

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St Roberts Catholic First School, Morpeth

Oldgate, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 1QF

Inspection dates:

25 and 26 March 2025

Outcome

St Roberts Catholic First School, Morpeth has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The executive headteacher of this school is David Sutcliffe. This school is part of the Bishop Bewick 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), Anita Bath, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Harrison.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils love attending this school. Attendance is high for most pupils because they understand that this will help them to achieve success. Pupils are very well supported by staff to reflect the school's chosen values ('6 BEES') in their behaviour. Older pupils take on responsibilities such as lunchtime support. They are strong role models for younger pupils. Pupils show exemplary attitudes to their education. They respect each other and listen attentively to staff.

The school has established an ambitious vision for all pupils to achieve highly. Teachers ensure that lessons are adapted to support all pupils to learn well. Staff understand how to build learning effectively so that pupils gain a wide range of knowledge and skills. Pupils achieve well as they progress through the school. They achieve particularly well in the writing aspect of English.

The school provides pupils with a multitude of opportunities to broaden their experiences. The school's outdoor 'forest' provision provides space for pupils of all ages to engage in activities that help build confidence and self-esteem. The extensive range of educational and residential visits help pupils to understand important values, such as democracy on a recent visit to the Houses of Parliament.

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

Since the previous inspection, the school has implemented an ambitious curriculum. Teachers follow the curriculum sequence well to ensure that pupils gain important knowledge and skills as they progress through the school. Teachers check how well pupils remember important content. They effectively support pupils to correct any errors in learning during lessons. This ensures that pupils do not develop misconceptions. Teachers use their expert subject knowledge to build pupils' knowledge securely. For example, younger pupils learn simple coding to programme a floor robot. Older pupils then learn coding to move characters in computer programmes.

In the early years, children's language, reading and writing develop effectively from Nursery into Reception. For example, children write their own shortened version of familiar stories. Sometimes, however, children do not benefit from wider learning activities as well as they could. This is because they are not supported to practise what they are familiar with or to use this to develop new knowledge and skills. In these instances, learning experiences do not prepare children as well as they could for future learning.

The school ensures that all pupils learn to read. In the early years, children enjoy talking together and listening to stories such as 'Little Red Riding Hood'. This prepares them well for the phonics programme which begins early in Reception. Children learn the letters and sounds that they need before learning to read. Pupils practise reading often from books matched to their knowledge of phonics. Following this strong start learning to read, pupils build fluency which helps them to understand what they are reading about. The school accurately identifies and supports pupils who find reading tricky. Staff then provide individual support to help pupils catch up effectively.

Pupils apply their knowledge of phonics to develop accurate spelling. Staff support them to form letters correctly. As pupils progress through the school, they develop fluent writing. This helps pupils to concentrate on improving the content of their writing. Pupils do this with high levels of success. Pupils love writing. From the start in the early years, children plan what they are going to write. Older pupils learn to improve their writing to a high standard.

The school identifies and assesses the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) accurately. Staff work well with external professionals to ensure that resources and adaptations to teaching approaches enable all learners to access the full curriculum. Staff know how to support pupils to ensure that they learn alongside their peers. Pupils with SEND achieve well.

The school prepares pupils for life in modern Britain. The well-constructed programme for health and relationships education helps pupils to understand important aspects of personal safety. Pupils demonstrate maturity beyond their years when they talk about healthy relationships, including online. The school provides a range of activities to support pupils' physical and mental health. As pupils progress through the school, they participate in a range of activities such as singing and dancing. The school is successful in its endeavour to help pupils to develop empathy. Pupils learn to respect each other's views.

School leaders work effectively with the wider trust. Governors know the school well. They check that leaders' actions to improve the school benefit all pupils. Governors offer appropriate support and challenge to the staff team. Staff are proud to work at the school. They value leaders' actions to support workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some activities and adult support in early years do not help children to develop knowledge and skills securely. This means that, on occasion, opportunities to build on what children are familiar with are missed and children do not learn as well as they could. The school should ensure that activities in the early years provide children with the opportunity to practise what they have learned and to build new learning on what they know already.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St Robert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School, to be good for overall effectiveness in October 2019.

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	148999
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10346806
Type of school	First
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	172
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Harrison
CEO of the trust	Anita Bath
Headteacher	David Sutcliffe
Website	www.st-roberts.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school joined Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust in April 2022.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.
- The school is designated as having a religious character, so it is also inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005. The school's last such inspection was in April 2023. The school's next section 48 inspection is therefore due before April 2028.

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 her evaluation of the school.

- The inspector met with the executive headteacher, the deputy headteacher, other school staff and members of the local governing board, including the chair and vice-chair.
- The inspector also held a telephone conversation with a trust director, the CEO and a representative from the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.
- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- 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 considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.
- The inspector considered the responses to the online staff and pupil surveys and spoke to some staff about their workload and well-being.

Inspection team

Kathryn McDonald, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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