

Inspection of St Michael's Catholic Primary School

Durham Road, St Michael's Catholic Primary School, Houghton le Spring, Tyne and Wear DH5 8NF

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 May 2022

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

What is it like to attend this school?

St Michael's is a place where leaders, staff and pupils are driven by the school ethos of 'Belong, Believe and Become'. Pupils strive to be the best they can be. St Michael's is an inclusive school where pupils feel safe and happy. Leaders have planned an ambitious curriculum to make sure all pupils achieve well.

Bullying rarely happens and, when it does, pupils know an adult will sort it out quickly. 'Bully Busters' from each year group support other pupils in their relationships. Pupils play well together right from the start, from early years to Year 6. However, sometimes a small minority of pupils use homophobic language.

Pupils show positive attitudes to learning. Older pupils take great pride in their work because teachers have high expectations of them. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. This is because teachers have high expectations of pupils. Teachers and other pupils are supportive of those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Pupils appreciate that teachers recognise and develop their talents. This is achieved through a range of sports clubs, music tuition, choir, and crafts. Links with a local university help pupils develop their sports skills.

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

Trustees have led the school through a difficult period of turbulence in staffing. They have made difficult decisions quickly. Trustees have formed a committed leadership team in the school. Some leaders recently moved into new roles. Even so, subject leaders are enthusiastic about their subjects of responsibility. They are keen to play their part in the school's development. Leaders have a clear and determined vision for every child to achieve well. Leaders in most subjects, including English, mathematics and science, know how precisely the subjects are taught. For some foundation subjects, such as geography, subject leaders do not have a clear understanding of how well their subject is being taught.

Together, leaders have brought about many improvements across the school. As a result, the quality of education pupils receive is good. In all subjects, the essential knowledge pupils must know and remember from early years to Year 6 has been mapped out. Plans show essential knowledge for each subject taught. Teachers know what pupils need to remember. They connect what pupils already know to new learning. For example, in history, pupils quickly recap their knowledge from previous lessons. They use the knowledge they have remembered to help them answer questions about the reasons for the Second World War. Teachers check and fill the gaps in pupils' knowledge brought about due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, pupils remember what they have been taught previously and how this connects to previous learning to help them with current learning. For example, in geography, pupils in Year 1 remember why penguins cannot live near the equator:

because 'it would get super-duper hot'. Pupils explained that they learned in science that penguins have blubber to keep them warm because they live in Antarctica.

Subject leaders have strong subject expertise. They provide helpful guidance for teachers. This support develops teachers' subject knowledge and helps them deliver subject curriculums well. However, sometimes some staff do not know the most effective approaches to use to support pupils learning to read.

Leaders make learning to read a priority. Children start learning straight away in Reception the letters and sounds that they need to learn to read. Leaders introduced a new way of teaching phonics this academic year. Staff follow this clear and structured programme. Some children are given support to catch up to where they need to be by the end of Year 1. Teachers make sure children can remember and use the sounds that they learn when they read words. Pupils at the early stages of reading learn to read well. Staff regularly read high-quality texts to pupils to foster their love of reading. Pupils say that they enjoy reading.

In mathematics, pupils explain confidently what they have previously learned. They talk knowledgeably about what they are currently learning, which gives them confidence when tackling new concepts. For example, children in Reception found numerals to 20 that were hidden around the learning environment and then ordered them from lowest to highest. In Year 2, pupils talked enthusiastically about equivalence of fractions. They recognised one half being equivalent to two quarters. Pupils in Year 6 said that adults support them well with their work as it becomes more demanding. They are well prepared for Year 7.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is knowledgeable about the range of pupils' needs in the school. She ensures staff are trained to effectively support pupils with SEND so that they access the whole curriculum. Teachers provide resources and adjust the curriculum to make sure all pupils gain the knowledge they need in order to achieve well. However, a few parents do not know about the support that is provided.

Pupils learn about different faiths and types of families through the curriculum. Pupils know that everyone is different in their own way. Leaders use assemblies to teach pupils about uniqueness. Pupils learn and know about the importance of contributing to society through charity events and fundraising for overseas charities. Most pupils interact well with each other most of the time. However, sometimes pupils use homophobic language. This is because they do not understand why they should not do so.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff attend safeguarding training and receive regular updates. They use their knowledge to help them identify pupils who need help or are at risk. Staff know how to report and record concerns about pupils they have concerns about. Referrals to

external agencies are made in a timely manner. Leaders work with other agencies to get help for pupils. Pupils learn about different risks and how to manage them. This includes an age-appropriate understanding of keeping safe when online and healthy relationships.

Leaders of safeguarding complete appropriate safer recruitment checks before staff begin to work at the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- A small but significant number of parents raised concerns that leaders do not communicate information in a timely manner. This includes information about their child's SEND. Leaders acknowledge that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, communication with parents has not been good enough. Leaders should ensure that parents receive the information that they need regularly, including information specific to parents who have children with SEND.
- In a few cases, members of staff do not have expert knowledge to teach early reading. Consequently, some teachers do not choose activities that help pupils learn as well as they might. Leaders should continue to develop staff's understanding of how to teach early reading well.
- Subject leaders do not systematically check and evaluate the impact of some foundation subjects. As a result, leaders do not yet have a thorough understanding of how well some subjects, other than mathematics, English and science, are being taught. Leaders should develop a system that gives them the information they need to ensure pupils benefit from effective teaching.
- Some pupils do not fully understand the protected characteristics. Consequently, some pupils use homophobic language and do not understand why this is not acceptable. Leaders should ensure pupils understand about all protected groups so that pupils are prepared for life as citizens in modern Britain.

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	147131
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10211855
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	208
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Martin Gannon
Headteacher	Sarah Murray (Acting Headteacher)
Website	www.stmichaelscatholicschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is one of 47 schools in the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust. The school joined the trust in July 2019.
- The school's religious character has not been inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 since it converted to academy status.
- The school has recently experienced significant changes in senior leadership.
- The school runs a breakfast club and after-school clubs.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the acting headteacher; acting deputy headteacher; deputy chief executive officer and chief operating officer of the trust; and a

representative from the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, who is also an appointed member of the trust. Inspectors also held meetings with the school business manager, and leaders responsible for attendance, behaviour, and personal development.

- The lead inspector met with five members of the local governing committee, including the chairperson. Inspectors also reviewed a sample of minutes from the local governing committee meetings.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: reading, mathematics, geography and history. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding leader. The single central record was also scrutinised. Inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding records and spoke to pupils and staff about safeguarding. Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in other subjects.
- A range of documentation provided by the school was reviewed. This included the school's self-evaluation document, development plan and school policies.
- Inspectors considered the 53 responses from parents who used Ofsted's free-text facility and 56 responses to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. No pupils or staff completed Ofsted's online staff and pupil surveys.
- Inspectors met with individual members of staff, including teachers and support staff. They met with groups of pupils, including single-sex groups in key stage 2.
- The lead inspector observed an adult listening to pupils read.

Inspection team

Kathryn McDonald, lead inspector Ofsted Inspector

Catherine Beard Ofsted Inspector

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