

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Whickham

Duckpool Lane, Whickham, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear NE16 4HB

Inspection dates:

7 and 8 May 2025

Outcome

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Whickham has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Joseph Wheatley. This school is part of Bishop Wilkinson 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), Nick Hurn OBE, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Martin Gannon.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school is a warm and welcoming place where pupils are happy and safe. It has high ambitions for what pupils can achieve. These ambitions are generally realised.

Relationships between staff and pupils are respectful and positive. The school has established clear routines and high expectations for behaviour. These are consistently applied by staff and met by pupils.

Pupils develop a secure understanding of democracy and individual liberty, preparing them for life in modern Britain. Pupils are taught how to stay safe online. They understand the risks associated with sharing personal information and know how to report concerns and protect themselves from harm.

Pupils explore a wide range of extra-curricular clubs that help them to discover and develop personal interests. Pupils put these developing skills to the test when they compete against other schools in a variety of different sports. This develops pupils' perseverance and commitment, teaching them how to win and lose with respect.

Pupils learn how to navigate real-world risks confidently and responsibly. This includes topics such as road, fire and water safety. As a result, pupils are equipped with essential life skills and decision-making strategies.

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

The school prioritises every pupil becoming a fluent reader and provides effective support for staff to deliver the phonics programme. As a result, teachers show deep knowledge and understanding of phonics. They use this to accurately teach pupils the sounds that make up words. Pupils show enthusiasm to read books that also match the words they learn. This helps pupils to read accurately and fluently. Teachers quickly identify pupils who need extra practise and provide tailored support to help pupils address gaps in their phonics knowledge.

The school has a well-structured, effective curriculum. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to support pupils to develop their learning. For instance, in writing, staff deliver purposeful activities using high-quality texts. These texts prompt emotional responses and rich discussion. Pupils explore language and punctuation in context and capture ideas for their own writing. This is successfully supporting them to confidently produce independent writing of a high standard. Current pupils are achieving well. The quality of education on offer is not fully reflected in the published outcomes in 2024.

Teachers routinely ensure that pupils revisit prior learning to help identify and address gaps in understanding. This is very effective in reading, writing and mathematics. However, this approach is not consistent across the curriculum. In a small number of subjects, some pupils continue to have gaps in their knowledge that are not successfully addressed. As a result, some pupils do not develop a secure understanding in line with the school's ambitious curriculum. When this is the case, pupils do not learn as much as they could.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are identified accurately. Staff use detailed information to adapt teaching so that pupils with SEND access the same ambitious curriculum as their peers.

Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Classrooms are calm spaces, allowing learning to take place without disruption. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They take pride in their work and are motivated to do well.

The early years provides children with a secure and supportive start to their education. Relationships between staff and children are warm and respectful, creating an environment where children feel safe to explore new learning. The early years is well organised and encourages children to make independent choices. Staff provide a range of activities that support children's early communication, language and number skills.

The school is committed to pupils' broader development. In Year 5, pupils become buddies to Reception children and help them settle into school. These leadership roles build responsibility and care for others. Pupils learn about different faiths and cultures. This includes during assemblies and in the classroom. These opportunities are effective. Pupils show a keen interest in peers that have different beliefs and experiences.

The school provides clear and compassionate leadership at all levels. This creates a strong sense of direction and purpose. Leaders listen to staff feedback and make adjustments to systems and processes to promote staff well-being. Decisions are made in pupils' best interests. The school has built strong relationships with families, which helps address barriers to attendance in a supportive way. As a result, attendance is positive. Trust leaders support the school to develop. They enable collaboration and information sharing, which is helping to ensure further capacity to improve.

Trustees and governors have a clear understanding of their strategic responsibilities and fulfil them. Governors visit regularly to monitor and support the school to continue to improve.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some foundation subjects, strategies to check and help pupils retain key learning are not consistently effective. As a result, some pupils continue to have gaps in their knowledge and do not develop a secure understanding across the curriculum. The school should ensure that approaches to support pupils in remembering and building on prior learning are consistently effective across all subjects, so that pupils know more and remember more over time.

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 predecessor school, St Mary's Catholic Primary School, to be good for overall effectiveness in June 2013.

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	149053
Local authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	10346813
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	190
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Martin Gannon
CEO of the trust	Nick Hurn OBE
Headteacher	Joseph Wheatley
Website	stmaryswhickham.bwcet.com
Date of previous inspection	14 July 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school is part of the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust.
- The school is a Catholic school and had its last section 48 inspection in June 2019. The school's next section 48 inspection is due in 2025/26.

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 his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team.

- The inspector met with a representative of the trust, the vice chair of trustees and representatives of the governing body.
- 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 Ofsted's online surveys for pupils, staff and parents. This included any free-text responses in Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Andrew Yeomans, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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