

Inspection of a good school: St Mark's Church of England Primary School

St Mark's Close, Bishopton Road West, Fairfield, Stockton-on-Tees TS19 7HA

Inspection dates:

7 and 8 December 2021

Outcome

St Mark's Church of England Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Mark's is an inclusive school built on warm, caring relationships between pupils and staff. Parents value the 'caring and nurturing environment' that helps their children 'grow in confidence'. Pupils love coming to school. They said that teachers help them if they struggle with their work.

Pupils understand the behaviour policy. Staff said that pupils' behaviour is good because everyone uses the same approach. The policy is based on mutual respect and the school's Christian values. Pupils check behaviour in school when they are part of the 'Year 6 in charge' day.

Bullying rarely happens in school. Leaders identify the root causes of any problems that arise, and support pupils and their families to manage these.

Staff are attentive to children's needs. Pupils feel there is always someone they can talk to if they have a concern or worry. Pupils' comments included: 'Staff check in on you if they see that you are upset.'

Pupils take part in a range of activities to develop their physical and mental well-being, such as dodgeball, archery, football club, cricket and after-school and breakfast clubs. Leaders invite visitors to talk to pupils about healthy eating.

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

Leaders have designed a curriculum to spark pupils' interest and imagination. Plans are well established in English and mathematics, and support pupils in achieving well. Plans to ensure that pupils learn and remember all the knowledge they need in every subject are well underway. Many pupils particularly enjoy the weekly curriculum activities planned in the outdoors, such as solving mysteries.

Pupils feel successful when learning mathematics. This is because leaders have carefully planned a curriculum that pinpoints the exact knowledge that they want pupils to learn.

They order knowledge so that it helps pupils to build on prior learning. For example, pupils effectively apply their knowledge of multiplication factors to support their work on shape. However, they do not always use the correct vocabulary to explain this. Most teachers use and explain mathematical vocabulary during lessons. Children in Reception learn to subitise, and they can explain what this word means. The teaching of vocabulary is not consistent across all classes.

Leaders promote a love of reading through a variety of books linked to the topics that pupils are learning about. Staff read to pupils every day so that they learn new vocabulary. Pupils said that there is a wide range of books they can choose to read in the 'story store'. Leaders engage parents and children in reading through online activities such as the 'masked reader challenge'.

Leaders' ambition is that 'every teacher is a teacher of reading' and 'no pupil will leave school without that vital life skill'. Leaders ensure that all staff across the school receive training in phonics. Staff can support any pupil who struggles to read. Pupils enjoy phonics lessons and can read books with fluency. This is because the books match the sounds they are learning.

Leaders are still developing curriculum plans in other subjects, such as history. Leaders have identified the main areas of history that they want pupils to learn about, for example the Egyptians and the Mayans. This includes learning about explorers such as Howard Carter and Hernan Cortes. Leaders know how they will ensure that pupils revisit important knowledge over time. However, leaders have not precisely identified what pupils will learn within each aspect of history. Pupils sometimes remember the activity they have carried out, rather than important historical knowledge. This lack of precision also makes it difficult for teachers to check what pupils have learned.

Children in early years thrive in a calm and purposeful environment. Leaders plan a curriculum that engages children and gets them off to a good start in areas of learning. Staff develop pupils' motor skills through stimulating activities such as wrapping presents and threading baubles. Children hunt outside for elves, led by the staff, who help to develop the children's vocabulary with words such as 'direction' and 'weather'.

Leaders ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive a range of support that meets their needs. This helps pupils to be successful. Pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs learn in a calm and nurturing environment. Parents' comments included: 'Staff are on the ball and put support in place immediately.'

Pupils can take part in a range of activities to help them develop as active citizens, such as pupils' parliament and eco-warriors. Leaders promote pupils' aspirations through the 'world of work'. Leaders invite professionals to talk about the jobs they do. Leaders aim to break down social stereotypes and promote diversity by challenging gender-stereotyped roles. They ensure that pupils hear from professionals with a range of backgrounds and ethnicities.

Staff feel that leaders give them the professional freedom and support to put ideas in place. They said that leaders work hard to listen to their views and support them to get their work-life balance correct.

In discussion with the headteacher, the inspector agreed that developing mathematical vocabulary and developing the wider curriculum may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that all adults understand safeguarding risks to children and how to report and record these. Leaders regularly check records and challenge each other around actions taken.

Leaders ensure that pupils know who they can talk to and report any concerns to. Leaders plan the personal, social and health education curriculum so that it supports pupils to stay safe, including online.

There is a pupil from every class who is appointed as a 'danger detective'. They monitor health and safety in their classroom and around school. Danger detectives said that it is their duty to make the environment safe. Danger detectives meet with a governor to report any concerns.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders' curriculum plan revisions do not consistently identify the precise knowledge that they want pupils to know and remember in all subjects. As a result, teachers are unable to assess learning effectively, in history for example. Pupils do not consistently gain a depth of knowledge in some foundation subjects. Leaders should ensure that curriculum plans are precise enough to ensure that teachers know exactly what to teach and how to check it has been learned.
- While some staff develop pupils' mathematical vocabulary, this is not consistent across all year groups. Some pupils do not use or understand mathematical terms. Leaders should ensure that all staff identify, explain and use mathematical vocabulary so that pupils have a better understanding of it and use it in their explanations.

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 St Mark's Elm Tree Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School to be good in June 2017.

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	144551
Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	10200638
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	447
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Bowes
Headteacher	Dawn Dacombe
Website	www.stmarks-elmtree.org.uk/
Date of previous inspection	27 June 2017

Information about this school

- The school provides a breakfast and after-school club.
- Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed who has now taken up a secondment post.
- The school offers six places to pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs in its enhanced mainstream school provision. This is oversubscribed, with 12 children currently accessing the provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, chief executive officer, members of the local advisory board and senior leaders.
- During the inspection, the inspector carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics and history. The inspector spoke with leaders of these subjects and looked at curriculum plans, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke to pupils.

- The inspector listened to pupils in Years 1, 2 and 3 read to an adult.
- The inspector spoke to pupils in single-sex and mixed groups, and observed pupils' behaviour around school and at lunch and breaktimes.
- The inspector reviewed school policies, procedures and records to evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding.
- The inspector talked to parents at the start and the end of the school day, and considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text responses. The inspector also considered responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Jenny Thomas, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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