

Inspection of St Nicholas Catholic Primary School

Ringswell Avenue, Exeter, Devon EX1 3EG

Inspection dates:	24 and 25 September 2024
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Good

The headteacher of this school is Damian Railston. This school is part of the Plymouth CAST Multi 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, Zoe Batten, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ruth O'Donovan.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at St Nicholas Catholic Primary School are friendly and welcoming. They attend well. The school is emerging from an unsettling time. There have been significant changes to leadership and staffing. The school recognises that the curriculum needs strengthening and has made a positive start. However, an ambitious curriculum is not yet securely in place. As a result, the quality of education that pupils receive is not yet good.

The personal development of pupils is a strength of the school and is informed by its distinctive values. Pupils appreciate the rewards they receive for demonstrating these values. Pupils sometimes join the school mid-year. Each new pupil gets the help they need to settle in swiftly. Pupils are safe. They are confident that if they have any worries or concerns, staff will help them sort these out. However, behaviour expectations are not commonly understood. As a result, some pupils do not have positive attitudes towards their education.

Pupils develop their talents and interests through extra-curricular clubs. They take part in activities such as football and chess. Pupils are proud to represent their school at sporting events. They visit places of interest, such as museums. Through these experiences, pupils build an appreciation of wider cultural opportunities.

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

There is an ambitious vision in place, but the impact of this is not yet realised. The school has made many positive changes to the curriculum. However, there is still significant work to do to ensure that pupils benefit from them. In many subjects, the curriculum is not yet fully developed or implemented. Consequently, pupils are not supported well enough to build up their subject knowledge. Pupils lose focus and motivation to study when the curriculum is not well structured or well taught.

In some subjects, such as mathematics, the curriculum sets out the essential knowledge that pupils need to learn and the order in which they do so. However, not all staff have the expertise to teach the curriculum effectively. In addition, regular checks are not made on how well pupils understand the curriculum. Therefore, some pupils move on to new learning with gaps in their knowledge still present. Opportunities to revisit important knowledge are limited.

The early years curriculum is well planned and detailed. The school has made improvements to the learning environment. However, staff have not received the support and training they need to teach the curriculum effectively. Complex tasks are sometimes introduced before children have mastered key learning.

The school has taken steps to develop a love of reading. The library is well stocked and the texts children read cover a wide range of genres. In all classes, pupils are encouraged to read regularly. Older pupils have a positive view of reading. Children in Nursery enjoy listening to stories. As soon as children join in Reception Year, they start learning the school's chosen phonics programme. Books match the sounds they know. However, the

phonics curriculum is not consistently implemented or adapted to the needs of pupils. Beyond phonics, the reading curriculum does not define the important knowledge and skills pupils need. Consequently, pupils do not build incrementally on what they already know.

St Nicholas is a school for all. It has seen a rise in the number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including those with education, health and care plans. Pupils have detailed learning plans with precise and measurable targets. However, shortcomings in curriculum design and implementation have an impact on pupils with SEND. Along with their peers, pupils with SEND do not develop detailed knowledge across the curriculum.

The school's work to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is of a high quality. Pupils develop a sense of moral purpose through charitable initiatives such as caring for the environment. They develop an age-appropriate understanding of the protected characteristics and British values. They talk knowledgeably about the importance of the rule of law and democracy. Pupils are eager to find out about the lives of others. They know the importance of treating everyone fairly. They learn about potential dangers when online and in the community.

The headteacher, trustees and local governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They have the necessary expertise to remedy the areas that require further development. Their actions have begun to have some positive impact on pupils' experiences. The school works with parents to support pupils' education. Staff are supportive of the leadership of the school and are proud to be part of 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)

- The curriculum is not fully developed or implemented as intended. Consequently, pupils are not sufficiently supported in building their subject knowledge incrementally. The school needs to ensure that the curriculum in all subjects is well designed and implemented effectively.
- Not all staff have received the necessary training to deliver the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils. Consequently, pupils are not fully supported to achieve the aims and ambitions of the curriculum. The school needs to ensure that all staff have the expertise to teach the current and planned curriculum effectively.
- The use of assessment does not identify whether pupils have learned the curriculum as intended. Therefore, gaps in pupils' understanding are not identified and rectified. The

school needs to ensure that teachers' use of assessment informs subsequent curriculum planning, so that all pupils learn successfully.

- The behaviour policy is not implemented consistently. As a result, pupils do not always exhibit positive behaviour and conduct. The school should ensure that staff are suitably equipped to implement the behaviour policy consistently, so that pupils clearly understand the expectations.

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	139394
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10344658
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	313
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ruth O'Donovan
CEO of the trust	Zoe Batten
Headteacher	Damian Railston
Website	www.st-nicholas-exeter.devon.sch.uk/website
Dates of previous inspection	27 and 28 November 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Plymouth CAST Multi Academy Trust.
- This is a Roman Catholic school. The most recent section 48 inspection took place in November 2023.
- The school has a nursery school for three- and four-year-old children.
- The school uses one alternative provider.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator, subject leaders, members of the governing body, the trust's school improvement officer and the director of education, who was the representative of the chair of the board of trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and computing. For each deep dive, inspectors 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.
- 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 considered responses to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. The inspectors also considered responses to the staff survey and responses to the survey for pupils.

Inspection team

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