

Inspection of an outstanding school: St Mary Roman Catholic Primary School

Melbourn Road, Royston, Hertfordshire SG8 7DB

Inspection dates:

26 and 27 March 2024

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Julia Pearce. This school is part of The Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Pat Murden, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Patrick Leeson.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are very happy at this welcoming school. They benefit from the school's ethos of wanting everyone to do well. Some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) arrive at the school with negative past experiences in education. Adults quickly help these pupils settle and understand what they need to do well in school.

Pupils care for each other. They routinely demonstrate the 'Gospel values' that the school teaches. Children in the early years share and take turns. They delight in playing and learning together. Older pupils take responsibility for younger pupils, such as by reading with them. Older pupils also serve as positive role models for younger pupils, demonstrating positive learning attitudes.

Pupils are inspired by staff's passion for learning. In lessons, pupils are focused and keen to succeed. Pupils approach their studies with determination. When discussing what they are trying to learn, pupils speak articulately and enthusiastically. Children in the early years quickly understand the importance of learning and take pleasure in their achievements. Pupils also benefit from the school's many opportunities to develop their own interests and talents. For example, all pupils benefit from learning a musical instrument. Pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education as well-rounded individuals.

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

Over the last two years, the school, with effective support from the trust, has redesigned aspects of the curriculum. Most areas of the curriculum are well organised and outline exactly what pupils must learn. Teachers use leaders' guidance to arrange effective learning activities, including for pupils with SEND. Many subjects are taught exceptionally well. However, a few curriculum areas are still being developed to ensure all staff are confident in how to teach the ambitious curriculum aims consistently.

Teachers routinely check what pupils know and understand. When pupils show signs of falling behind, teachers provide effective support. In the best taught areas of the curriculum, teachers give pupils plenty of opportunities to recall important knowledge. However, there are some areas of the curriculum where the knowledge pupils must remember over time is not clarified. As a result, teachers do not know what key knowledge pupils need to review in these subjects. Consequently, some pupils forget important elements of what they have studied in certain areas of the curriculum. This hinders them learning parts of the curriculum in the depth leaders intend.

The school teaches reading well. From when they start in the early years, pupils learn to love reading. As a result, many pupils see reading as an enjoyable leisure activity and suggest books to their friends. The school's approach to teaching pupils early reading is very well delivered across the school. Children in the early years quickly learn how to blend basic sounds. In key stage 1, pupils develop their understanding of phonics and become confident readers. The school provides a rich collection of texts for pupils to read. Staff ensure these books are exactly matched to pupils' needs. For pupils that find reading difficult, staff provide expert support that ensures pupils learn what they need to read effectively and access the curriculum.

The school makes clear their expectations for pupils' behaviour. Pupils live up to the high standards set and develop positive attitudes to learning. Staff meet the needs of pupils with social, emotional and mental health challenges very well. When these pupils are unsettled, staff help them with effective strategies that ensure pupils regulate their behaviour.

The school has worked well with families to improve attendance over recent years. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils, however, remains lower than the rest of the school.

The school ensures that pupils learn about the diverse lifestyles and beliefs in modern society. Pupils understand the importance of respecting others' differences. When discussing differing views, pupils show sensitivity towards others. The school also provides pupils lots of opportunities to develop confidence as independent young people. For example, starting in key stage 1, pupils take part in residential learning events, such as overnight stays at the school. This culminates in key stage 2 with nearly week-long trips to places of interest around the country.

Leaders have forged strong relationships with parents and staff. Parents highly praise the work of staff and leaders. All staff are proud and enjoy working at the school. Leaders take suitable steps to help staff maintain a reasonable workload.

The trust and governors have accurate views of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They work well together to provide leaders the support and challenge they need to continue improving 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)

- Some areas of the school's curriculum do not identify exactly what pupils need to know and remember. As a result, teachers are not clear what is the key knowledge or prior learning they should review with pupils in these subjects. This leads to pupils not being secure in their retrieval of important knowledge. The school must ensure that in these few subjects, the curriculum clarifies explicitly what pupils must remember and that teachers check pupils can recall this important knowledge to ensure they learn the curriculum as fully intended.
- The school's efforts to improve pupils' attendance is not having the desired effect on disadvantaged pupils. Some of these pupils do not maintain regular attendance. The school must develop strategies to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.

Background

When we have judged outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in December 2017.

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	138292
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10295052
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	234
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Patrick Leeson
Headteacher	Julia Pearce
Website	www.stmarysroyston.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	5 and 6 December 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of The Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust.
- The school uses no alternative providers.
- This is a school with a Catholic ethos within the Diocese of Westminster. The school received its most recent section 48 inspection in January 2018 and will be reinspected approximately five years from then.

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 held discussions with the chief executive officer of the trust, governors, the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders, teachers, members of support staff and pupils.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and physical education. 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 also discussed the wider curriculum, looked at a range of curriculum documents, looked at samples of pupils' work and spoke to some pupils about their learning 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 observed the behaviour of pupils in lessons and during social time.
- The inspector looked at relevant documents, considered pupils work and held discussions with leaders, staff and pupils about the provision for pupils' personal development.
- The inspector considered the 32 staff responses, the 39 pupil responses and the 121 parent responses to Ofsted's online surveys.

Inspection team

Al Mistrano, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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