

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Newton Aycliffe

Central Avenue, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham DL5 5NP

Inspection dates:	8 and 9 April 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 Emily Millward. This school is part of Bishop Hogarth 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), Stuart McGhee, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Yvonne Coates.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel safe and happy in this calm, kind and friendly school. Pupils appreciate the strong positive relationships they have with the staff in school. They know that teachers will help when they get stuck. Pupils know who to talk to if they have any worries or concerns. They know staff will deal with any issues well. Pupils feel listened to and supported.

The school has created a culture in which pupils grow to develop their character and be part of the school community. Pupils enjoy coming to school. They appreciate their time together and understand the importance of the school's routines. They are supported well when they struggle. Pupils are respectful to all and have positive attitudes towards their learning. They know they will be recognised for doing the right thing, even if they do so quietly.

The school provides pupils with opportunities to develop their leadership skills. Pupils with additional responsibilities, such as school councillors, house captains or working in the eco team, are passionate about their roles. They help the leaders in school to move things forward. For example, they recently formed a new house, as well as helping with community events in the parish church.

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

The school has developed, with the support of the trust, a curriculum that has clear and high ambitions for every pupil. It is carefully rooted in local and regional context of the school. It also helps pupils to understand significant national and international issues. This starts in the early years where the curriculum is carefully designed to prepare children well for learning beyond Reception. Pupils do well in their time at St Mary's. For example, pupils develop a secure understanding of mathematical ideas. Pupils build their knowledge over time and enjoy talking about what they know.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive the support they need to access the curriculum. They enjoy learning the full range of subjects alongside their peers. Teachers have a firm understanding of the subjects they teach. They use this to help pupils develop their understanding of key ideas and vocabulary and identify any gaps in their learning. This helps pupils to understand what they have learned and how it fits with what they already know.

The school has raised the profile of reading and, more recently, writing. Pupils quickly gain the knowledge and skills they need to become confident, fluent readers. They are beginning to read for pleasure more often. Staff have the appropriate expertise to help pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read. This helps pupils who find reading difficult to catch up. Reading is being promoted well across the school. However, pupils' writing is not being developed well enough. As a result, this can affect pupils' ability to express their ideas clearly and develop confidence in their writing.

Children in Reception settle well into school life. They listen attentively, work happily together and particularly enjoy their interactions with adults. Children are keen to share their achievements with others. Sometimes, the support they receive is not as consistent as it could be. This means that a few children could be making more rapid progress through the highly ambitious curriculum.

Securing high attendance is a significant priority for the school. As a result of the robust systems to track attendance, the school easily identifies pupils who may need further support. The school works with families to successfully improve attendance rates for these pupils.

Pupils learn about healthy relationships and how to keep safe, especially online. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well considered throughout the day. Trips out of school support pupils learning of the curriculum and their wider personal development. A recent ski trip to Scotland for Year 5 and Year 6, along with participation in trust-wide activities such as debates, have made very positive contributions to pupils' lives.

Pupils also enjoy high-quality pastoral support. The school carefully adjusts to support the needs of individual pupils and families alike. Staff have rightly focused on broadening pupils' horizons in terms of aspiration and diversity. For example, the texts studied in English portray an array of different communities, as do the influential people that pupils learn about in History.

Trustees and governors understand the strength of the school's provision and what needs to improve. They receive clear information about leaders' actions. They share the same wholehearted focus on pupils' development. Staff appreciate the steps taken to support them with their workload and well-being. Staff, including those newer to the school, comment on how 'together' the school feels, particularly in placing pupils at the heart of everything it does.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's writing approach has recently been revised and is not fully embedded. As a result, pupils' writing skills are not consistently well developed over time. The school should ensure that staff receive the support and guidance needed to ensure that the approach to writing is implemented well so that it meets the needs of all pupils.
- Children in the early years do not consistently receive the support they need. As a result, a few children do not develop as fast as they could through the highly ambitious early years curriculum. The school should ensure that all aspects of children's

development are promoted consistently in the early years, so they are increasingly ready for their next steps into Year 1.

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	149059
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10346817
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	178
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Yvonne Coates
CEO of the trust	Stuart McGhee
Headteacher	Emily Millward
Website	www.stmarysna.bhcet.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- This school is part of Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust.
- The school is part of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. A section 48 inspection of the school is yet to take place.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Newton Aycliffe converted to become an academy in June 2022. When its predecessor school, St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Newton Aycliffe, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good for overall effectiveness.

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.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- During the inspection, inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, trust staff and the diocese representative.
- Inspectors held discussions with trustees, including the chair of the trust and members of the board of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each of these subjects, inspectors met with subject leaders, carried out visits to lessons, spoke to pupils and looked at some of their work.
- Inspectors also visited the early years provision at various points during the inspection.
- Inspectors reviewed the extra-curricular activities with leaders.
- Inspectors met with members of staff and spoke to parents and carers and groups of pupils as part of the inspection.
- Inspectors met with leaders in relation to the school's approach to English. They reviewed a range of pupils' work, including consideration of the school's approach to writing.
- Inspectors looked at records and spoke to staff in relation to behaviour, bullying, attendance and safeguarding.
- 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.

Inspection team

Richard Wakefield, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Simon Ward

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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