

Inspection of a good school: St Mary's Catholic Voluntary Academy

Longlands Road, New Mills, High Peak, Derbyshire SK22 3BL

Inspection date:

24 January 2023

Outcome

St Mary's Catholic Voluntary Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending this small, calm and productive school. They say that they feel safe and happy because everyone looks after each other. They try to follow the school's 'gospel values'. These values help pupils care for and respect each other. Pupils are polite and friendly towards staff and visitors.

Parents and carers are supportive of the school. One parent expressed the view of others when they said, 'We love St Mary's! It is a very welcoming, nurturing, family environment.' Pupils are also very positive about their school; they value it and like it. They know that there are trusted adults who will support them to learn and keep safe. Pupils appreciate the effort staff take to get to know them. Relationships are positive.

Leaders have high expectations of what pupils should learn. They are passionate about providing an environment that prepares pupils to be 'confident, happy citizens'. Staff are determined to give pupils lots of memorable experiences. They want pupils' learning to be relevant and embedded in their community.

Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. At lunchtimes, they enjoy talking about the 'big questions' staff give them. Bullying rarely happens, and if it occurs, pupils are confident that all staff will deal with it effectively.

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

Leaders have developed a very ambitious curriculum. They have ensured that the information pupils need to learn is well structured. This helps pupils to fill any gaps in their knowledge. The 'rocket recaps' in lessons help pupils recall what they have previously learned. Teachers then give pupils opportunities to build on what they already know and can do.

Leaders are keen for pupils to link up their learning across the curriculum during topic work. At times, this ambition can lead to teachers not always ensuring that they clearly

identify for pupils what the most important subject knowledge is that they will learn. Pupils remember lots from their topic lessons; however, the key knowledge can sometimes be lost due to the many connections that pupils make between the different topics. In subjects that are taught outside topics, such as mathematics, the key knowledge teachers want pupils to remember is much clearer.

Teachers ask questions to check that pupils understand what they are learning. This helps teachers to identify accurately what pupils know and what they still need to learn. However, teachers do not always use the information from other, formal assessments to help them plan what they will teach pupils next.

Pupils are eager to learn. They listen to their teachers and are confident in explaining their thinking. They use more technical vocabulary in their answers as they learn more about the topics they are studying. They take pride in their work and complete it to the best of their ability.

Leaders have prioritised reading. They have found many creative ways to introduce pupils to different books and texts. Pupils read regularly. They have group reading lessons that develop their comprehension skills. Children who are at an early stage of learning to read receive high-quality, daily phonics lessons. Pupils who struggle with their reading receive support through regular intervention sessions. This helps them to become more confident and fluent readers.

Children in early years get off to a strong start. Older 'buddies' help them to settle quickly into school. Being taught in a mixed-age class means that children benefit from having slightly older role models to learn from.

Leaders have systems in place to identify and support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupil profiles inform staff of these pupils' individual targets and how best to support them. Some of these targets are not as precise as they could be to enable teachers to know exactly what to focus on and when.

Pupils have very positive attitudes towards learning and focus on their work. Staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Low-level disruption is rare. There is a purposeful atmosphere in lessons.

There is a very strong focus on pupils' broader development. Leaders have created a well-planned programme, with a focus on developing pupils into responsible leaders. The 'little fish' initiatives give pupils a wide range of opportunities to have a say in how their school is run. Pupils are keen to leave their school better than it was when they joined. Leaders' passion to develop pupils as global citizens prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. Pupils discuss moral issues in many lessons. They explore and contribute to their local community through developing the town garden.

The school is well led. Staff say that leaders care about their well-being. Staff value the support they receive. They are proud to work at the school. Those with governance responsibility are committed to the school. However, they do not have a sharp enough view on some aspects related to their statutory responsibilities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders responsible for safeguarding are knowledgeable about pupils' individual circumstances. Close working relationships between school leaders, parents and other professionals mean that any early indicators of concern are identified quickly. Staff are well trained to recognise any signs that might cause concern about pupils' welfare.

Leaders act on any concerns in a timely manner. Leaders have appropriate procedures in place to manage any allegations. Staff work with pupils to ensure that they understand how to keep themselves safe, including when working online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not ensured that teachers consistently implement all aspects of the ambitious curriculum. For example, they have not ensured that teachers consistently identify the most important knowledge that pupils should learn from the different topics they study. Furthermore, some teachers do not always use formal assessment outcomes well to plan future learning and to provide pupils, including pupils with SEND, with precise targets for their next steps. As a result, not all pupils can recall the key, important knowledge that leaders want them to remember from the topics they have studied. Leaders need to ensure that teachers have the necessary knowledge and understanding to be able to teach topics in a manner that enables pupils to be able to remember the key knowledge that they should for future learning. Leaders should ensure that all pupils receive precise guidance and targets for their next steps, so that they can achieve as highly as possible.
- Those responsible for governance do not have a sharp enough view of how well the school is meeting some its statutory responsibilities, particularly around the Equality Act 2010 and the 'Prevent' duty. Multi-academy trust leaders and governors need to have the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to assure themselves of the effectiveness with which the school is meeting its statutory responsibilities.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which 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 Catholic Primary School, to be good 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](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	146260
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	10254887
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	127
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Sarah Noon
Headteacher	Patricia Chapman
Website	www.saintmarysnewmills.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St Mary's Catholic Voluntary Academy converted to become an academy and joined the St Ralph Sherwin Trust in September 2018.
- When its predecessor school, St Mary's Catholic Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted in February 2018, it was judged as continuing to be a good school.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, curriculum leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and a range of staff.
- The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer and chair of trustees from the multi-academy trust.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the local governing board as well as two other governors.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, geography and history. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also discussed the art curriculum with leaders and looked at some sketchbooks. The lead inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at other times around the school.
- Inspectors considered a wide variety of school documents, including the school self-evaluation and school development plan.
- Inspectors took note of the responses received to Ofsted Parent View and considered the results of Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys. Inspectors met with small groups of pupils to gather their views.
- To judge the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors read the school's relevant policies, scrutinised the single central record, checked the school's procedures for the safe recruitment of staff and met with the safeguarding team. Inspectors also spoke with staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Dave Gilkerson, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Matthew Rooney

Ofsted Inspector

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