

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

Northwood Road, Whitstable, Kent CT5 2EY

Inspection dates:

7 and 8 November 2023

Outcome

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

The headteacher of this school is Michele Blunt. The school is part of the Kent Catholic Schools Partnership, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Annemarie Whittle, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Mike Powis. There is also an Area School Improvement Partner, Vicki O'Halloran, who is responsible for this school.

What is it like to attend this school?

The values of 'joy, courage, honesty, excellence and community' are threaded through daily life at St Mary's. Pupils enjoy school and feel safe here. They trust adults to help them if they have a problem. The school teaches pupils to accept and celebrate people's differences. Pupils behave well, showing consideration and respect for each other. They understand that some pupils might need extra help to keep calm and focused on their learning.

The school has an ambitious curriculum and has high expectations of what pupils will learn, right from the start of early years. Teachers make sure that work is well-structured and interesting. Pupils benefit from trips and experiences outside the school. These trips help bring learning to life. They enjoy attending clubs and activities, such as music, sports and coding. This develops their interests and talents well.

Serving the community is a priority. Pupils care for the local environment by adopting a section of the beach and by planting bulbs in the town garden. 'Mini Vinnies' raise funds for charitable causes and support the school's food bank. Pupils have opportunities to learn about becoming active and responsible citizens. Many enjoy taking on important leadership roles, such as librarians, prefects and house captains.

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

The recently reviewed curriculum is both ambitious and accessible for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As a result, pupils achieve

well. Across subjects, important knowledge is clearly identified and broken down into a logical sequence. This helps pupils to retain their learning over time. For example, in modern foreign languages, the impressively ambitious curriculum helps pupils learn both French and Spanish from the early years. They love singing songs and become confident speakers in later years. This stands them in very good stead for further language learning later in secondary school.

Teachers explain ideas clearly and regularly check that pupils have understood. This means that in mathematics, pupils quickly gain number fluency. In the early years, staff use resources to help children become confident in counting. For example, children are absorbed in working out the different ways of making 'eight' on an abacus. While older pupils develop secure knowledge of methods and calculation, the school does not yet provide enough opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their mathematical reasoning skills. Pupils with SEND are supported well to complete similar activities to their peers. Staff's understanding of what works best for pupils with SEND is developing effectively thanks to training provided by the school.

Reading is always a priority and the phonics programme is firmly established. The school makes sure that staff are supported to deliver phonics well. The books pupils read match the sounds that they know. Adults swiftly identify children who may be struggling to read and give them extra help. In key stage 2, the school makes sure that pupils read a wide range of texts from diverse cultures. Pupils enjoy learning interesting vocabulary and discussing mature topics. This helps them become keen and avid readers. One pupil described reading as 'like a holiday in my head'.

Expectations of how pupils should conduct themselves are consistent. The school is calm and orderly. In early years, routines are well established. This means that children know exactly what to expect and can quickly develop a high level of independence. Across the school, relationships between adults and pupils are warm and respectful. It is very rare that learning is disturbed. Very occasionally, pupils with SEND find it difficult to behave as the school expects. Staff deal with this sensitively.

Pupils receive a broad personal development programme. Pupils are taught about how to stay safe, including online. Almost all say they follow this advice. The school makes sure that pupils have a good understanding of growing up and healthy relationships. This helps to prepare them for their next steps. The school supports pupils' wider social and emotional needs effectively through its pastoral programme.

The majority of parents support the work of the school. One parent summed up the views of most by saying, 'My child is thriving here.' However, a minority of parents feel that the school does not engage or communicate with them as well as it could.

School staff are proud to work here. They feel well supported and appreciate the many training opportunities that they are offered. Leaders are mindful of workload and well-being which staff appreciate. Those responsible for governance and school leaders work together to ensure that pupils are at the heart of the decisions they make.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The mathematics curriculum does not provide enough opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their thinking or reasoning. While pupils show fluency in methods and operations, and undertake problem-solving, they do not routinely explain answers, justify methods or think more deeply about the efficiency of calculations. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum provides regular opportunities for pupils to show their reasoning skills.
- Parental engagement is not as effective as it could be. A minority of parents do not feel that the school communicates or engages with them sufficiently well. Leaders should ensure that engagement with all parents is productive and purposeful.

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 April 2018.

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 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	142162
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10288057
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	374
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mike Powis
CEO of the trust	Annemarie Whittle
Chair of local governing committee	Anne Locke
Headteacher	Michele Blunt
Website	www.st-marys-whitstable.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	25 April 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Mary's is a Catholic primary school, within the Archdiocese of Southwark.
- The school is part of the Kent Catholic Schools Partnership, which is an educational trust. The trust runs 26 primary and secondary schools.
- The school's last section 48 inspection under the Education Act for schools with a religious character took place in June 2023.
- The headteacher took up post in September 2023. Previously, she was academy principal, with an executive head overseeing the school.
- Currently, the school does not have any pupils attending alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education 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 her evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with leaders, including the headteacher, assistant headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator and other subject leaders.
- The inspector met with five members of the local governing committee, including the chair. She also spoke to the chair of trustees.
- The inspector spoke to the trust's chief executive officer and the school's area school improvement partner.
- Deep dives were carried out in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. She also looked more widely at a range of pupils' work in different subjects.
- 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 safeguarding culture that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspector gathered evidence to explore the impact of pupils' behaviour and the school's wider curriculum.
- The inspector talked to pupils and staff throughout the inspection to gain their views about the school. This included the views of staff submitted via Ofsted's confidential surveys.
- The inspector considered the views of parents submitted via Ofsted's parent survey.

Inspection team

Maria Roberts, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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