

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary Academy

Swires Road, Halifax, West Yorkshire HX1 2ER

Inspection dates:	18 and 19 March 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The headteacher of this school is Jenna Walker. This school is part of Blessed Peter Snow Catholic Academy 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), Rob Pritchard, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Antonia Dorsey.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school's curriculum is ambitious. It reflects leaders' high expectations for pupils' academic achievement. These expectations are largely realised. The school's 12 virtues are brought to life through pupils' positive attitudes to school, their dedication to their learning and the kindness they show to each other.

Pupils are deeply respectful. They describe difference as 'the special things that make us all unique'. Pupils accept and celebrate their many differences. This starts in the Reception class where children quickly become confident and independent learners who work and play together kindly. Behaviour at all times of the day is calm and settled. Learning in classrooms is purposeful and takes place without interruption. Bullying is rare. Pupils have confidence that when it happens, all adults take their concerns seriously and quickly deal with it.

Pupils have meaningful opportunities to contribute to the life of the school. 'Happiness heroes' support other pupils when they are feeling sad. Pupils learn about fundamental British values, such as democracy, including through opportunities to take up democratically elected roles. School councillors, for example, are proud of the changes they have made to playtimes and the alterations to their lunchtime menu choices.

St Mary's Catholic Primary Academy is a happy place where pupils thrive.

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

The school has been through a period of curriculum change. Improvements in subjects, such as history and design technology, have increased expectations for pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school has set out the knowledge and skills that pupils should learn in a logical order.

The school has prioritised training for all staff. Teachers have the knowledge and skills they need to teach the curriculum effectively. Despite this, teachers do not check well enough what pupils have learned. When this happens, pupils are given work to complete that is not well matched to their needs. This means that pupils sometimes make mistakes in their work. These misunderstandings are not addressed quickly enough.

The school's processes to identify pupils with SEND are robust and timely. 'Support me to learn' plans include appropriate adaptations for teachers to use in lessons. This ensures that pupils with SEND access and enjoy learning alongside their peers.

The school prioritises reading. Leaders provide staff with ongoing mentoring and coaching. All staff are highly skilled at teaching phonics. Pupils with SEND and those who struggle with their reading get the support they need to catch up. As a result, the number of older pupils who need help with their reading is falling. Pupils enjoy the time in the day when their teacher reads to them. A recent visit to the school by a published author has inspired pupils to read.

Adults in the Reception classes regularly read to children enthusiastically. This helps to foster an interest and love of books from an early age. Children learn in a well-resourced environment that is exciting and engaging. They are provided with lots of opportunities to practise their mathematics and phonics skills as they play. Adults prioritise developing children's language. However, adult interactions with children in the early years do not consistently challenge children to use their growing vocabulary as they learn through play. As a result, children miss out on practising the new words they have been taught.

The school monitors attendance closely. It works with families to overcome the barriers that they face in coming to school. High attendance is celebrated through rewards and assemblies. However, persistent absence remains too high for some disadvantaged pupils. This means that they do not fully benefit from the curriculum and wider opportunities the school offers.

The personal, social and health education curriculum is well designed. When local issues arise, the curriculum is adapted so that pupils know how to stay safe. Pupils learn about the ways in which people can be different and to respect those differences. Through the curriculum, pupils have learned about the racial tensions in South Africa when studying the life of Nelson Mandela. Older pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships, including an understanding of consent. Pupils know the importance of staying mentally healthy. They benefit from the calm breathing techniques they have been taught. Pupils benefit from writing down their thoughts and feelings during mindfulness lessons in their private journals.

Those with responsibility for governance know the school well. They hold the school to account effectively. The trust provides bespoke support for the school and has helped to bring about the many positive curriculum changes. Staff report that leaders always consider their workload and well-being. They feel valued, well trained and respected.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- On occasion, teachers do not check what pupils know carefully enough. This means that work is not always accurately matched to pupils' needs. The school should ensure that assessment is used effectively to check on what pupils know and can do so that the work they complete in class is well matched to their existing knowledge and skills.
- The school's attendance strategies are not reaching some disadvantaged pupils whose absence remains too high. Consequently, some disadvantaged pupils miss out on too much learning and the experiences that the school provides. The school should refine its approaches to reduce persistent absence further for these pupils so that they can benefit from what the school has to offer.

- Adult interactions with children in the early years do not consistently focus well enough on the development of communication skills. As a result, children's vocabulary and language are not developed as well as they might be. The school should ensure that opportunities to grow children's language and vocabulary are prioritised so that children benefit from high-quality adult interactions as they learn through play.

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	148657
Local authority	Calderdale
Inspection number	10346771
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	288
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Antonia Dorsey
CEO of the trust	Rob Pritchard
Headteacher	Jenna Walker
Website	www.stmaryshalifax.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	22 and 23 November 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school joined the Blessed Peter Snow Catholic Academy Trust in July 2021.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school is a Catholic school in the Diocese of Leeds. The most recent section 48 inspection for schools with religious character took place in April 2024. The school's next section 48 inspection will take place within five academic years.
- The school runs a before- and after-school club for pupils.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, acting headteacher, acting deputy headteacher and members of the trust team, including the trust's school improvement coordinator.
- Inspectors held discussions with staff to consider their views.
- Meetings were held with trustees, including the chair of the trust and the CEO.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, mathematics, history and design technology. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also discussed the school's work in some other curriculum areas and reviewed a selection of pupils' work in English.
- 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.
- An inspector spoke to parents at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors reviewed responses to Ofsted's parent survey, Ofsted Parent View. They also considered responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil survey.
- To evaluate pupils' behaviour, inspectors visited lessons, analysed behaviour records, met with groups of pupils and observed their play at breaktime and lunchtime.

Inspection team

Chris Pearce, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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