

Inspection of a good school: St Benet's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Fulwell Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR6 9QU

Inspection dates:

30 April and 1 May 2024

Outcome

St Benet's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

There is a solid sense of community at St Benet's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School. The Catholic ethos is palpable within this inclusive, welcoming community. Adults know pupils well. Strong, trusting relationships are evident. Pupils are proud of their school. Pupils are respectful of one another and of staff.

Playtimes are joyful occasions. Older pupils act as buddies. They support younger children in their play. Some pupils are what the school calls 'Happiness Heroes'. They keep a watchful eye on their peers to ensure everyone is happy and safe. Pupils who need a quiet space enjoy playing games in the 'you are not alone club'. Pupils are safe in school. They know that staff or an anti-bullying ambassador will help them if they have any worries.

The school has high expectations for all pupils. Pupils respond well to these expectations. They work hard in lessons and demonstrate exemplary behaviour. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve highly in most subjects. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

The development of pupils' character is exceptional. The school provides a vast range of leadership opportunities for pupils. Pupils speak with pride and enthusiasm about their roles. They say their voice is listened to and valued.

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

The school has redesigned its ambitious and broad curriculum. This new curriculum is progressive and well sequenced. Essential knowledge, skills and vocabulary are clearly identified for each subject. Children in early years get off to a good start. Activities are carefully designed to support children's learning and enjoyment. There is a sharp focus on

communication and language skills. Children in the early years are well prepared for learning in key stage 1.

In key stage 1 and 2, there is variability in the school's implementation of the curriculum. In many subjects, teachers have the expertise to deliver the curriculum well. Where this is the case, they introduce new learning clearly and provide activities that help pupils to develop understanding. However, in some subjects, the tasks selected for pupils to complete do not help them to learn as well as they could. At times, the school's checks on what pupils know and can do are not as effective as they need to be. They do not provide the school with clear information about next steps in learning. As a result, in some subjects, at times learning is not always maximised.

Reading is a school priority. In the early years, children start their reading journey in Nursery sharing lots of books, rhymes and songs. In Reception class, children learn to read through a highly structured phonics programme. The school has trained some staff to be reading experts. They deliver the reading programme with success. However, a small number of staff have received only basic training. They are unable to implement the programme with precision. This delays progress for some pupils in gaining the knowledge and skills they need to become confident, fluent readers.

The school successfully promotes a love of reading. Younger pupils enjoy sharing books with the older pupils who act as 'Reading Champions'. Enticing reading areas and a rich variety of texts help pupils to develop a genuine love of reading.

Mathematics is a strength of the school. The curriculum has been carefully sequenced and planned to enable pupils to build on prior learning effectively. Pupils regularly solve problems and use reasoning in mathematics. They are very positive about mathematics. Many pupils say it is one of their favourite subjects.

The school identifies the additional needs of pupils with SEND quickly and accurately. It works well with external agencies to ensure that these pupils receive timely, high-quality support. As a result, pupils with SEND successfully learn the same curriculum as their peers and achieve well.

Pupils consistently display high standards of behaviour. They behave extremely well in lessons and concentrate on their learning. Pupils attend school regularly. Leaders support families effectively when barriers to attending school arise.

The school has designed an impressive programme of learning and enrichment activities to support pupils' wider development. Pupils show a mature understanding of diversity and equality. Pupils understand the fundamental British values. They can relate these to their everyday lives and talk about them with confidence. The school places a strong emphasis on developing pupils' talents and broadening their interests. Pupils benefit from regular opportunities to take part in a wide range of sporting events, clubs and visits.

Governors have a clear picture of the school's strengths and priorities. They regularly ask questions to check that improvements are being made. Leaders have created a school

where staff are happy and feel valued. Staff appreciate leaders' consideration of their well-being and workload.

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 subjects, the school's delivery of curriculum content and use of assessment to identify, and address, gaps in pupils' knowledge is not as effective as it needs to be. This is limiting the achievement of pupils in some subjects. The school should provide training and support for staff so that they can implement the curriculum successfully and assess pupils' understanding effectively in order to ensure that pupils develop knowledge and skills consistently well across the curriculum.
- The school does not deliver its early reading scheme consistently. This means that some pupils do not receive the precise support they need to help them to read as quickly, or successfully, as they could. The school should review the training it provides to staff to ensure that all staff have the expertise to implement the early reading scheme successfully.

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 school to be good in October 2014.

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	108837
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10297266
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	342
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Denise Joan Willis
Headteacher	Ann Blakey
Website	www.stbenetsschoolsunderland.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	13 November 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has a Roman Catholic religious character. Its most recent section 48 inspection was in June 2015. Its next section 48 inspection will be within eight school years.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision for pupils.

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 spoke with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, members of the local governing body, curriculum leaders and other staff members.
- The inspector held telephone conversations with representatives of the local authority and the diocese.

- 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.
- The inspector also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- 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 reviewed the responses to Ofsted's parent surveys, Parent View, and spoke with a range of staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Alison Stephenson, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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