

# Inspection of St Margaret Mary Catholic Primary School, Carlisle

Kirklands Road, Carlisle, Cumbria CA2 4JD

---

Inspection dates:	8 and 9 October 2024
The quality of education	<b>Inadequate</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Inadequate</b>
Early years provision	<b>Inadequate</b>
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Luke Denny. This school is part of the Mater Christi 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 (CEO), Jacky Kennedy, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by John Murray.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils are happy and enjoy attending school. They told inspectors that it is like being part of one big family where everyone is welcome. Pupils typically behave well. This helps to create a calm and orderly learning environment. Most pupils follow the school's 'golden rules'. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive. Pupils are confident that staff are there to listen. Pupils believe that their school is a safe place.

Pupils' personal development is fostered well. Many pupils take on board pupil leadership responsibilities such as reading buddies or being part of the group known as 'the planetees'. Pupils make a difference in the school and local community through litter-picking events and donating to the local food bank appeal. One of the school council's most recent achievements is the design of a new school uniform, which pupils wear with pride.

In contrast, the school's expectations for pupils' achievement are low. Its efforts to improve the curriculum have lacked sufficient urgency. Pupils' strong attainment in reading, writing and mathematics in the 2023 data is in stark contrast to the current picture of pupils' learning in the school. In different year groups and across different subjects, pupils are underachieving. This includes children in the early years, who are not well prepared for their next steps.

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

In most subjects, the school has not put in place a curriculum which sets out the important knowledge that pupils should learn. This prevents teachers from knowing what they should teach and when this should happen. As a result, from the early years to Year 6, teachers are left to their own devices to decide what pupils should learn. Children in the early years, and pupils across the school, experience a curriculum that lacks structure and purpose. This means that, despite the positive outcomes at the end of key stage 2, pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), do not achieve well across the curriculum.

The school has not ensured that teachers have had the training to develop their subject knowledge and expertise. This means that new subject content is not delivered with enough clarity to help pupils understand their learning. The activities that teachers choose do not support pupils to build their knowledge securely or make connections in their learning.

In many subjects, teachers do not check pupils' understanding of key information effectively. Considerable weaknesses in pupils' fundamental knowledge, notably in reading and writing, often go unchecked. Pupils carry gaps in their knowledge for sustained periods. As a result, pupils do not develop secure foundations on which to build their future learning.

In the Nursery Year, children have some opportunities to share a book with adults and sing nursery rhymes. However, there is a delay in children starting to learn the phonics

programme in the Reception Year. This causes them to be on catch up from the start. From this point on, the phonics programme is not delivered consistently well to ensure that pupils gain a secure grounding in early reading.

Children in the early years and pupils in key stage 1 who struggle to keep up with the pace of the phonics programme are not spotted quickly enough. When gaps in their learning are identified, the support they receive is often ineffective. Consequently, by the end of Year 2, a considerable proportion of pupils are not fluent, confident readers. They are ill-prepared to meet the demands of key stage 2. Pupils' weak reading knowledge compounds their poor achievement further. In contrast, the school has been more successful in making sure that pupils, especially those in key stage 2, develop a love of reading.

The school accurately identifies pupils with SEND. However, the support for these pupils is very mixed. Some pupils complete mundane tasks that do not match their needs. Pupils with very complex needs are well cared for. However, many do not get the help and support they need to learn all they should. Some staff are not trained sufficiently well to use the information they receive about pupils with SEND to inform how they adapt their delivery of lessons. As a result, pupils with SEND do not achieve well.

Most pupils, especially those in key stage 2, behave well. Older pupils learn without distraction and are respectful towards staff and visitors. Behaviour in the early years is not as positive. Children in the early years do not benefit from any structure or routine to the school day. This leads to interrupted learning. The school is tenacious in its approach to tackling any instance of low attendance. It works in partnership with families and external agencies to provide appropriate support to pupils, parents and carers. This ensures that pupils attend school as often as they should.

