

Inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, a Voluntary Academy

Tong Lane, Bacup, Lancashire OL13 9LJ

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 April 2024

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Inadequate
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Inadequate
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Ofsted has not previously inspected St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School as an academy under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 as, until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last graded inspection of the predecessor school.

The headteacher of this school is Claire Mills. This school is part of the Romero Catholic 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 (CEO), Des Callaghan, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Angela Ager.

What is it like to attend this school?

Some pupils enjoy learning at St Mary's. They also appreciate the opportunity to take part in the many trips and visits that the school provides. However, other pupils do not share the same enjoyment of school as their peers. Pupils regularly experience disruption to their learning, and they feel unsafe in classrooms and on the playground, mainly due to the behaviour of others.

Pupils do not achieve as well as they should. The school does not have high enough expectations for pupils' academic success. The curriculum that they experience is not delivered consistently well across different subjects. Some staff do not have the knowledge and skills that they need to make sure that pupils gain a deep body of knowledge.

Children in the early years have a more positive experience than pupils in key stage 2. Despite weaknesses in the overall quality of education, they experience a more coherent curriculum with purposeful learning activities.

Pupils enjoy taking on some leadership responsibilities as librarians and as part of the G.I.F.T team. Within this team they relish the opportunity to work alongside pupils from other schools on projects linked to recycling or promoting spirituality.

The school does not safeguard pupils effectively. It has not taken sufficient action to protect pupils' and staff's welfare. For example, the school has not followed up on safeguarding concerns or put support in place for pupils who are at risk of harm.

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

Trustees and the members of the local governing body do not understand their statutory responsibilities. They do not fulfil their duties in respect of safeguarding and they do not have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. Those responsible for governance have not provided sufficient challenge to the school to ensure that pupils receive a good education. They have done too little to improve pupils' behaviour or to ensure that pupils attend school regularly.

The school's efforts to improve pupils' achievement have not had enough impact. This has been compounded further by turbulence in staffing. Many teachers have left the school during the previous two years. This churn in staffing means that the delivery of the curriculum is inconsistent across classes and subjects. While some pupils learn what they should, some others, especially some pupils in key stage 2, do not.

The school has designed an ambitious curriculum, which makes clear the key knowledge that pupils should learn. This begins in the Reception class and builds appropriately through to the end of Year 6. The curriculum in the early years has recently been strengthened. This revised curriculum supports children's learning and development in a more structured way than it did previously. This means that

children in the early years are increasingly better prepared for the move into Year 1. Staff are able to identify the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) accurately. They ensure that these pupils have access to the same curriculum as their peers.

Although staff know what should be taught in key stages 1 and 2, the school has not provided the training and support that staff need to deliver curriculum content consistently well. As a result, some pupils often experience learning which is a series of disconnected lessons. This does not help them to build securely on their previous knowledge, or prepare them for what they will learn next. Some staff are ill equipped to identify what pupils already know and can do. For example, they are unable to identify gaps in pupils' learning. This prevents some pupils, including those with SEND, from building a rich body of knowledge. Some pupils are not prepared well enough for key stage 3.

In recent times, the school has made early reading a key priority. In this area, it has ensured that staff receive training and regular coaching so that they have the expertise to deliver the phonics programme effectively. This work has proved to be successful. Children in the Nursery class enjoy listening to and joining in with stories. This prepares them well for learning phonics as soon as they enter the Reception class. Pupils practise reading using books that contain the sounds that they already know. Staff provide pupils with extra support if they need it. This helps these pupils to catch up quickly with their peers. Most pupils become successful and fluent readers by the end of Year 2 in readiness for key stage 2.

Reading across key stage 2 has not been prioritised in the same manner. Several staff are unclear on how to build on the positive start that pupils make in early reading. Staff lack the expertise to support pupils to read fluently and with accuracy. As a result, by the end of Year 6, some pupils have gaps in their reading knowledge. This makes it difficult for them to access key knowledge in other subjects.

The school does not support staff to manage pupils' behaviour. There is an absence of clear policies and procedures to promote positive behaviour. This, coupled with the school's low expectations for pupils' behaviour, means that staff are free to deal with incidents of misbehaviour as they wish. Often, these strategies are unsuccessful.

Some pupils find it difficult to manage their emotions. They do not receive the support that they need to help them to overcome past experiences. This causes many to behave in unacceptable ways during the school day, especially during playtimes and lunchtimes. Many pupils stated that they do not feel safe at these times of the day. However, few report their concerns because they are not convinced that any action will be taken to reduce their worries. Incidents of fighting and swearing during breaktimes are commonplace. Some pupils take themselves out of lessons and run around the school building. As a result, the school environment is a volatile place to learn, play and work.

The school, including those responsible for governance, has not taken sufficient action to support staff to deliver the curriculum consistently well or to tackle poor behaviour. This has had a negative impact on staff's workload, well-being and welfare.

