

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

The Green, Long Newton, Stockton-on-Tees TS21 1DL

Inspection date: 14 December 2022

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

The classroom code displayed in each class goes a long way to describing pupils in St Mary's. Pupils 'dream big, respect everyone's uniqueness, show kindness and work hard'. They explain about the friendliness of the school and how they 'help people who find it tough'. This is a friendly and happy school where everyone is welcome. Nearly all parents support and think highly of the school and the staff.

Pupils say teachers expect them to work hard, so they do. Teachers are fair and treat pupils with respect. Pupils are aspirational to secure a successful career. Visits from professionals such as doctors and microbiologists inspire pupils to try their hardest in class. Pupils feel safe and trust adults to keep them safe. Pupils learn how to deal with anxiety to stay mentally healthy. They have detailed knowledge on staying safe online.

Behaviour is good in school. Pupils trust staff to sort out any poor behaviour, including bullying. Bullying rarely happens. Pupils aspire to a role of responsibility to help the school day run smoothly. These roles include the house captains, school councillors or sports leaders. Pupils speak highly of the available activities outside. Favourites are the cycle track, the outdoor gym, the obstacle course or the multi-use games area.

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

Leaders at all levels work well together to make the improvements needed to the school. Trust leaders ensure that subject leaders in school have the skills and knowledge that they need. They visit the school to check that the quality of education is improving. 'Academy councillors' are local governors, and they also check what is happening through their critical evaluation and questioning. Trustees oversee all this to check that it is truly having an impact.

The curriculum is structured well. In most subjects, teachers deliver knowledge through key ideas that weave through each subject. New learning is planned and sequenced to build on what pupils already know. Shorter units of work build knowledge progressively.

Teachers make checks in lessons to make sure pupils have grasped new learning. Pupils receive help so they keep up with their peers. Teachers use assessment well to check on the progress made by pupils over longer periods.

This newly planned curriculum is not fully embedded. A few subjects lack important details. The essential learning at the end of some units of work is not sufficiently defined. In a few subjects, such as history, teachers are unable to assess key learning at the end of a unit of work because essential knowledge is not tightly specified.

Leaders have made early reading for younger pupils a priority. Children in Reception know the sounds of letters and can blend sounds to read simple words. There is a clear link between phonics, spelling and writing. Pupils learn phonics as a whole class, and teachers check on how well pupils are keeping up. Teachers give extra help to pupils who need it so that pupils do not fall behind. Pupils know the routines of each daily phonics lesson. They mostly practise their reading with books they can read and understand. New books have been purchased that match pupils' interests. Pupils are quickly becoming fluent readers.

All pupils learn the same curriculum. Pupils work hard and want to succeed. Teachers address any disruptions to learning through off-task behaviour immediately. They make sure all pupils can access the work. Teachers support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to achieve well in lessons and over time. For example, they make subtle changes to activities such as how work is presented or recorded. Parents are involved with the plans for pupils with SEND to help them reach their targets. This helps to ensure that the written plans for pupils with SEND are well considered and helpful for staff.

Leaders plan for opportunities to expand what pupils know and appreciate about different cultures. These are woven through school life. For example, pupils have a connection with a school in Africa and exchange letters with the pupils there. They develop an understanding of the similarities and differences of being a pupil in a different continent. Pupils live out school values such as 'taking action' against perceived injustice. When Ukrainian pupils joined the school, pupils insisted on supporting associated charities. Regular sports events, visits to local museums and points of interest help develop pupils' sense of achievement, endeavour and independence. Pupils develop their interests at the many school clubs on offer, such as sign language, choir and crafts.

Staff share the same goal to secure the very best for the pupils. Staff describe colleagues as 'an extended family'. Morale is high. Staff appreciate the 'hands-on' approach from the senior leaders, who lead by example. Staff do not hesitate to ask for help as there is no fear of criticism.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that everyone understands that 'safeguarding issues could happen here'. Adults keep a watchful eye for anything that suggests something is not quite right.

Training for staff and academy councillors is extensive and pertinent. Leaders 'push and shout loud' to secure help for pupils and families. External partners provide training and make checks on systems. The teamwork between leaders, academy councillors and 'challenge and support partners' from the trust creates extra layers of vigilance. Trustees receive regular reports on safeguarding and hold leaders to account.

The school office manager works with leaders to oversee detailed records and vetting checks for new appointments. Safeguarding training is central to induction for new staff. Leaders have identified stranger danger as an immediate risk. Protocols for entry and exit to school are clear. Passwords are needed to collect pupils. Visits from the air ambulance, fire brigade and the cyber police teach pupils how to stay safe out of school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some foundation subjects, leaders have not identified the essential knowledge that pupils need to know and how pupils should demonstrate this at the end of each unit. Teachers are not clear on what pupils should remember, and some pupils have gaps in their knowledge. Leaders need to define more precisely the knowledge that pupils need to retain in each subject and ensure teachers are teaching and assessing using this.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St Mary's Church of England Aided Primary School, to be good in January 2012.

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.

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	146449
Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	10255793
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	111
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Taylor
Headteacher	Michael Piper
Website	www.stmaryscephprimary.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St Mary's Church of England Primary School converted to become an academy in November 2018. When its predecessor school, St Mary's Church of England Aided Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- This school is a member of the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust.
- The school's religious character is Christian. The diocese inspects this separately under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.
- The school's last section 48 inspection took place in March 2017. It was judged to be outstanding. Section 48 inspections are currently scheduled within eight years of the previous inspection. This cycle has been extended to allow for the period when inspections were paused due to COVID restrictions.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- 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.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the assistant headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, curriculum leaders and teachers. An inspector met three local academy councillors, including the chair. An inspector met the chief executive officer of the trust, who also represented the trustees and the Diocese of Durham and Newcastle.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, art and design, and mathematics. For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons where available, spoke to teachers and teaching assistants, spoke to pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- An inspector listened to a range of pupils read from different year groups.
- The inspectors looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about other curriculum subjects.
- The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lesson visits, at breaktime and at lunchtime. They spoke to pupils about their views on behaviour. A group of pupils gave an inspector a tour of the school.
- An inspector looked at the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks. The inspectors spoke to leaders, teachers, governors and pupils about safeguarding.
- The views of parents who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, were considered. An inspector met several parents at the end of the school day.
- The inspectors met with staff to discuss their well-being and workload. The inspectors considered the responses and comments from Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Phil Scott, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Zoe Carr

Ofsted Inspector

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