

Inspection of a good school: Stella Maris Catholic Primary School

Parkfield Road, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5BY

Inspection dates:

20 and 21 June 2023

Outcome

Stella Maris Catholic Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

There is an exceptionally strong sense of community and family at Stella Maris. Staff, pupils and families forge strong connections in order to ensure that pupils do well. Parents and carers commented on the school's 'loving, nurturing and supportive' feel, being 'like one big family' and commented that their children 'flourish' and 'thrive' in its care.

There are also strong connections with the local community. The school has its own food bank, 'the pantry', run by members of the 'sunshine team' – pupils who see it as their mission to, as one pupil explained, 'Spread some sunshine to others who need it.' As well as running this resource, pupils are active in the community, reading to those in residential homes and fundraising for local and national charities.

Other leadership opportunities include school and eco-councils. Pupils recently secured funding for a greenhouse on the school grounds so they can grow and nurture plants. These opportunities, and the strong teaching that pupils benefit from, have pupils at the heart of what the school does. As a result, there are especially strong and supportive relationships between staff and pupils, and pupils achieve well.

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

Leaders have carefully planned a curriculum from the early years upwards that considers what all pupils need to know and in what order. This includes pupils with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This means that in subjects such as English, reading and mathematics, pupils do well. In the foundation subjects, such as music and history, leaders have mapped out important skills and how they build and develop through each year group. However, there has not yet been the same identification of the specific points of knowledge that pupils need and how these connect together. As a result, while pupils can talk confidently about what they know from their most recent learning, they cannot yet connect this securely to what they have learned before, or securely retain that knowledge over time. Leaders recognise this is an area for continued development in their plans and are already taking action to address this.

Early reading is taught incredibly well. There is a buzz of excitement in phonics and reading lessons, and staff have the expertise to teach precisely and pick up on any misconceptions quickly so that they can be remedied. Children relish the opportunity to show what they know, literally wriggling in their seats to be the one to get to share their ideas with others. This sense of excitement to learn permeates the early years, and beyond.

Pupils with SEND benefit from precise teaching that helps them to make progress through the planned curriculum. Staff ensure the right support is in place to help them to achieve well. This is true for all pupils from Reception onwards. Staff check carefully what pupils know and ask questions designed to get them thinking deeply. In some areas, for example in history, questioning is especially well developed. Here, staff probe what pupils think in order to elicit deeper thinking. As a result of this, pupils think deeply and give considered and developed answers. However, this is not yet as fully developed in some other subjects.

From the youngest years onwards, behaviour in the school is very settled and focused. Staff have high expectations of behaviour, and pupils are proud to meet these expectations. In lessons, pupils are engaged and focused and want to do well. From Reception Year, children learn how to share and take turns. Around the school site, they play happily together. Any misunderstandings or disagreements are resolved quickly by staff. Pupils can all talk about the school values of love, trust, care, share and respect. They understand what they mean and why embodying them makes their school community stronger.

Leaders are driven by a strong moral purpose to ensure that all pupils benefit from opportunities to develop beyond the classroom. This wider offer is exceptionally strong and carefully targeted to ensure that all pupils, but especially those who are disadvantaged, benefit from the support that leaders provide. The recent work that has gone into supporting young carers in the school is an especially strong example of the support in place for all pupils.

Leaders and governors work well with the multi-academy trust, together continually developing the school. They measure the impact of this work carefully. Trust leaders have a secure understanding of the school and work effectively with governors to support and challenge leaders appropriately. They know their statutory responsibilities and meet them well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in this school.

Leaders ensure that all staff have the relevant training to help them identify pupils who may be at risk of harm. Staff know their pupils well and are swift to report any concerns. Governors and trustees ensure that leaders take the right steps to check that adults are safe to work in the school. Staff liaise effectively with external agencies and ensure that

pupils and their families get the help they need.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not yet identified precisely enough the small steps of knowledge that pupils need to secure in the foundation subjects. This means that teachers' assessment of what pupils have learned is not as precise as it could be. Leaders need to ensure that staff know what specific elements of knowledge pupils need to learn in the foundation subjects, as is the case for mathematics and early reading so that they can assess precisely what pupils have understood and remembered over time.

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 December 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	141629
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10256447
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	210
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Michael Powis
Principal	Lisa Huotari (Executive Principal) Andrew Langley (Principal)
Website	www.stellamaris.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10 October 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has been part of the Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership since January 2015.
- The school currently uses one unregistered alternative provision.
- The school is part of the Archdiocese of Southwark. The last section 48 inspection was in March 2023.

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.
- The inspector held meetings with the executive principal, the principal, senior leaders, teachers and pupils. The inspector met with the members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. The inspector also held meetings with trust representatives, including the chair, the chief executive officer and the executive director of education (primary). The inspector also had a telephone conversation with a representative from the diocese.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, history and

music. 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 lead inspector listened to some pupils read to adults they knew. Additionally, the inspector looked at planning and pupils' work across some other areas of the curriculum.

- To inspect safeguarding, the inspector held meetings with safeguarding leaders, governors, teachers and pupils. They scrutinised the single central record and checked safeguarding records.
- The inspector also took account of a range of other information, including the school's development plans, school policies and governor and trustee minutes.
- The inspector spoke with pupils about their experience of the school. They took account of parent and staff views through conversations and responses to Ofsted's surveys.

Inspection team

Marian Feeley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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