

Inspection of a good school: St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Bicester

Queen's Avenue, Bicester, Oxfordshire OX26 2NX

Inspection dates:

11 and 12 January 2023

Outcome

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Bicester continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders, staff and pupils live out the strong values of St Mary's School. Leaders are ambitious for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Overall, their high expectations for pupils are met. Pupils are confident, successful learners who benefit from a well-rounded education.

Leaders place pupils' well-being at the heart of all that they do. Consequently, pupils feel safe. They love coming to school. Pupils say that staff are always there to support them. Pupils appreciate the uplifting outdoor music, which encourages them to sing and dance each morning, as they arrive at school. Everyone is welcome, and the school is a happy community.

Leaders have extremely high expectations for behaviour. Pupils understand the importance of kindness and good manners. They behave sensibly and respectfully. Bullying or unkind behaviours are never tolerated. Pupils say that bullying is not an issue, but they are rightly confident that adults will help them to resolve any problems that might arise. Pupils value the many opportunities to enrich their learning through visits and extra activities, such as the popular arts and crafts club.

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

Pupils achieve well in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Leaders and governors have high ambitions for every child. Pupils with SEND are included in all aspects of school life. Staff quickly identify these pupils' additional needs and ensure that planned support is provided to help them learn well. Where appropriate, leaders work with external professionals to make sure that these pupils get any extra help they need.

Pupils quickly learn to read fluently. Right from the start of Reception, children regularly learn phonics. They apply their phonic knowledge using books that are precisely matched to their stage of reading. Any pupils who fall behind are identified swiftly and given the help they need to catch up. Pupils deepen their reading fluency and understanding well as

they move through the school. Pupils appreciate their school library. It is an inviting space with a good range of books on offer.

Leaders have adopted an ambitious curriculum. They successfully link what children learn in the early years with the subjects taught in other year groups. In all subjects, leaders have identified the essential knowledge they want pupils to learn. However, in some subjects, leaders have not always sequenced this knowledge logically so that pupils connect new learning with what they already know. In these subjects, pupils do not learn as well as they do in English and mathematics. Leaders provide regular training for staff. Teachers know how to teach most subjects effectively. They present information clearly and are usually quick to notice and correct pupils' mistakes. One pupil described how the class appreciate being able to discuss mistakes 'because then everyone learns from them'.

The effectiveness of the checks that teachers make on what pupils remember is variable. Teachers often check pupils' understanding to inform their teaching. In some subjects, such as English and mathematics, teachers successfully use this information to meet the needs of all pupils. However, in other subjects, the information is not used consistently well to make sure that all pupils remember the essential knowledge they need.

Pupils are keen to learn. Leaders' high expectations for behaviour are understood throughout the school. This begins in the early years, where children carefully follow well-established routines. Classes are calm and purposeful. Pupils are able to concentrate fully on their learning.

Leaders promote pupils' wider development well. For instance, staff lead residential visits and outings to broaden pupils' knowledge and enhance the curriculum. Pupils explore their talents and interests through singing in choirs, exploring the creative arts and participating in sporting events. They understand the need for laws, and confidently explain how this promotes a better society. Pupils enjoy serving their community through activities such as planting sunflowers outside their parish church. They regularly support charitable causes and enjoy taking on additional responsibilities, such as helping younger pupils at lunchtimes.

Leaders, including governors, show an unfaltering commitment to pupils and staff. Governors know the school well. Leaders and governors consider staff's workload carefully. A member of staff reflected the thoughts of the broader staff team, saying, 'There is an open-door policy and leaders are as supportive as possible of staff.'

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders place high importance on keeping pupils safe. They have developed a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. Suitable checks are made on all adults who work with the children in school. Staff are well trained. They are vigilant in identifying any concerns they have about a pupil's well-being or safety. Leaders respond to issues swiftly and sensitively. They work closely with external agencies to provide

additional support for families, when required. Through the curriculum, pupils learn about keeping safe, including when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum in some foundation subjects is not well sequenced. Pupils are not able to make connections between concepts securely enough to learn as well as they could. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum builds, sequentially, towards clearly identified end-points for those subjects where this is not yet the case.
- In the foundation subjects, assessment information is not always used effectively. Gaps in pupils' knowledge are not addressed swiftly enough. Leaders need to ensure that assessment information is used consistently well to inform teaching and to support pupils to learn well.

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 school 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.

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	123207
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10256457
Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	248
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Chris Hartley
Headteacher	Patricia Pickering
Website	www.st-marys-bicester.oxon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	19 October 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Bicester is a Catholic voluntary-aided school. It is part of the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham. The last denominational Catholic school inspection was carried out in April 2019.
- The school does not currently use any alternative 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 leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- During the inspection, the inspector met regularly with senior leaders. Meetings were also held with other school leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator. The inspector held a meeting with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. The inspector also held telephone conversations with representatives from the local authority and the archdiocese.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and art. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited

a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspector listened to some pupils reading.

- To inspect safeguarding, the inspector reviewed safeguarding records, including the single central record and appointment procedures. The inspector spoke with staff about their safeguarding training and spoke with pupils about the support they have in understanding how to keep safe.
- The inspector reviewed the responses to Ofsted's parent, pupil and staff surveys.
- The inspector met with staff to gather their views about the school, including discussions about workload and well-being. The inspector spoke to pupils during lessons and at other times of the school day.

Inspection team

Clare Morgan, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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