

Inspection of a good school: St Joseph's Catholic Academy

Ragworth Road, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees TS20 1HR

Inspection dates:

23 and 24 May 2023

Outcome

St Joseph's Catholic Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Joseph's Catholic Academy is a friendly, welcoming and inclusive school. Very positive relationships exist between adults and pupils and there is a strong sense of mutual respect. As a result, pupils behave well. They feel happy and safe in school. Bullying is not a problem here. Pupils are confident that if it did happen, adults would deal with it quickly.

Leaders have high expectations and ambition for all pupils. For the most part, these expectations are realised. Pupils take pride in their work and strive to achieve well. They have very positive attitudes to learning. There are some instances where teachers could be more tenacious in making sure that pupils apply basic skills such as correct letter formation and use of punctuation.

Pupils' wider development is a strength of the school. Leaders have thought carefully about how to plan opportunities for pupils to have experiences that they might not otherwise get. Educational visits, for example to London, visitors to school and themed days all help to enhance pupils' experience of the curriculum. There are several opportunities for pupils to take on a leadership role in school. For example, they can become pupil chaplains, sports leaders, playground friends or part of the student council.

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

Leaders have put a broad and balanced curriculum in place. They have identified enrichment opportunities for almost all subjects. For example, pupils participate in Black History Month as part of their learning in history and there are regular science, technology, engineering and mathematics days. Teachers plan sequences of lessons that break learning into small steps. Pupils enjoy learning and are attentive in lessons. Classrooms are calm, purposeful and free from disruption.

Leaders have considered early years in their curriculum development. The curriculums in all subjects start in Nursery and run through to Year 6. This means that children in early years get off to a strong start and are prepared well for the transition to key stage 1. There has been recent investment in the outdoor area in early years, which has resulted in an impressive space for children to learn in.

The curriculum for mathematics is particularly strong. Leaders have reviewed the curriculum so that it closely aligns with pupils' needs. They have put a lesson structure in place that carefully guides and supports pupils so that they are successful in their learning and achieve well. This lesson structure is now being used in other subjects.

Systems are in place to check what pupils know and remember. Teachers use the outcomes of assessments well to inform their planning. There are regular opportunities for pupils to revisit prior learning in lessons through retrieval tasks. In some subjects, such as geography, these tasks are not always sharply focused on the key knowledge that pupils need to remember.

Reading is very clearly a high priority for leaders and this is reflected in pupils' enjoyment of reading as well as their achievement. Adults teach the phonics programme consistently and effectively. Any pupils who are at risk of falling behind with reading are quickly spotted and supported to keep up with their peers. Pupils' reading books match the sounds that they know. Leaders have developed a reading spine to ensure that pupils are exposed to a rich and diverse range of texts throughout school.

Leaders are determined for all pupils to achieve well, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). There has been a recent focus on how to adapt teaching to engineer success for these pupils. While the provision for pupils with SEND generally meets their needs, there are some instances where the targets on individual education plans are too broad. Where this is the case, pupils often do not meet their targets because the progress they make against them is difficult to measure.

Pupils appreciate the range of opportunities that are on offer to them. They talk animatedly about taking part in sports competitions and are clear that these are open to all, not just the strongest pupils. There is a strong uptake of after-school clubs, such as the board games, film and cooking clubs. Leaders carefully plan the extra-curricular offer to develop pupils' character, social and academic skills and to give pupils a chance to contribute to the local community.

Governors and the trust offer effective support to leaders and staff. Staff are proud to work at the school. They report high levels of consideration for their workload and well-being and are supported to access further training to help with their professional development.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Leaders make thorough checks on potential employees. All staff and governors are regularly trained in how to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse. Staff report and record concerns in a timely and appropriate way. Leaders use external agencies to support with safeguarding. If they feel that external agencies are not acting in the best interests of pupils, they are quick to challenge this.

Leaders have mapped out safeguarding across the curriculum to ensure that pupils are educated about how to keep themselves safe. Pupils can talk about how to stay safe online and offline. Pupils who are 'danger detectives' meet regularly with leaders to raise any concerns or issues that they are aware of in school. Leaders then act on this.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The targets on some support plans for pupils with SEND are not specific enough. This means that pupils may not get the precise support that they need to enable them to achieve the best possible outcomes. Leaders should ensure that staff are trained in how to write targets that are specific, measurable and time bound.
- Teachers' expectations in terms of pupils' application of basic skills are not consistently high. For example, instances of incorrect letter formation in key stage 1 are often not addressed. Similarly, in key stage 2, pupils sometimes spell subject-specific vocabulary wrong or do not capitalise proper nouns and adults do not correct this. Leaders should ensure that teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils across all subjects.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, to be good in February 2016.

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	146679
Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	10268456
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	294
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Yvonne Coates
Headteacher	Gill Dowson
Website	www.sjnorton.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school converted to academy status in February 2019. It is part of the Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust.
- The school is a Roman Catholic primary school within the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. The most recent inspection of the school's religious character took place in February 2023.
- The school has nursery provision for three-year-old children.
- The school does not make use of any alternative providers.
- The school operates before- and after-school childcare 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 have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. She also met with the chief executive officer of the trust, the chair of trustees, the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator, members of the governing body, subject

leaders and the acting deputy director of education for the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. 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 reviewed how leaders consider pupils' wider development.
- The inspector observed pupils reading to familiar adults.
- The inspector observed the behaviour of pupils in lessons and during breaktimes.
- The inspector examined the single central record and looked at how safeguarding incidents are reported. The inspector spoke to leaders, teachers, support staff, governors and pupils about the culture of safeguarding in the school.
- Inspectors considered the responses made by parents to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also considered the responses to the staff and pupil questionnaires.

Inspection team

Philippa Kermotschuk, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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