

Inspection of St Dominic Catholic Primary School

St Dominic Catholic Primary School, Southdown Road, Harpenden, Hertfordshire AL5 1PF

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 November 2023

| Overall effectiveness | Outstanding |
|------------------------------|--------------------|
| The quality of education | Outstanding |
| Behaviour and attitudes | Outstanding |
| Personal development | Outstanding |
| Leadership and management | Outstanding |
| Early years provision | Outstanding |
| Previous inspection grade | Outstanding |

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since March 2009.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are incredibly proud of their school. They feel safe in the calm, caring environment adults have created here. Pupils love learning. They work hard and achieve extremely well, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.

The school's values are threaded through everything it does. Pupils demonstrate these, focusing on a different one each month, kindness, for example. Older pupils are exceptional role models. As a result, when younger pupils struggle to act out the values, they follow the example of the older pupils.

Pupils' conduct around the school is calm and courteous. Beautiful manners come naturally to them. There is a strong culture of respect. Pupils say one of the best things about their school is the warmth of the relationships they enjoy with each other and with their teachers.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular activities, such as a very popular lunchtime chess club. They take part in competitive sporting events against other schools. Trips enrich pupils' learning. Residential trips develop pupils' independence and resilience. Visitors to the school give them memorable experiences that strengthen their character. For example, pupils learned that 'nothing is impossible' from an inspirational visitor who has overcome multiple challenges.

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

The school's curriculum is very carefully planned from the early years through to Year 6. As soon as they join the Nursery class, children begin to learn the foundational knowledge they will need for later learning. The curriculum is designed so that pupils build their learning gradually. It sets out what pupils should learn in each subject area and the order in which they should learn it.

Teachers deliver lessons confidently. They make learning 'sticky', by recapping previous learning at the start of each lesson. They check pupils' understanding regularly and adjust their teaching if necessary. Pupils' ability to recall what they have learned is impressive. They use what they already know to approach new learning with enthusiasm. In music, for example, pupils learn about rhythm and beat in the early years. By Year 5, pupils use various elements of music, including improvisation, in their own jazz compositions.

The school prioritises reading. Well-trained adults deliver daily phonics sessions from the Nursery class to Year 1. These teach children the sounds they need for early reading. Teachers are quick to identify any pupils who need extra help. They act promptly to support these pupils. As a result, the majority of pupils can read fluently by the end of Year 2. Older pupils are avid readers. Reading lessons in key stage 2 develop higher-level skills such as comprehension, inference and prediction. Pupils are motivated to read widely and often by the school's millionaire readers and reading super-power awards.

The school is ambitious for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers make adaptations and adjustments for these pupils to enable them to access the same curriculum as their peers. Pupils with SEND are supported to be successful in their learning.

Pupils listen attentively in lessons. They understand what is expected of them and show highly positive attitudes to learning. Teachers help pupils to manage their feelings so that they are always ready to learn. If any pupils need extra help with this, the school acts swiftly and effectively to put tailored support in place.

In the early years, children thrive. They benefit from caring, attentive adults, a stimulating environment and a carefully planned curriculum. Children show high levels of concentration and perseverance. They become engrossed by activities that are set up for them. For example, classifying shells using different criteria, or working as a team to find out what is inside a pumpkin.

The school's programme for pupils' personal development is highly effective. Pupils learn about healthy lifestyles and relationships. They talk knowledgeably about peer pressure, consent and stereotyping. Pupils are very well prepared for life in modern Britain. They celebrate and value diversity. They show tolerance and respect for a range of religious beliefs and understand the purpose of rules. Pupils are proud to be members of the school or eco-council. Older pupils have ambitious goals for their future lives.

Senior leaders are highly reflective. They share an ambitious vision for the school and are focused on driving continuous improvements. Governors work alongside leaders, providing support, challenge and guidance. Staff are extremely positive about the way leaders and governors, look after their well-being and workload. A small number of parents would like the school to improve its communications systems. However, the majority are very happy with their children's education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

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| Unique reference number | 117478 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10255038 |
| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 3 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 238 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair of governing body | Michael Gallagher |
| Headteacher | Clare O'Sullivan |
| Website | www.stdominic.herts.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 5 March 2009 |

Information about this school

- The school does not use the services of any alternative provision.
- The school has a religious character. It received its last section 48 inspection in November 2019. The next section 48 inspection will be within 6 years of that date.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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 COVID19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with a range of leaders, including senior leaders, the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator (SENCo), and governors,

including the chair of governors. An inspector met with the school effectiveness adviser from the local authority, Herts for Learning (HfL) Education.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, history, and music. They looked at plans and samples of pupils' work from other subjects. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work. The lead inspector listened to a sample of pupils read to a familiar adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: 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' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation and policies, including the school development plan and minutes of governing body meetings.
- Inspectors reviewed the responses to Ofsted's parent and staff questionnaires. They also spoke with pupils, parents and staff to gather their views of the school.

Inspection team

Caroline Crozier, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Ania Vaughan

Ofsted Inspector

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