

Inspection of a good school: St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, Saffron Walden

South Road, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 3DW

Inspection dates:

19 and 20 September 2023

Outcome

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, Saffron Walden continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Mary Jo Hall. This school is a single-academy trust. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Brunwin.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive at this delightful school. It is at the heart of the community. Happiness fills classrooms and the school playground. Pupils show kindness and caring towards each other and to adults. They behave exceptionally well throughout the school day. Treating each other fairly is a golden rule that pupils live by.

Pupils relish the opportunities to learn how to be responsible. 'Buddies' in Year 5 help children in the Reception class to settle quickly into school life. These relationships create friendships between pupils that last as they move into the next year group. House captains, eco-club members, prefects and school councillors take their positions of responsibility seriously. Pupils are grateful for the opportunity to elect their school councillors, as they trust them to 'make the school even better even though it is already amazing'.

Staff are passionate about pupils achieving the very best they possibly can across all areas of the curriculum. These high expectations are clearly understood by pupils. Pupils rise to the many challenges the school sets them. They are determined to be the best they can be in whatever they do. They work hard in lessons and achieve well in many areas of school life.

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

The school has reviewed and refined its curriculum over recent years. It begins in the early years and clearly identifies the important foundations children need to secure to be ready for Year 1. Across subjects, the school has clearly structured the curriculum so that pupils experience lessons that build on what they have learned previously. Helpful

curriculum documents support teachers to know what pupils have already learned and what they will learn next.

Reading is at the heart of the curriculum. Children are immersed in stories and rich language from the moment they start in the Reception class. Pupils at the early stages of learning to read are taught effectively by highly trained staff. Staff carefully show children how to pronounce the sounds that letters make. Precise and timely checks identify any pupil who is finding reading hard. These pupils get the support they need to build their confidence and their fluency. Well-chosen books help pupils apply their knowledge of sounding out and blending when they read new words.

As pupils move through the school, they read a wide range of carefully selected books and stories. Older pupils look forward to reading books their friends and teachers recommend for them. They enjoy the school challenging them to read books that will expand their knowledge and vocabulary. They also look forward to their dedicated time to read purely for pleasure with the 'relaxed read' choices.

Across subjects, teachers and support staff have the subject knowledge they need to teach the curriculum. Teachers use well-considered questions to check pupils' understanding. For example, in mathematics, teachers probe pupils' knowledge of number and then adapt their teaching depending on pupils' understanding.

The school has begun to review its approach to assessment in some subjects. In these subjects, teachers do check pupils' understanding of important knowledge and vocabulary. However, these checks do not always provide the information that teachers and subject leaders need. Therefore, they do not always understand precisely how well pupils have remembered the important knowledge and vocabulary they expect them to.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive effective support. Staff receive useful training and guidance. They know how to identify and support pupils with SEND. Careful adaptations to the curriculum and well-chosen resources help pupils with SEND to access the same curriculum as their peers.

The school thoughtfully plans many opportunities for pupils' wider development. The curriculum provides extensive enrichment opportunities. Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are exceptional. They rise to the challenge of learning musical instruments. They relish performing these in concerts and assemblies throughout their time in key stage 2. The school expects pupils to have an active voice in the school. Pupils are particularly enthusiastic about protecting the community and world they live in. The school's eco-curriculum develops these interests further. This carefully planned wider offer supports pupils to grow into well-rounded people who are ready for the next stage of learning.

The governing body knows the school well. It ensures that leaders support staff to manage their workload. Staff are very appreciative of the support they receive and the professional development the school provides for them. The school works proactively to engage the parental community. The vast majority of parents are very positive about the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few subjects, there is not an embedded approach to assessment. There are occasions where checks on learning do not provide teachers or leaders with precise enough information on how well pupils have remembered important knowledge and vocabulary. The school should complete its ongoing work to ensure it establishes a clear approach to checking pupils' understanding of the key content and vocabulary they want pupils to know and remember in all subjects. Teachers and subject leaders must then use these checks to adapt the curriculum appropriately.

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 October 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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and](#)

[protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	137081
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10295036
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	217
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Brunwin
Headteacher	Mary Jo Hall
Website	www.stmsw.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	22 March 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a Catholic school. The most recent inspection of its religious character under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 was in December 2018, and it will receive its next inspection within eight years of that date.
- There is breakfast and after-school care for pupils on site run by the school.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's educational provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, he discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspector also listened to pupils read to a

familiar member of staff. Curriculum plans and examples of pupil workbooks in history were considered. The inspector also scrutinised a range of writing from across the curriculum.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interest first.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders, staff, trustees and pupils.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documents, including behaviour logs, bullying records, pupil records, records of trustee monitoring, school development plans and school policies.
- There were 93 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, which were considered.
- The inspector considered 120 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils. He also spoke with pupils throughout the inspection to gather their views.
- There were 31 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for school staff. The inspector also spoke with staff throughout the inspection to gather their views.

Inspection team

Michael Williams, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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