

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Vivian Road, Harborne, Birmingham B17 0DN

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 January 2023

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	Outstanding

This school was last inspected 13 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school. Parent, staff and pupil questionnaire responses endorse that pupils feel safe. This is because pupils are well cared for by staff.

Leaders' ambition to ensure that all pupils achieve well is realised. Children get off to a strong start in learning to read, write and count in the early years. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), attain at a high level in English and mathematics in all year groups. This is because these subjects are planned and delivered effectively. However, what pupils learn in some other subjects and areas of learning is less well-sequenced and developed.

Pupils behave well. They are polite and well-mannered, and they work hard. They have a firm understanding and appreciation of differences. Pupils show respect and tolerance towards others from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Although the school community has changed over time, everyone is treated equally and made to feel welcome.

Pupils know the difference between bullying and isolated incidents of unkind behaviour. They know why bullying is wrong and the importance of reporting it. Leaders act swiftly to address any early issues to prevent potential bullying from escalating.

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

Since her appointment, the headteacher and leadership team have begun to review and improve the quality of the curriculum. They have introduced a new reading system and purchased high-quality reading books. They have continued to place a strong emphasis on English and mathematics in all year groups.

Teachers set challenging work that builds on pupils' knowledge and skills well. Some subjects are taught by subject specialists. As a result, pupils consistently achieve well in these areas. However, content delivered in some areas of learning in the early years and some subjects in key stages 1 and 2 are sequenced less well. Pupils do not build on their prior knowledge in these subjects. The work introduced is random rather than coherently planned.

Teachers have good subject knowledge. They benefit from quality external support and training in subjects such as mathematics and physical education (PE). Teachers explain new learning clearly and show pupils how to approach tasks set. They assess pupils' understanding in lessons and at the end of units. Gaps in learning and misconceptions are identified and rectified promptly.

Leaders identify pupils with SEND early through observation, discussion and assessment checks. Staff use the information gathered to adapt provision effectively.

For example, young children with complex needs are gradually integrated into school life to help them settle fully. Leaders provide appropriate resources, specialist advice and extra adult support. This ensures that pupils receive the help they need to achieve well. Staff keep systematic records and involve parents in reviews of their child's progress.

Reading leaders are ambitious and determined to teach every child to read. The youngest children learn to love books due to the enthusiasm of their teachers and regular story time. Well-structured daily phonics lessons help children quickly learn their letters and sounds. Those who struggle with reading get extra help. Impressively, these pupils can all use their phonics knowledge to work out new and tricky words. Leaders provide online reading books as well as library books for pupils to read at home. Most parents provide strong support with home reading.

Many pupils enjoy and take part in the wider opportunities the school provides. Pupils learn skills such as karate and chess. Others learn to play a musical instrument or be part of a sports team. School visits, clubs and school events add to pupils' development. For example, older pupils recently visited the houses of parliament to gain a deeper understanding of democracy and British values.

The strong Catholic ethos of the school contributes to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils have a clear understanding of other world faiths. They readily take on different roles and responsibilities to help others. Pupils raise impressive funds for different charities.

Staff work closely and are a united team. They appreciate the support and consideration they receive with regard to their workload and well-being from senior leaders and governors.

Governors use their skills and expertise well to support the school. They are well-informed and active in their roles. This allows them to make decisions in the best interest of pupils. However, governors and senior leaders have not reviewed their own effectiveness as well as they could. For example, external reviews of leadership and management are limited. This has reduced leaders' and governors' ability to identify where school improvement could be stronger.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding within the school. Staff are well trained and vigilant to any safeguarding issues. They know the signs and symptoms of abuse. Staff report concerns promptly, and leaders act immediately to secure the help needed from external agencies. Leaders carry out careful checks on staff to make sure they are suitable to work with pupils.

Pupils learn about personal safety through the curriculum. They have a secure understanding of internet safety and the dangers of social media. They know they can always confide in a member of staff if they are worried about anything.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not ensured that the curriculum is coherently sequenced in some areas of learning and in some foundation subjects. As a result, pupils' learning is sometimes disjointed and not embedded. Leaders should ensure that there is clear progression of skills and knowledge in these subjects so that pupils achieve as well as they do in English and mathematics.
- Leaders, including governors, have not reviewed their own effectiveness as well as they could. This has reduced their ability to identify, and rectify, weaknesses in some areas of the curriculum and maintain the momentum of school improvement. Leaders should ensure that they are proactive in validating their work, for example through seeking opportunities to collaborate with other professionals, or learn from advancements in curriculum thinking in order to further improve pupil achievement in all subject areas.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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	103438
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10256879
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	418
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Mary Higgins
Headteacher	Louise Yorke
Website	www.stmaryrc.bham.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	2 and 3 July 2009, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher was appointed in September 2021.
- The numbers of pupils on roll have doubled since the time of the previous inspection. The school has moved from one-form entry to two-form entry. The demographics of the school have changed significantly. There is now a higher proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and from diverse cultural backgrounds on roll.
- This school is part of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham. The school's last section 48 inspection was conducted in May 2019. Section 48 inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They restarted in September 2021. The next inspection will be within eight years of the last section 48 inspection.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded 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 of the school.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, subject leaders and the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator. Meetings were also held with seven members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. Telephone discussions were held with the deputy director of education for the archdiocese, and a representative from the school improvement organisation that is commissioned by the local authority.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, English, mathematics, art, PE and modern foreign languages. Inspection activities in these subjects included lesson visits, discussion with staff and pupils, meeting with subject leaders and work scrutiny. The lead inspector also observed pupils reading to a staff member.
- The inspectors considered a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement. Minutes of governor meetings were also scrutinised. Inspectors also looked at records of behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school and talked to them informally about behaviour, bullying and welfare.
- The inspectors talked to parents at the start of the school day and considered their responses to Ofsted Parent View, and their free-text responses. They also reviewed the responses of staff and pupils through Ofsted questionnaires and gathered their views through discussion.

Inspection team

Heather Simpson, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Lindsay Nash	Ofsted Inspector
Vanessa Payne	Ofsted Inspector

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