

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

Pemberton Road, Blackhill, Consett, County Durham DH8 8JD

Inspection dates:

26 and 27 March 2024

Outcome

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

The headteacher of this school is Victoria Ramshaw. This school is part of Bishop Wilkinson 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, Nick Hurn, OBE, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Angela Boyle.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a welcoming school where adults ensure that pupils feel safe and are ready to learn. Pupils are taught a broad curriculum by staff who have excellent subject knowledge. Pupils enjoy learning and they engage well in lessons.

There is a buzz of activity in early years. Children are confident in choosing creative activities and drawing on their imagination. They take pride in making bird houses and dens. There is a high level of purposeful conversation led by adults.

Pupils respond to the high expectations of behaviour set by staff. They understand the new behaviour system based on restorative practice. Pupils are keen to receive the praise and rewards given for positive behaviour.

Pupils are encouraged to be leaders. The school council actively promotes better parking and a reduction in cars speeding near the school. Their campaign has influenced the local council, which is now consulting on the introduction of traffic calming measures.

Pupils have many opportunities to develop spiritually. They lead worship, contributing to Celebration of the Word and whole-school mass every half term. Pupils enjoy sharing their thoughts and prayers with parents and carers, especially during Holy Week.

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

The trust is supporting the school through a period of change. This includes the induction of a new headteacher and changes to leaders of subject and special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school has introduced ambitious new subject curriculums for history and geography during this time. There has also been an emphasis on

improving the quality of mathematics education. Some parents feel they have not been sufficiently informed about the changes and believe some aspects of communication could be improved. The school has set up a parent communication group to consider ways to improve this.

Pupils achieve well in school, particularly in key stage 1. However, there was a dip in mathematics attainment at key stage 2 in the 2023 standardised assessment tests. This is attributed to some gaps in pupils' knowledge and inconsistency in the delivery of the mathematics curriculum. Since then, the school has strengthened the oversight of mathematics. There are regular checks to ensure that the detailed curriculum is being taught well. Pupils are very enthusiastic in lessons and have secure subject knowledge. Additional work on learning multiplication tables is benefiting pupils. They can complete calculations in a speedy, effective way.

The teaching of phonics is very successful. This is because teachers are consistent in teaching the highly structured phonics programme. There are regular checks on what pupils know. Their reading books are well matched so that they become fluent readers. In key stage 2, a well-considered programme for reading supports the development of comprehension skills and reading fluency. However, some pupils do not read for pleasure at home. They have not developed reading habits that lead to the joy of reading. The school is aware of this and has undertaken some initiatives such as author visits to promote the love of reading.

The scope of the revised history curriculum goes beyond national curriculum expectations. However, this curriculum is not fully embedded. Teachers have received training in understanding the new content. They know what to teach but there are some inconsistencies in the way the history curriculum is being taught. The school has not checked how the curriculum is being implemented. Therefore, teachers have not received feedback about teaching strategies. This means that some pupils are not secure in some subject knowledge.

Pupils with SEND are well supported. Teachers are confident in adapting lessons. This includes the use of apparatus in mathematics and prompts for writing in English. The sensory room is used effectively to provide a quieter environment for some pupils when they need it.

Routines for positive behaviour are well established. Pupils are highly respectful to one another. New arrangements for breaktimes provide more space for pupils to play in. Effective systems to follow up pupil absence are having a positive impact on school attendance.

Pupils are reflective about their own beliefs and learn about and respect others' faiths, feelings, and values. They are knowledgeable about fundamental British values and understand how these link to their everyday life. Pupils enjoy a variety of trips, which broaden their view of the world. These include visits to museums and residential experiences.

Staff are proud to work at this school. They feel well supported by school and trust leaders who have engaged with staff effectively to reduce their workload. Members of the local governing committee support and challenge leaders to develop further the quality of education for pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school does not monitor the implementation and impact of some subject curriculums well enough. This means that leaders are not sufficiently aware of the precise strengths and areas for development in the teaching of each subject that pupils study. The school should continue to develop and review monitoring processes in these subjects.
- The school has not fully developed ways to encourage a love of reading, particularly with key stage 2 pupils. This puts some pupils at a disadvantage compared to their peers who have developed a wider vocabulary and can draw on a range of books to compare texts. The school should continue to develop initiatives that encourage pupils to read more widely and on a regular basis.
- Some parents expressed concerns about communication with school. This is having a negative impact on how these parents view the school. Leaders should continue to ensure that communication procedures are reviewed and improved.

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 Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Blackhill, to be good in March 2015.

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	148413
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10297523
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	204
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Angela Boyle
Headteacher	Victoria Ramshaw
Website	www.blackhill-st-marys-rc.durham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	18 December 2018

Information about this school

- A new headteacher commenced their post in January 2024.
- This school is part of Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust.
- The school does not use any alternative education provision.
- The school is a member of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and has a Christian character. It is, therefore, also inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005. The diocese last carried out a section 48 inspection in October 2019.

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 school leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspector met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and the special educational needs coordinator. Meetings were also held with class teachers, including the early career teacher, and pupils.
- The inspector met also with representatives of the local governing committee and Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust.
- The inspector carried out deep dives into reading, mathematics, and history. For each deep dive, the inspector looked at curriculum planning, conducted joint lesson visits with leaders, spoke to pupils about their work and looked at pupils' books and samples of their work.
- Prior to the inspection, the inspector reviewed documents on the school's website, as well as published information about the school's performance and previous Ofsted inspections.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and around the school. She spoke with pupils about their views of the school and their learning, behaviour, and safety.
- 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.
- As well as speaking to parents in school, the inspector considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. The inspector took the views of staff into account through a number of meetings as well as their responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Mary Cook, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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