The school does not have a clear understanding of why some pupils do not attend school regularly or on time. This means that the school is unable to spot patterns in pupils' behaviour and absence. In turn, the strategies used to bring about improvement are not effective. Attendance rates are low.

Pupils enjoy different events that are celebrated in school, such as World Book Day and mental health week. They find these experiences help them to learn more. Pupils talked with confidence about how to stay safe online. They are well prepared for the changes that will happen to their bodies as they approach puberty. However, pupils' understanding of democracy or respect for others who are different to themselves are underdeveloped. While the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum does include these aspects, weaknesses in how they are delivered means that pupils are not as well prepared for their future lives as they should be.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Staff know how to identify the signs of potential harm to pupils and how to report these concerns. However, records show that these concerns are not dealt with appropriately. The school does not have effective systems in place to check on pupils who may be at risk of harm. The school too readily accepts when parents and carers do not wish to work with staff or external agencies. This places vulnerable pupils at considerable risk.

Trustees and members of the local governing body have a relaxed approach to safeguarding. They do not know, or check, how effectively the school safeguards pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school, including the trust, does not fulfil its statutory duties to safeguard pupils and to ensure staff's welfare. This puts pupils and staff at risk of harm. The school, and those responsible for governance, must take immediate steps to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils and staff.
- Trustees and the members of the local governing body do not provide sufficient challenge to the school to ensure that pupils receive a good education. As a result, some pupils underachieve and are not well prepared for the next stage of their education. Trustees and members of the local governing body should ensure

that they improve their effectiveness so that they have an accurate oversight of the school's work.

- The school has low expectations of pupils' behaviour. It has not established a suitable behaviour system or clear routines that are understood by staff and pupils. Consequently, pupils' conduct in lessons and around the school is poor. This interrupts other pupils' learning. It also makes other pupils feel unsafe. The school must ensure that there are high expectations for pupils' behaviour and that all staff are equipped with the knowledge and skills that they need to tackle poor behaviour.
- The school does not provide effective support to vulnerable pupils or to those who find managing their emotions difficult. This, in turn, contributes to the poor behaviour on display around the school. There are limited opportunities for pupils to share their concerns and worries. This means that pupils who have experienced trauma or difficulties in their lives do not receive the help and support that they need. The school should make sure that staff are suitably equipped to help pupils to manage their emotions, and to respond to pupils' concerns. This is to ensure that pupils feel safe and are ready to learn.
- Pupils' absence rates are high. The school, and those responsible for governance, do not keep a close enough track on pupils' rates of attendance. This puts some pupils at risk of harm. It also means that they miss much of their education. The school should monitor attendance more effectively to identify why pupils fail to attend and to follow up swiftly on any pupil absences.
- In key stages 1 and 2, teachers have not received the support or the guidance that they need to fully implement the curriculum, including reading in key stage 2, as intended. This means that some pupils do not build their knowledge securely over time. The school should ensure that staff are well trained to deliver the curriculum.
- Pupils' understanding of fundamental British values is underdeveloped. This results in pupils showing a lack of regard for others, including pupils and adults in the school. It also means that they do not gain respect for differences between people in modern society. The school must ensure that the PSHE curriculum is delivered well so that pupils are better prepared for life in modern Britain.

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	147592
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10321464
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	147
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Angela Ager
CEO of the trust	Des Callaghan
Headteacher	Claire Mills
Website	www.stmarysbacup.org
Dates of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School converted to become an academy school in November 2019. When its predecessor school, St Mary's Catholic Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- The school is part of the Romero Catholic Academy Trust.
- This is a Roman Catholic school. The last section 48 inspection for schools of a religious character took place in July 2018. The next scheduled inspection should take place in the academic year 2024/2025.
- A new headteacher has been appointed since the school joined the trust.
- The substantive headteacher was unavailable at the time of this inspection.
- The school runs a before- and after-school club for pupils.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision for pupils.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection that the school has received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any ongoing impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- The lead inspector spoke with school leaders and members of staff. She also met with the CEO and the director for primary schools within the trust. The lead inspector held discussions with the chair of trustees and representatives of the local governing body, including the chair of governors. She also spoke with a representative of the local authority and the diocese.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, they 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 lead inspector observed pupils from Years 1 to 3 read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects. They spoke with leaders and pupils. Inspectors reviewed samples of pupils' work in these curriculum areas.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: 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 inspectors reviewed a range of documents including records of governing body meetings, leaders' evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and documents relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- The inspectors spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences at school and observed their behaviour at playtime. They considered the views of pupils shared through Ofsted's online survey for pupils.
- The inspectors spoke with staff about their workload and well-being. They considered the views of staff shared through Ofsted's online survey.

- The inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.

Inspection team

Sue Dymond, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Julie Stevens

Ofsted Inspector

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