The school has a well-thought-out programme to support pupils' personal development. Pupils learn about well-being and how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. They have a firm understanding of respect and tolerance. Pupils, including those with SEND, spoke with delight and appreciation of the many opportunities they have to learn beyond the curriculum. The highlight for most pupils is the many trips and visits to places of interest across the UK.

The trust and the school have failed to identify the decline in the quality of education. A culture of low ambition has become embedded. Those responsible for governance have not challenged the school or held it to account for the quality of its provision. As a result, pupils' experiences do not prepare them well for the future.

Staff said that they are proud to work at the school. They appreciate the steps that leaders take to reduce their workload and to support their well-being.

## **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 in many subjects, as well as in the early years, is not well designed. It does not provide teachers with sufficient guidance for them to know what pupils should learn and when subject content should be taught. This hinders pupils, including those with SEND, from building a secure body of knowledge over time. The school must ensure that the curriculum sets out the important information that pupils will learn, ordered from the beginning of the early years to the end of Year 6, so that pupils can build their learning securely.
- In the absence of curriculum guidance, and without suitable support and training, teachers lack the expertise to deliver the curriculum. This means that the activities they select, alongside unclear explanations, do not help pupils to develop their knowledge or to understand key concepts. As a result, pupils do not learn the important knowledge that they should. The school must ensure that teachers are suitably equipped to build pupils' knowledge over time.
- Teachers do not use assessment strategies well. Consequently, they do not know what pupils know and understand. Misconceptions and gaps in pupils' learning remain unidentified and not corrected. The school should make sure that teachers have the support they need to utilise assessment strategies successfully so that they understand where pupils have gaps in their knowledge and adapt their teaching to remedy misconceptions.
- The school's early reading curriculum is not effective in making sure that children in the early years, and pupils in key stage 1, learn to read as soon as they should. Consequently, many pupils do not learn to read well enough. This makes it difficult for these pupils to access the rest of the curriculum. The school must ensure that staff are sufficiently trained to implement the phonics programme consistently well. Additionally, it must ensure that pupils who do not keep up with the pace of the programme receive swift and effective support to be able to access the curriculum.
- The school has not ensured that teachers have the expertise to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. Consequently, adaptations to teaching and resources are not matched to pupils' needs. The school must ensure that teachers have the knowledge and expertise to provide the right support for pupils with SEND so that they learn all that they should.
- Capacity to improve the school is weak. The efforts to bring about much-needed improvements have been slow and lack urgency. Consequently, pupils underachieve and do not receive the standard of education to which they are entitled. The trust and those responsible for governance must ensure that they secure the necessary leadership capacity in the school to bring about rapid and sustained improvement.

HMCI strongly recommends that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers. The position regarding the appointment of early career teachers will be considered again during any monitoring inspection we carry out.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	148701
<b>Local authority</b>	Cumberland
<b>Inspection number</b>	10321477
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	230
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	John Murray
<b>CEO of the trust</b>	Jacky Kennedy
<b>Headteacher</b>	Luke Denny
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.smmcatholicprimary.co.uk">www.smmcatholicprimary.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- St Margaret Mary Catholic Primary School converted to become an academy in September 2021. When its predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- This Roman Catholic school is part of the Diocese of Lancaster. Its last section 48 inspection, for schools of a religious character, took place in June 2019. The next section 48 inspection is due by the end of 2025.
- Many staff, including the headteacher, are new to post.
- The school provides 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. 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.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's educational 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 this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with trust leads, including the CEO, trustees, leaders of the school and members of staff. The lead inspector held discussions with members of the local governing body. She also spoke with representatives of the diocese and the local authority.
- 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 with teachers, spoke with 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 discussed the curriculum in some other curriculum subjects. They spoke with leaders and pupils. Inspectors reviewed samples of pupils' work in these curriculum areas.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and around 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.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including records of local governing body and trustee board meetings, leaders' evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and documents relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences at school. They considered the views of pupils shared through Ofsted's online survey for pupils.
- Inspectors spoke with staff about their workload and well-being. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also spoke with some parents during the inspection.

## **Inspection team**

Sue Dymond, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Elliot Costas-Walker

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2024