

Inspection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Barnard Castle

Birch Road, Barnard Castle, County Durham DL12 8JR

Inspection dates: 27–28 November 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School is a special place to be. A sense of belonging and family threads through all aspects of school life. Uniqueness is celebrated. Pupils behave well.

Pupils have the utmost pride in the school. They cannot think of a single thing they would like to change. They know that their views are important and valued by adults in school. Pupils are keen to take up the many leadership opportunities on offer. They take time and care to write applications for roles such as playground buddies.

The day starts in an exceptional way. Pupils have a hotel-style dining experience in the breakfast club. They take turns, use excellent manners and make healthy choices. It is similar at lunchtime.

Leaders have made sure that the curriculum helps pupils to achieve well and keep safe. Pupils know that reading is important and something to be enjoyed.

Everyone in the St Mary's family knows each other well. Leaders work closely with families to make sure pupils have what they need to be safe and happy. Work with the whole community has resulted in everyone knowing what bullying is, and what it is not. It has equipped pupils with skills to resolve issues themselves or seek support when they need it.

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

Since the school's previous inspection in 2012, standards achieved by pupils have fluctuated. However, in the past 18 months, the new senior leadership team has brought about notable improvements. The standards achieved by pupils are strong. Attendance has improved. The promotion of pupils' personal development is exemplary. Leaders treat each pupil as an individual and equip them very well for life ahead. Pupils behave very well most of the time. They rarely miss a day at school.

Pupils, staff and parents and carers praise the ambition and improvement the headteacher has brought to the school. They speak highly of her consideration of everyone's welfare and her high expectations of what everyone can achieve.

Leaders have strengthened the existing broad curriculum. They have ensured that it is well sequenced so that pupils build on and revisit knowledge in subjects over their time in school.

The team's ambition to give children a good foundation to school life is clear to see in early years. Parents are welcomed and regularly involved in their children's learning. For example, during 'Bonkers for Conkers' week, children were keen to show parents their work. This included how they used their mathematical knowledge to complete conker challenges.

Pupils love reading! Everyone knows how important it is to read well and the pleasure that a good book can bring. One pupil said, 'I love getting lost in a book – it takes you to another world.' Another explained how looking at different authors' choice of language helps them when they write themselves.

Leaders make sure that children begin to learn to read as soon as they start school. Children in Reception cannot wait to start their morning routine of learning and practising new sounds outside. Adults teach phonics well. They make sure that any child who has got off to a slower start gets more opportunities to practise.

Leaders and the staff team skilfully adapt the curriculum so that it fully meets the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The 'nurture pod', funded by the school community, provides a haven for vulnerable pupils. Staff ensure that everyone learns well, feels good about themselves and has help to manage difficulties in their lives. Leaders readily work with external agencies to help pupils to manage their emotions and behaviours.

The most able pupils in key stage 2 have challenging curriculum goals and rise to what is expected of them. Sometimes, in early years and key stage 1, teachers do not take account of what pupils with higher starting points know already when planning activities. This means a few do not achieve as well as they should.

In this small school, curriculum leadership is being planned carefully. Staff are grateful for leaders' consideration of their well-being. They work hard to help pupils achieve well and enjoy learning. Where leaders have already planned assessment carefully, such as in English and mathematics, it is strong. It helps teachers check what pupils know and what they need to learn next. There are some subjects where ways of checking what pupils have learned are not yet fully in place.

Senior leaders work closely with the local authority. They are making sure new curriculum leaders have the support they need to have the full curriculum in place. This will help leaders to check how well pupils are achieving in every area of the curriculum. It will help governors understand strengths and areas for improvement even better too.

Governors are immensely proud of their roles. They are accurate in their celebration of the school's strengths and recognition of aspects that still need further work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders make sure that every adult in school understands the important role they have in keeping pupils safe. Frequent training and updates, and a culture of discussing and sharing concerns, however small they may seem, mean that vulnerabilities are quickly noticed. Record keeping is appropriately detailed and actions are followed up promptly. The school works closely with the local authority and external agencies to strengthen this work.

The curriculum clearly identifies what pupils should know about risks they may face and how to deal with them. Staff make sure that pupils of all ages have appropriate guidance in the safe use of the internet.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers do not build consistently well on what the most able pupils in early years and key stage 1 already know and can do. Consequently, these pupils do not achieve as well as they could. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum is implemented effectively so that the most able pupils in early years and key stage 1 achieve as well as the most able pupils across key stage 2.
- Curriculum leadership is not consistently strong in a few subjects, such as modern foreign languages and music. Some curriculum leaders are very new to their roles. In these subjects, leaders do not have an agreed approach to check on how well pupils are acquiring knowledge and skills. Leaders should ensure that their plans to address this are implemented so that all leaders, including governors, have a clear picture of how well pupils are achieving in all aspects of the curriculum.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	114261
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10111087
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	97
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Emma Curran
Headteacher	Lesley Box
Website	www.stmarysprimary.durham.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	10–11 October 2012

Information about this school

- A new headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have been appointed in the last 18 months.
- The school has a much higher proportion of pupils with SEND than the national average.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

- We met with the headteacher throughout the inspection. We held discussions with the deputy headteacher and representatives of the governing body, including the chair, and spoke to a representative from Durham local authority on the telephone.
- We explored the curriculum by carrying out deep dives in reading, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages. This involved meeting with curriculum leaders, visiting lessons, speaking to pupils and looking at their work and speaking to teachers. We listened to pupils read.

- We carried out a range of activities to check the culture of safeguarding. This included speaking to leaders, staff and governors to check their understanding of how to keep pupils safe. We looked at the curriculum for teaching pupils how to keep safe and spoke to pupils about this. We looked at school safeguarding documents. We looked at examples of records of concerns and the actions taken by leaders.
- We spoke to parents before school and to staff with different roles in school to seek their views. We considered the 34 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View.
- We spoke to pupils, formally and informally, throughout the inspection. We observed pupils in classrooms and at lunchtime and breaktime.

Inspection team

Kate Rowley, lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Jean Watt

Her Majesty’s 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.

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/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: 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
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2019