

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

Meadowside, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR2 7QN

Inspection dates: 17 and 18 December 2024

Outcome

Evidence gathered during this ungraded (section 8) inspection suggests that the school's work may have improved significantly across all areas since the previous inspection. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Martin Clephane. This school is part of Bishop Chadwick 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), Brendan Tapping, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Daniel O' Mahoney.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at St Mary's are proud, polite and respectful members of the school community. Their exemplary attitudes and conduct contribute exceptionally well to a peaceful and harmonious learning environment. Relationships between pupils and adults are extremely positive. Pupils are incredibly enthusiastic about the school. At every stage of their education, pupils are remarkable ambassadors for St Mary's. They embody the school's three key rules of 'be kind, be safe, believe'.

There are consistently high expectations for pupils' achievement. Over a number of years, pupils realise these high expectations. They achieve highly as a result. Pupils demonstrate a tangible love of learning. Their focus and engagement in lessons is remarkable. Pupils' recollection of their prior learning is exceptional.

Staff are vigilant in ensuring that pupils are safe. Pupils have a keen sense of how to keep themselves safe. Behaviour is consistently of the highest standard. Where some pupils occasionally experience difficulty with their behaviour, well-trained staff put effective support in place. This has notable impact.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They refer often to 'happy and thriving' children, 'approachable and supportive' staff and the 'fantastic ethos'. The school's vision of enabling pupils to develop spiritually, intellectually, physically, emotionally and creatively is evident in all the school does.

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

Leaders have developed an exceptional curriculum that spans early years to Year 6. This extends across all subjects and allows pupils of all ages to achieve highly. The systems that the school has for identifying pupils' needs are comprehensive. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive effective support from skilled adults. This allows them to achieve exceptionally well.

The school's four key principles of belief, rights, environment and well-being (BREW) have been skilfully and impressively established over time. They are explicitly woven into the curriculum. Pupils make numerous meaningful links to these principles in lessons. They have an impressive recall of their prior learning, whether recent or more long-term. Pupils use the skills and knowledge that they have acquired over time to make impressive connections between different areas of their learning. For example, older pupils talk with deep understanding of the causes of world conflict. They can explain the impact that this has on the countries involved. Pupils appreciate the moral dilemmas that such conflict creates. Pupils apply their learning from English, history, geography, art and other curriculum subjects very well in these discussions.

From children's first days in the school's early years provision, talented adults promote a love of songs, rhymes, poems and stories. Their careful modelling of language and vocabulary allows children to develop confidence in their own communication skills. Firm and secure foundations, such as in phonics and number skills develop over time. Children achieve highly. They are ready for the next stage of their education.

Pupils at the early stages of learning to read benefit from precise teaching of the school's phonics programme by skilled staff. Pupils of all abilities make excellent progress in their learning to read. They become confident and fluent readers. Reading has a high profile in the school's wider curriculum. Pupils are avid, motivated readers. The published 2024 outcomes for the phonics screening check in Year 1 were an anomaly. They do not reflect the high-quality teaching and modelling that characterise the school's approach to phonics. Neither do these outcomes adequately reflect the progress made by that cohort of pupils.

As a result of an exciting, engaging curriculum and the warm, positive relationships they enjoy with adults, pupils love coming to school. Their attendance is high. Pupils' behaviour is of a very high standard.

The school's approach to pupils' personal development is first-rate. A range of carefully considered educational visits and visitors to school develop pupils' character, resilience and appreciation of others. There are regular opportunities for representatives of other faiths and beliefs to visit school. This helps pupils to better understand the richness and

diversity of the world they are growing up in. Pupils develop commendable attitudes to others, regardless of any perceived difference. The school's BREW principles are skilfully threaded throughout its personal development programme for pupils. Opportunities to promote awe and wonder are explicitly and carefully considered by leaders and staff. For example, younger pupils visited a lighthouse. They watched the tide come in over the causeway, cutting them off from the mainland. They then engaged in learning across many different curriculum subjects before returning to school later in the day. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for life beyond school.

Leaders have been relentless in pursuing improvements in the quality of the school's work. Governors and trustees have a clear understanding of their delegated roles and responsibilities. They fulfil these with diligence. Monitoring of the school's priorities from senior leaders is highly effective. The school takes staff's workload and well-being into account when making key decisions. Staff are motivated and happy.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, to be good for overall effectiveness in September 2013.

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	148781
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10346776
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	459
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Daniel O' Mahoney
CEO of the trust	Brendan Tapping
Headteacher	Martin Clephane
Website	www.smrc.school
Dates of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school converted to become an academy on 1 January 2022. When its predecessor school, St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- The school is one of 30 academies in the Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- As the school is designated as having a religious character, it is also inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005. The predecessor school's last such inspection was in July 2019. The school's next section 48 inspection is due before July 2027.

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. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, other school staff, members of the governing committee, a representative from the diocese and the CEO.
- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector listened to some pupils from Years 1 to 3 reading to a familiar adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: 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 inspector considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses.
- The inspector considered the responses to the online staff survey and spoke to some staff about their workload and well-being.

Inspection team

Richard Beadnall, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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