

Inspection of a good school: St Margaret Ward Catholic Academy

Little Chell Lane, Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST6 6LZ

Inspection dates:

28 and 29 September 2021

Outcome

St Margaret Ward Catholic Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Margaret Ward is an inclusive academy with a successful focus on achieving well. Leaders pay attention to keeping pupils safe and ensuring that they develop personally and socially. Positive relationships between pupils and staff support learning well. Pupils enjoy coming to school and feel safe.

Leaders have very clear expectations for how all members of the community behave towards each other. Staff share these expectations, known as the 'Margaret Ward Way', clearly and consistently with pupils. Pupils appreciate this clarity. They told inspectors, 'we know where we stand'. Pupils try hard and consistently live up to these expectations.

The school environment is calm and orderly. Pupils behave sensibly in lessons and at other times of the school day. They follow teachers' instructions and are respectful of each other. Bullying rarely happens. If it does, pupils know who to speak to and they are confident it will be sorted out quickly.

Leaders acted swiftly to restart lunchtime and after-school clubs following the disruption due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. There is an impressive range on offer. Most pupils make good use of them. These include an orchestra, choir, football, jazz band and drama club and many, many more.

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

Leaders are ambitious for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Over recent years, they have taken steps to ensure that pupils study a broad range of subjects in depth from Year 7 to Year 9. As a result of these actions, more and more pupils are better prepared to study the range of subjects that are part of the English Baccalaureate. The number of pupils studying French GCSE, for instance, has significantly increased in the last two years. In the sixth form, there is a range of courses to suit the students' aspirations.

Pupils with SEND learn the same curriculum as their peers. These pupils have an individual 'pupil passport'. This passport sets out how adults can best support them. Teachers use this information well in lessons. As a result of these approaches, pupils with SEND achieve well.

Curriculum leaders ensure that pupils learn content in a logical order. For instance, in mathematics, pupils get lots of practise plotting coordinates before learning how to draw line graphs. This logical order helps to build pupils' confidence in a range of subjects.

Teachers give pupils regular opportunities to answer questions about topics that they have learned before. Pupils told us that this is helping them to remember content they have learned in the past. Teachers explain subject content clearly and are knowledgeable about their subjects. In the sixth form, they correct students' misconceptions well. However, in Years 7 to 9, teachers do not check pupils' understanding within lessons well enough. This means that teachers do not always know when and why pupils are stuck. As a result, some pupils do not get the help they need quickly enough. This slows their learning.

When pupils join the school, leaders check how well they can read. Leaders use this information to identify pupils with specific reading difficulties or those who are at the early stages of reading. Leaders then make sure that these pupils get the help they need from well-trained adults. This support helps pupils to become more confident readers.

Pupils' positive behaviour in most lessons ensures that very little learning time is lost. They focus on their work and cooperate well. For example, pupils showed great maturity in a French lesson as they practised speaking the phrases they were learning while moving, without fuss, around a busy classroom.

The school's 'Touching Hearts' curriculum is a strength of the school. It develops pupils socially and personally. As part of this curriculum, pupils learn about different faiths and beliefs. There is a strong emphasis on mutual respect and tolerance. This prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. In addition, the 'Touching Hearts' curriculum builds year on year so that pupils get the information they need at the right time. For example, to help pupils in Year 8 think about future careers, they meet with many local employers. In the sixth form, students enjoy a wide range of carefully planned activities that help prepare them for their next steps. All students, for instance, complete a qualification in public speaking in preparation for university.

Leaders and those responsible for governance support the well-being of staff and pupils. They feel supported in managing their workload. Staff are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are knowledgeable about the signs of abuse. They have a strong understanding of the school's safeguarding procedures. Leaders ensure that staff pass on any concerns about a pupil quickly. When pupils need help, leaders take swift action.

Leaders are acutely aware of the local risks to pupils. They ensure that pupils get the support and information they need to help them keep safe. For example, pupils learn about the dangers of county lines and gang activity.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers do not check pupils' understanding within lessons well enough. This means that teachers do not always know when pupils are stuck or have gaps in their knowledge. Leaders should ensure that teachers know how to systematically check learning in their subjects so that they can identify gaps in learning and give pupils the help they need.

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 evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, 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 deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St Margaret Ward Catholic School and Arts College, to be good in February 2013.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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	140149
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10199734
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1134
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	132
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Gillian Meller
Principal	Dominic McKenna
Website	http://www.stmargaretward.co.uk/
Date of previous inspection	20 October 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school uses three registered alternative providers and one unregistered alternative provider.
- The school is within the Catholic Diocese of Birmingham. Its most recent section 48 inspection took place in November 2019.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with the principal, vice principal and other senior leaders. They met with representatives of governance, including the chair of the trust board and the chair of the local academy committee.

- Inspectors did deep dives in English, mathematics and French. For each deep dive, inspectors met with curriculum leaders and teachers, visited a sample of lessons, reviewed pupils' work and spoke with some pupils about their learning.
- Through discussions with leaders, pupils and staff, inspectors considered how effectively pupils are safeguarded. They also looked at documents related to safeguarding, including records of pre-employment checks carried out before staff are appointed. They also observed informal times of the day to evaluate safeguarding arrangements and pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors spoke to staff about behaviour and workload in the school.
- Inspectors considered 47 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. This included 31 free-text comments. Inspectors also looked at 56 staff responses and 178 pupil responses to Ofsted's surveys.

Inspection team

Christopher Stevens, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Chris Pollitt

Her Majesty's Inspector

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