

Inspection of a good school: St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School

Magdalen Road, St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex TN37 6EU

Inspection dates:

23 and 24 April 2024

Outcome

St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils have a very clear understanding of the values of their school. Their attendance has improved significantly during the last year. They respond positively to praise, to additional challenge, and to the high expectations of staff. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are supported well here, as are those with English as an additional language. As a result, classrooms are purposeful places where pupils from a wide range of backgrounds achieve increasingly well.

Older pupils are acutely conscious of their responsibility to set positive examples for younger peers. They are openly proud of the multicultural aspect of their friendships. They feel that they have a voice and are confident in expressing their feelings and opinions when asked.

In discussions with the inspector, pupils acknowledged that behaviour is not always perfect, though were clear that when friendships do break down, they need to play their own part in making things better. One freely offered quote during a discussion with pupils new to the school was that there are no 'full-time' bullies here. Those who have been at the school longer agree. They feel that the school is a safe place to be and that any worries are dealt with quickly by staff.

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

This is a good and improving school. Much progress has been made since the school's last inspection. Leaders at all levels, including those in positions of governance, have ensured that there is a clear upward trajectory over time. The school's ongoing work with the local English and mathematics hub schools is paying dividends. Positive partnerships with other schools are also benefiting staff and pupils alike. Staff are positive about the support of leaders and are proud of their important work as a close-knit team.

The curriculum is evolving. The school intends that it closely matches the needs and aspirations of the diverse community of pupils it serves. A programme of revision is under way. The school knows that some subjects need to be refined further to ensure that the way learning is sequenced over time helps pupils to build securely on what they already know and can do.

Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), benefit from tailored and timely support when needed. Much of this happens in the classroom without additional fuss. Some is delivered in collaboration from professionals from outside the school. Pupils new to the country, many with English as an additional language, are also supported well.

Children get off to a good start in the early years. They work and play together well. Staff are attentive and understand the individual needs of children. The school's work to teach pupils to read starts in Reception. It has been revised and strengthened recently. Staff have attended a range of additional training to support them to teach phonics. Classroom visits showed a high degree of consistency in the way that the programme is delivered. Pupils who are in danger of falling behind are supported well because staff have a sound understanding of their progress.

Older pupils also benefit from a well-organised programme to support their reading and love of the written word. As a result, they enjoy books and are happy to share their preferred authors and discuss their likes and dislikes, often linked to the set texts they explore together as a class.

Pupils are equally positive about their work as mathematicians. The school has worked hard to develop the way pupils support each other in their learning. Classroom visits show that this aspect is increasingly successful in mathematics lessons. Pupils relish additional challenge because they understand that mistakes sometimes need to be made in order to build future success. Because of this, they are increasingly confident to share their work with their peers, free from the worry of negative judgements when their answers are not quite right.

The programme to support pupils' wider development is a strength of the school. This is firmly built on the school's Catholic ethos and equally valued by those from different faiths and backgrounds. Pupils talk about their enjoyment of being 'creative'. Older pupils are excited about their impending residential trip and the challenges this will bring in the form of outdoor adventure.

Parents are positive about what they see as equal opportunities for all and the school's focus on nurture and the well-being of pupils. Boys like to dance here. Girls enjoy competitive sports against other schools. Respect flows freely between pupils and staff. People are allowed to have a sense of humour. Kindness is the norm.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some foundation subjects, the school's curriculum planning does not define clearly enough the key knowledge and skills that pupils need to know and develop. Where this is the case, teachers are not as clear about what they need to teach or what pupils already know and can do. End points are not as well defined as they could be, meaning that pupils are not as prepared as they might be as they move on to secondary education. Work has started on a review of foundation subjects. Some of this work is complete. Some is still ongoing and now needs further refinement. Leaders need to complete this work as a matter of urgency. This will ensure that all staff have a clear understanding of the key knowledge and skills that pupils need across all curriculum subjects as they move through the school year on year.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in February 2019.

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	114574
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10321802
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	204
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Sylvia Cousins
Headteacher	Claire O'Rourke
Website	www.st-mary-star.e-sussex.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	12 and 13 February 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a voluntary-aided Roman Catholic primary school in the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. The school also works closely with the local authority.
- The school's last section 48 inspection took place in November 2021.
- The school does not use 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 his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held a wide range of meetings with leaders at all levels, as well as teaching and support staff. He met with the chair of the governing body, accompanied by two other governors. He also talked to representatives of the diocese and the local authority on the telephone.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early 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. He heard some pupils read to a known adult. He also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects with leaders.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of parents, 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 gathered evidence to explore the impact of pupils' behaviour, the school's wider curriculum offer and how leaders support staff with their workload.
- Pupils were talked to throughout the inspection to gain their views about the school. The inspector also held a formal meeting with a representative group of pupils.
- The inspector considered the views of parents submitted through Ofsted Parent View. The views of staff were also considered through Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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