

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St Mary's Catholic Academy

Cruso Street, Leek, Staffordshire ST13 8BW

Inspection dates:

21 and 22 January 2025

Outcome

St Mary's Catholic Academy has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The principal of this school is Gemma Turner. This school is part of The Painsley Catholic Academy multi-academy trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the interim chief operating officer, Joanne Bradbury, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ken Wilson.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils, parents and staff are united in their view that St Mary's is a lovely community to belong to. The school ensure that the decisions they make to improve the school are always in the best interests of pupils and their families. Pupils are kind and caring. They demonstrate the school virtues, showing compassion and empathy to those less fortunate than themselves.

Pupils achieve well because of the carefully designed curriculum they learn. They develop a love of learning and are eager to find out more about the topics they study. Those that arrive new to the country are supported to feel part of the community and learn English quickly.

This is a school where everybody feels included. Pupils learn that they are all different and unique and that is what makes them all special. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are successfully supported to develop their self-confidence. Most join one of the many clubs on offer.

Pupils' views are important. They enjoy the opportunity to decide on the clubs they can attend. Their favourites are laser tag, archery and drama. Pupils are active citizens in their community. They visit the local care home and form friendships with residents, paint local fences and tidy litter from the streets around their school.

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

The school, in partnership with the trust, have developed a kind and caring school, which is focused on being the best it can be. They identify aspects of their work that need improving and are systematic in making sure that changes are delivered. Staff benefit from extensive training opportunities, which enable them to deliver the curriculum as intended. Many take part in leadership programmes that help them to lead their subjects effectively.

Since the previous inspection, the school has worked well to develop many curriculum subjects. Learning sequences build successfully on pupils' prior knowledge, helping them to become better at the subjects they study. Staff check pupils' knowledge well and quickly identify gaps in their understanding. Pupils receive timely support in reading and writing when they need it.

There has been significant improvement in pupils' ability to write fluently. Pupils form letters, spell and develop cursive handwriting. This supports them to write accurately and at speed. Those at the early stages of learning to read have books that are matched to the sounds they know. This is helping pupils become confident and fluent readers. Pupils develop a love of reading and enjoy books from a range of authors.

Some pupils arrive at the school with communication difficulties. The school is successfully developing pupils' speaking and listening skills. They provide a range of strategies to help pupils rehearse what they want to say before they write. Pupils learn to expand upon their peers' responses and share their thinking with support partners. Pupils are developing their vocabulary because staff highlight words that will be useful to know. They check pupils' understanding of these words regularly and encourage pupils to use them when writing.

The school is working to improve pupils' mathematical skills. Children in the early years enjoy exploring and identifying patterns in number. However, some older pupils experience difficulties recalling basic number facts and timetables. This prevents them from calculating at speed and solving more complex mathematical problems.

Children in early years develop positive relationships with each other and staff. They learn to concentrate for long periods of time and are confident when approaching new learning activities. Pupils with SEND are identified early and are well supported to settle in school. They receive support from specialist services, who help the school to adapt learning to meet their needs.

Pupils behave exceptionally well in lessons and during breaktimes. They listen respectfully to staff and are willing to share their ideas. Pupils feel safe in school because staff understand their needs and offer support when they need it. Pupils attend school regularly because the school have supported parents to understand the importance of being in school on time and in school each day. Pupils want to attend school because they are keen to learn and want to take part in the many different clubs on offer.

Pupils' wider development is exceptional. Pupils love going on trips to places linked to their learning. Doing so, brings their learning to life. Pupils learn to play instruments in rock bands, sing at arena concerts to thousands of people and take part in community drama events, where they showcase their acting skills. Pupils become responsible leaders. Being a head boy or girl is something many pupils aspire to become. Others enjoy being playground buddies, responsible for ensuring nobody feels left out.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils do not have a secure knowledge of basic number facts and timetables. This prevents them from calculating at speed and solving more complex mathematical problems. The school should ensure that approaches to developing pupils' number fluency are being delivered effectively, so that all pupils are able to calculate and reason at speed.

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 school to be good for overall effectiveness in January 2016.

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	138725
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10343985
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	157
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ken Wilson
COO of the trust	Joanne Bradbury
Principal	Gemma Turner
Website	www.st-marys-leek.staffs.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	4 and 5 December 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school operates before- and after-school provision.
- The school is part of The Painsley Catholic Academy, a multi-academy trust.
- This is a Catholic faith school in the Archdiocese of Birmingham. The most recent section 48 inspection took place in February 2022. The school's next section 48 inspection is likely to take place before August 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 their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector met with a range of leaders, including those responsible for the curriculum, teaching and learning, behaviour, attendance, personal development and safeguarding.
- 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 spoke with the director of education for the Birmingham diocese.
- The inspector met with a trustee and the chair of the local governing body.
- The inspector considered the survey responses to Ofsted Parent View and the free-text comments from parents.
- The inspector also evaluated the responses to the online staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Tony Bradshaw, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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