

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Barnard Castle

Birch Road, Barnard Castle, County Durham DL12 8JR

Inspection date: 12 November 2024

Outcome

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Barnard Castle has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Lesley Ann Box. This school is part of Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education 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), Stuart McGhee, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Yvonne Coates.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Mary's is a welcoming and inclusive school where pupils thrive. Pupils are happy. They enjoy positive relationships with staff and peers alike. There is a respectful warmth that spreads through the school. Pupils appreciate that their small school has big ambitions for them to achieve well. They relish the wealth of leadership and enrichment opportunities available to them. Pupils take their peer mentoring responsibilities seriously, too. This includes modelling good manners to younger pupils in the dining hall.

Over time, pupils' achievements in external tests have exceeded national averages. Pupils learn well due to the ambitious and well-taught curriculum. Children in the early years swiftly learn the routines of the setting. They are quick to settle to activities. Children also show respect and focus when engaging in a variety of tasks.

Pupils enjoy numerous extra-curricular opportunities. They take part in daily clubs, including drama, sport, well-being and choir. Pupils also apply for positions in the 'Climate Change Team'. Through these, they plan and put in place a wide variety of initiatives. For example, pupils were inspired by a trip to a recycling centre. As a result, they created a 'litter bug' group that picks up litter in school and in the local community. These rich opportunities contribute exceptionally well to pupils' personal development.

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

The school ensures pupils learn a well-sequenced, ambitious curriculum. Learning develops from the early years through to Year 6. The 'connected curriculum' includes a wide range of subjects. Staff expose pupils to a breadth of learning. Pupils engage well with material that helps them make links between subjects. For example, pupils in key stage 2 enjoy reading World War One poetry. They learn about the context of these poems. This strengthens their historical understanding as well as their literacy. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) enjoy the same ambitious curriculum as their peers. Staff know pupils and their needs well. Learning is skilfully adapted so that pupils with SEND can achieve well. Pupils strive to meet the staff's high expectations.

The early years environment is a well-designed learning space. Carefully chosen activities enhance children's learning well. For example, children enjoy counting pom-poms into a jar using tweezers. This enhances their mathematical understanding while improving their fine motor skills. Children confidently discuss and predict patterns. Children are inquisitive. They ask focused questions. Well-trained adults seize opportunities to respond to children's interests.

The school ensures pupils have the basic skills they need for later learning. Reading is a high priority in the school. Children begin learning phonics at the earliest opportunity. This includes preparing for phonics in the Nursery. Over time, pupils become increasingly confident readers. If they fall behind, expert staff help them to catch up. Pupils also develop a love of reading. This begins in early years, where children focus intently during story time. All pupils enjoy membership of the local library. This broadens their reading further. Some pupils' letter formation is not as developed as that of their peers. On occasion, the school exposes pupils to complex writing tasks before they are ready. In addition, there are inconsistencies in how well errors in pupils' work are addressed. Misconceptions in handwriting or basic writing skills can persist, and limit some pupils' ability to move their learning forward.

An impressive culture of positive relationships underpins successful learning. Pupils thoroughly enjoy being at school. This is illustrated by their higher-than-average attendance rates. Pupils are kind to one another. Year 6 pupils enjoy being buddies to Reception children. If pupils struggle, the school prioritises their personal development. It does this in a highly effective way. For example, pupils proudly take on important leadership roles in school. These include working alongside the catering staff. Pupils also help to manage the school's information technology and tend the school's chickens. Pupils become increasingly responsible citizens. This heightens their engagement and achievement in school. In addition, all pupils learn how to stay safe in the wider world. From the early years, they learn about first aid in an age-appropriate way. Pupils also speak confidently about how to stay mentally and physically healthy.

Parents and staff are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Staff are proud and valued. They know leaders will ask their opinions about workload before implementing anything new. Parents frequently mention the 'nurturing' environment the school provides. Trustees and governors are effective in their roles. They share a clear vision

with school and trust leaders. This ensures all decisions support the best interests of St Mary's pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is some variation in how well handwriting is taught. This means that some pupils do not acquire skills in letter formation well enough and are not ready to move on to more complex tasks. The school should ensure pupils have sufficient opportunities to practise and embed foundational skills in writing before complexity in writing increases.
- The school's approach to identifying errors and helping pupils address these errors in their written work is not consistent. Some pupils embed misconceptions in their writing or do not routinely learn from their mistakes. The school should improve the use of assessment to help pupils to spot errors and improve the quality of their writing.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in November 2019.

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	149058
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10346816
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	100
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Yvonne Coates
CEO of the trust	Stuart McGhee
Headteacher	Lesley Ann Box
Website	https://stmarysbc.bhcet.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	27 and 28 November 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust.
- The school's religious character is Catholic. The last section 48 inspection took place in June 2018.
- The school does not use alternative provision for its pupils.

Information about this inspection

- 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.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher over the course of the inspection. The lead inspector also met with the CEO and the deputy CEO of the trust.

- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning, listened to pupils read 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 met with groups of pupils and staff formally throughout the inspection and spoke with them informally at social times and in lessons.
- A range of school documents were reviewed, including the school's self-evaluation and the school improvement plan.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and for pupils.

Inspection team

Hannah Millett, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Matthew Vickers

Ofsted Inspector

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