

Inspection of Saint Mary's Catholic Primary School

Belgrave Avenue, Congleton, Cheshire CW12 1HT

Inspection dates: 9 and 10 May 2024

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

This school was last inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 seven years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between graded inspections under section 5 of the Act. 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.

The head of school is Gregory Merrick. This school is part of Our Lady Help of Christians 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), Mark Mountcastle, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by John Kalnins.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), enjoy belonging to this local, welcoming school. They relish the many opportunities that they are given to cooperate, play and spend time with their friends. They take part in activities such as curling, trampolining and singing stars. Pupils spoke with sheer joy about recent residential visits.

The school has high expectations for pupils' achievement. Pupils experience a curriculum which is broad and links to their school context. However, weaknesses in the previous curriculum offer means that some pupils have gaps in their knowledge. They are not as well prepared for their future learning as they should be.

Most pupils share warm and respectful relationships with staff and with their peers. The school has recently revised their behaviour systems. This is bringing about improvements in the way that staff deal with incidents of poor behaviour or bullying. Records show that the school responds swiftly to any concerns which pupils or parents and carers raise.

Pupils benefit from activities that help to keep them physically active. For example, they enjoy playing sports such as football and tag rugby. They appreciate the opportunity to represent their school competitively in local tournaments.

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

The school has experienced some considerable challenges in recent years. This has led to a turbulent period in terms of staffing and leadership of the school. Trust leaders and members of the local governing body have recognised that the quality of education that pupils receive has declined. They have taken positive action to enlist external support to aid the school to bring about improvement.

As part of its improvement work, the school has recently revised the curriculum. Staff appreciate these changes and the positive impact they have had on their workload and ability to teach. For example, the newly introduced curriculum provides staff with high quality resources that reduce the amount of preparation time.

In most subjects, the curriculum is ordered in a logical way. It flows well across key stages 1 and 2. The important knowledge that pupils should learn is broken down so that it is clear how they will progress through the curriculum. However, this is less well developed in the early years. This means that teachers are less sure about what children in the Nursery and Reception classes should know and be able to do. This hinders their learning. It means that they are not fully prepared for Year 1.

The 2023 published data shows that the proportion of pupils who met the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6 was in line with

the national average. Typically, current pupils continue to learn well in these subjects. However, pupils' learning across the full breadth of the curriculum is more varied. Pupils did not learn well during the time that the previous curriculum was in existence. This means that in most subjects, with the exception of English and mathematics, many pupils have gaps in their learning. This makes it difficult for them to access some of the more ambitious subject content in the new curriculums.

Teachers' ability to pinpoint gaps in learning are at various stages of effectiveness. At times, the checks on what pupils have learned and remembered over time do not identify where pupils have difficulties, missed knowledge or misconceptions. This slows pupils' learning and accounts for their uneven achievement across the curriculum.

Pupils with SEND fare better than some of their peers. This is because the school identifies the additional needs of pupils with SEND swiftly. These pupils access the right support, often using external expertise, to help pupils with SEND succeed.

There is a strong emphasis on developing children's language skills in the Nursery and Reception classes. To counteract the weaknesses in the previous phonics programme, a new approach has recently been introduced. Staff are beginning to put their training in place so that they are delivering the programme with greater confidence. Even so, the programme is not taught consistently well. For example, some staff do not ensure that they pronounce sounds accurately. This leads to pupils gaining misconceptions which get in the way of future learning. Some pupils are not confident or fluent readers by the end of Year 2.

Books are part and parcel of school life. Children in the provision for two-year-olds enjoy listening to stories. They are keen to join in when familiar tales are told. Children in the early years and pupils in key stage 1 read books that are well matched to the letters and the sounds that they know. However, older pupils, who have not benefited from this new approach, have not developed a love of reading. They are not inspired by authors and literature. While pupils do read within school, many pupils do not independently enjoy reading. The school does not do enough to encourage pupils to read widely and often.

Pupils are polite. They typically behave well and for the most part they take part in lessons without causing any disruption. However, up until recently, the school has not done enough to promote positive attitudes to learning. This is reflected in pupils' books which are often poorly presented and show unfinished work. This has been accepted by staff over time. Pupils do not have sufficient pride in their learning.

The school promotes pupils' personal development well. Pupils benefit from a well-thought-out curriculum for personal, social and health and economic education. They understand how to keep themselves safe online. They are confident in what they would do if they saw something unacceptable when working and playing on the internet. Pupils learn about keeping themselves healthy and the importance of personal hygiene. However, pupils' understanding of fundamental British values is less well developed. This is because staff do not ensure that pupils learn enough

about being a member of British society. This hinders pupils' readiness for the next steps in their lives.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

While pupils are safe at this school, inspectors found some shortcomings in the safeguarding arrangements. The school does not have a joined-up approach to recording all aspects that may contribute to keeping a pupil safe from harm. This makes it challenging for the school to carefully monitor safeguarding concerns. It also makes it difficult for the school, trust and local governing body to evaluate the effectiveness of their safeguarding practices. However, pupils are not at immediate risk of harm.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school has not identified the essential knowledge that children in the early years must learn and in what order this should be taught. This makes it difficult for teachers to design learning that enables children to build a secure body of knowledge over time. This results in some children not being well prepared for Year 1. The school should ensure that teachers know what children must learn and when this should be taught so that pupils are ready to make a successful start when they enter key stage 1.
- Weaknesses in the previous curriculum mean that pupils have gaps in their knowledge. Added to this, teachers do not revisit key elements of learning frequently enough to bridge these gaps. Consequently, some pupils have insecure foundations on which to build new learning. The school should ensure that teachers address gaps in pupils' learning and provide sufficient opportunities to revisit and recap the most important learning.
- The phonics programme is not delivered consistently well. As a result, some pupils struggle to become fluent competent readers by the end of Year 2. Some older pupils show a lack of enthusiasm for reading. The school should ensure that staff receive further training to be able to deliver the phonics programme as intended and to promote a love of reading across the school.
- Over time, the school has not done enough to develop positive attitudes to learning. Consequently, some pupils show a lack of pride in their work. The school should ensure that expectations of pupils' work are raised so that they approach learning with a great desire to do their very best.
- Some aspects of pupils' wider development are not secure. This means that they are not as well prepared for life in modern Britain as they should be. The school should ensure that pupils gain a deeper knowledge of fundamental British values so that they are ready for their next steps.

- The school does not have a joined-up approach for recording safeguarding concerns. This makes it difficult for the school, trust and local governing body to evaluate the effectiveness of their safeguarding practices. The school should ensure that all relevant information is shared and logged so that every member of the safeguarding team is aware of each pupil and their specific needs.

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	141826
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	10337705
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary Academy
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	183
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Kalnins
CEO of the trust	Mark Mountcastle
Headteacher	Gregory Merrick (head of school)
Website	www.saintmaryscongleton.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	12 and 13 December 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Academy Trust.
- This is a Roman Catholic school. The last section 48 inspection for schools of a religious character took place in January 2020. The next scheduled inspection should take place in the academic year 2026 and 2027.
- There has been a change in leadership since the previous inspection. There is currently an acting head of school in place.
- The school provides early education for two-year-old children.
- 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.

- 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 of the school.
- The lead inspector spoke with school leaders and members of staff. She also met with the CEO. 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 diocese and the local authority.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and physical education. 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 reading 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

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