), the designated safeguarding lead and the early years leader.

- As part of the inspection, the inspector focused mainly on early reading, mathematics and geography. He met with groups of pupils, curriculum leaders and teachers to talk about the quality of education in these subjects.
- The inspector made visits to classrooms. These visits were with the relevant curriculum leader or the headteacher.
- The inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- The inspector spoke to pupils formally and informally about their learning and experiences at school. He looked at their work to see how well the curriculum is implemented.
- Documents relating to safeguarding were checked, including the checks that leaders make on staff's suitability to work with children prior to employment. The inspector checked that safeguarding policies and procedures are implemented effectively across the school.
- The inspector talked to parents after school. He considered the 36 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 23 free-text responses received during the inspection.
- The inspector considered the 32 responses to Ofsted's survey for staff.
- The inspector considered a range of documentation provided by the school. He looked at the school's self-evaluation, school development plan, school policies, curriculum documents, SEND records, published information about pupils' performance, behaviour records and minutes of academy committee meetings.
- The inspector looked at information published on the school's website.

Inspection team

Wayne Simner, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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