

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Academy

Ford Green Road, Norton-le-Moors, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST6 8EZ

Inspection dates: 30 November and 1 December 2021

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Ofsted has not previously inspected St Mary's Catholic Academy under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. However, Ofsted previously judged St Mary's Catholic Primary School to be outstanding, before it opened as St Mary's Catholic Academy as a result of conversion to academy status.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils love coming to this school. They feel safe and secure, and they know that staff care about them. They also know that all staff expect them to 'respect themselves, respect others, respect other people's property and respect God'. Pupils rise to the school's high expectations. The school is a happy, caring and kind community.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are kind and courteous. For example, bullying is very rare. Pupils have faith in the school's adults to deal with any bullying that does happen. They know that staff will listen and support them when they are worried about anything.

Staff expect pupils to work hard, and they do. Teachers plan learning exceptionally well in all subjects. Pupils enjoy their lessons. They remember what they have been taught. Staff provide excellent support for pupils who find learning more difficult. All pupils make strong progress in their time at St Mary's.

The school makes pupils' wider development a high priority. Pupils enjoy a wide range of activities beyond the classroom. Staff are determined that all pupils will take part in the '100 things to do at St Mary's'. For example, all pupils take part in public speaking events each year.

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

This is a school that has provided high-quality education for many years. The principal and head of school provide strong and empathetic leadership that staff and parents value. The school's staff form a united team, committed to the school's ethos of 'many hearts, one accord'. They are determined to do the very best for all pupils.

The curriculum is exceptionally well planned in all subjects. Curriculum leaders are both experts in, and enthusiasts for, their subjects. They ensure that pupils' learning builds successfully from the start of Nursery to the end of Year 6. The Newman Catholic Collegiate Multi-Academy Company (the collegiate) facilitates subject networks. These provide high-quality, subject-specific training that is valued by curriculum leaders and staff.

Teachers and teaching assistants are skilled in getting the best from pupils. They explain new ideas clearly, using high-quality resources. They check pupils' understanding, spotting misconceptions and correcting them. They provide extra help for pupils who are not learning new content as quickly as their peers.

The school makes reading a high priority. In the foundation stage, children get off to an excellent start. Pupils become proficient readers because of skilful phonics teaching in Nursery, Reception and key stage 1. Those who find reading difficult are given extra help to catch up. Pupils learn to enjoy reading, as they move through

the school. Pupils talked enthusiastically to inspectors about the books they are reading.

Mathematics is taught consistently well throughout the school. Pupils become fluent in basic arithmetic skills. For example, they learn number bonds in Reception and times tables in key stages 1 and 2. Teaching successfully develops pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts. As a result, pupils can apply their knowledge and explain their thinking when solving unfamiliar problems.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make strong progress. Staff provide just the right support so that they can learn effectively. For some pupils, this means a little extra help. For a small number of pupils, teachers adapt the curriculum significantly. Here, teaching assistants provide excellent one-to-one support.

Pupils demonstrate highly positive attitudes to learning. Staff are quick to praise positive behaviour and good work. Pupils enjoy school and almost all attend very regularly. Leaders work hard to support the families of pupils who attend less regularly than they should.

The school provides a wide and rich array of activities and opportunities beyond the classroom. Leaders carefully plan these to promote pupils' personal development. All pupils take part. Leaders ensure that cost is never a barrier to participation. For example, all pupils in Years 3 and 4 learn a musical instrument. Many pupils carry on learning instruments in Years 5 and 6. The school meets the cost for all disadvantaged pupils.

Governance is strong. Governors have link responsibilities, such as safeguarding, SEND and standards. Each area also has a link director. Link directors and collegiate staff train link governors in their specialist areas. This means that governors are very well equipped to support and challenge school leaders.

Parents hold the school in high regard. All who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online inspection questionnaire, said they would recommend the school to other parents. They praised many aspects of the school. Several cited the high-quality remote learning their children enjoy if they have to study from home.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of care and keeping pupils safe throughout the school. Leaders make sure that staff are alert to the signs that pupils might need some extra help. Staff pass concerns to leaders, who deal with them swiftly and appropriately.

Pastoral support is a strength of the school. Staff are skilled in spotting the early signs that pupils might need help. The school then puts in place effective support.

This might be from the school's learning mentor, its safeguarding and well-being officer or from an external agency. This means that pupils get the right help at the right time.

All staff and parents who responded to their respective inspection questionnaires said that pupils are safe in school.

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	140114
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10199281
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	243
Appropriate authority	Board of directors
Chair	Gillian Meller
Principal	Ian Beardmore
Website	www.st-marysrc.stoke.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school opened as an academy on 1 September 2013. It is part of the Newman Catholic Collegiate Multi-Academy Company, within the Archdiocese of Birmingham.
- The school's most recent section 48 inspection took place in July 2018. The next section 48 inspection will be within eight years of that date.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with the principal, the head of school and other senior leaders. They also met with four directors and one member of the local governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, history and music. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders,

looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- Inspectors considered safeguarding by meeting with the principal, who is also the designated safeguarding lead, and the school's safeguarding and well-being officer. They scrutinised policies and records relating to child protection and examined the safeguarding checks made on staff before they join the school.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and talked to them about their reading.
- Inspectors spoke with several members of staff, including those who have recently joined the teaching profession. They considered the responses from staff to their online inspection questionnaire.
- Inspectors spoke informally with pupils at breaktime and lunchtime. They considered pupils' responses to their online inspection questionnaire.
- Inspectors spoke with parents at the start of the day and considered the responses, including written responses, to Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Alun Williams, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Susan Ray

Ofsted Inspector

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