

Inspection of a good school: St Paul's Catholic Primary School, Alnwick

South Road, Alnwick, Northumberland NE66 2NU

Inspection dates:

5 and 6 March 2024

Outcome

St Paul's Catholic Primary School, Alnwick continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Eileen Lomax. This school is part of Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Anita Bath, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Harrison.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at this school exemplify the school's 'RESPECT' values, which include resilience, empathy and positivity. These values, along with the school's strong Christian ethos, underpin all that happens here. Staff and pupils embody the school's vision of 'growing in God's love to be the best we can be'. Pupils are proud to be part of the school family. They are happy and confident. Pupils understand and embody equality and tolerance. They reflect this in their day-to-day attitudes to each other. Pupils are proud to hold positions of responsibility across the school and fulfil these roles with diligence. For example, pupils of all ages work positively together as part of the school's 'buddy' system.

Pupils' behaviour in and around school is positive. Lessons proceed without disruption. Pupils have positive attitudes to their learning. Pupils enjoy lessons and engage well with their learning. Leaders have crafted a curriculum tailored to the local area. This helps to make pupils' learning relevant and exciting. Adults deal with any issues around behaviour quickly.

Leaders at St Paul's have very high expectations of pupils. These expectations are realised. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) achieve well.

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

The senior leadership team has overseen a process of further development and improvement across the entire curriculum. Subject leaders are knowledgeable and committed to their subjects. Well-trained staff deliver the curriculum with fidelity. Leaders

have carefully considered the development of cross-curricular links in subjects. For example, pupils use their mathematical knowledge to interpret climate graphs from different biomes in geography. They are able to make comparisons of rainfall and temperature in these locations and discuss their findings. Effective support and adaptations for pupils with SEND allow them to access the same ambitious curriculum as their peers. While the school has high expectations for achievement across the curriculum, some groups of pupils are not making the progress that they are capable of in writing.

Two-year-old children experience high-quality interactions with adults from their first day in the school's 'Little Lambs' provision. Their exposure to songs, rhymes and stories set firm foundations for later phonics teaching. There is a sharp focus, across early years and into key stage 1, on learning to read. Where pupils require additional support for phonics, staff deliver timely and focused interventions. Pupils develop confidence and fluency in reading. They develop a tangible love of reading. Older pupils enjoy the numerous opportunities they get to read for pleasure.

Early years provision centres around an ambitious and comprehensive curriculum. There is a clear focus on children's development of spoken language. Children are articulate and keen to engage in role play. In Nursery, children welcomed the inspector into 'the shop' and conversed at length using appropriate language. Adults immerse children in opportunities to develop their understanding of number and to promote writing. During the inspection, a group of children in Reception set up an agility course in the outdoor provision and timed each other as they completed the course. Names and times were carefully written down by children.

Positive relationships between all members of the school community are evident across school. Pupils' behaviour in and around school matches leaders' high expectations. The support that the school puts in place for pupils' pastoral care is highly effective. Pupils appreciate this. Some pupils act as well-being ambassadors. They understand their role as 'looking out for anyone who might feel sad inside' and are empowered to offer comfort. While pupils' attendance is in line with national figures, too many pupils are persistently absent.

The school has an exceptional offer for pupils' personal development. The school goes beyond the expected, providing pupils with a wide and rich series of experiences. For example, pupils talk with excitement about a recent visit from an astronaut and the opportunities they enjoy for adventurous activities along the coast. Some pupils visited Alnwick Gardens to better understand the importance of healthy eating. They grew their own food which was used in the school kitchens. Some pupils enjoyed a public speaking competition between the other primary schools in the trust. The school provides numerous areas of responsibility for pupils, including as spiritual ambassadors, head boy and girl and school councillors.

Leaders, including governors and trustees, have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Governors offer challenge under their scheme of delegation. Staff are positive about their workload and well-being. One member of staff

summed up the feelings of many by saying, 'I have never felt as praised and valued before as I do here.'

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some groups of pupils do not make sufficient progress in writing across key stage 2. This means they are not adequately prepared for the curriculum in key stage 3. The school should ensure that progress in writing, especially for boys and disadvantaged pupils, improves so that pupils are ready for the next stage of their education.
- The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school is too high. This means that these pupils miss a great deal of their education, struggle to catch up with their learning and fall behind their peers. The school should take further action to ensure these pupils attend school regularly.

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 predecessor school, St Paul's RC Voluntary Aided Primary School, to be good in October 2012.

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	148503
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10297536
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	224
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Harrison
CEO of the trust	Anita Bath
Headteacher	Eileen Lomax
Website	www.stpaulsalnwick.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St Pauls' Catholic Primary School, Alnwick converted to become an academy school in April 2021. When its predecessor school, St Paul's RC Voluntary Aided Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- The school is one of 39 schools in the Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust.
- A new senior leadership team has been appointed since the predecessor school was last inspected. The headteacher took up post in September 2019.
- The school runs provision for two-year-olds.
- The school operates a breakfast and after-school club.
- The school uses one registered alternative provision.
- As the school is designated as having a religious character, it is inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005. The last section 48 inspection of the school was in June 2018. The next inspection is due before July 2026.

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 their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, other school leaders, school staff, representatives of the governing body, representatives from the trust and a representative of the diocese.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, the inspector held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector listened to pupils from Years 1, 2 and 3 reading to a familiar adult.
- The inspector also met with leaders and discussed the curriculum in some other 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 culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspector considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.
- The inspector considered the responses to the online staff survey, including the free-text comments.

Inspection team

Richard Beadnall, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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