

Inspection of a good school: St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Maidenhead

Cookham Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 7EG

Inspection dates:

10–11 December 2019

Outcome

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Maidenhead continues to be a good school.

However, the inspector has some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders want the best for pupils. They aspire for pupils to leave St Mary's with a strong 'moral compass' and for them to be ready to face the challenges of secondary school. Pupils speak with enthusiasm and pride about the school. They feel safe and cared for by the staff. Pupils say that bullying is rare and that any problems are dealt with quickly by their teachers. They enjoy coming to school and value their friendships with other pupils.

The school's strong religious character underpins the ethos. Staff encourage pupils to be kind and caring. In class and around the school, most pupils behave well and work and play together happily.

While pupils' achievement in reading and mathematics has been consistently strong, standards in writing dipped in 2019. Leaders are taking appropriate action to address this decline. They are also beginning to strengthen the curriculum, which they acknowledge is not yet planned well enough. Too little thought has been given to some subjects, such as French and design and technology, which are taught infrequently. Leaders know that teaching does not consistently meet the needs of some pupils or stretch the most able.

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

Leaders communicate enthusiasm for reading and have prioritised early reading. Phonics is taught effectively from the beginning of Reception. Teachers model letter sounds well and regularly check how well pupils are getting on. When needed, teachers provide extra support to pupils. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their favourite texts and authors. They also understand that reading helps them to learn in other subjects such as history. Older pupils talk knowledgeably about what they have learned about life in Victorian times from a novel they have read. In recent years, pupils' achievement has been particularly strong in reading.

Leaders are focusing on improving writing. Their writing plans set out clearly what pupils will learn. Pupils now write more regularly and apply their skills in other subjects. Leaders are also refining the school's approach to mathematics. Their recent plans provide helpful guidance for staff in how new knowledge is sequenced. Leaders' plans to strengthen history are also well under way. They have re-shaped topics to make these more exciting. Leaders have also mapped out the historical skills that pupils will learn. However, they have not yet considered how pupils' knowledge is built on over time.

Some subjects have not been designed or planned well enough. The content covered in subjects such as design and technology and French is too narrow and does not equal that of the national curriculum. In science, learning is not sequenced well, and learning goals are not always clear. There are some lengthy gaps of time when pupils do not encounter some subjects. As a result, they do not remember what they have previously learned.

In most subjects, teachers have good subject knowledge. They explain and model new concepts well, for example when teaching mathematics. However, teachers' expectations are not consistently high enough. Some teachers do not consider carefully enough pupils' abilities or needs. As a result, the most able pupils are not consistently challenged. Some teachers do not provide effective guidance for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Tasks are sometimes not adapted well enough and some pupils struggle to get going.

Leaders fund and organise regular extra help for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. They have a good knowledge of pupils' needs and vulnerabilities. Leaders make sure that support from the school's 'college' teacher is precisely focused on pupils' needs.

Children generally get off to a good start in early years. However, while there are strengths in teaching, there are inconsistencies. Some activities do not hold enough appeal or challenge. This means that some children do not stay focused on learning.

The school is an orderly environment. Courtesy and good manners are the norm. Leaders promote good behaviour. However, their records of the few incidents of poor behaviour are not systematic. Teachers help pupils to make meaningful links between biblical parables and important values such as compassion. Pupils have recently considered the qualities of patience and tolerance that are needed to be a peacemaker. The school's rich religious education curriculum helps pupils to learn about and make links between faiths.

Most teachers feel supported and say that leaders consider their well-being. They enjoy working in a close-knit team. However, due to a long-term unfilled vacancy, leadership capacity has been reduced. Therefore, some staff have taken on additional temporary responsibilities, resulting in increased workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders know pupils and their families well. They promote a culture of care and are alert to concerns about pupils. When needed, leaders refer their concerns to outside agencies.

They keep in regular contact with other professionals and make sure that pupils and families get the help and support that they need. However, leaders' records of concerns and actions taken are not well organised or in clear chronological order.

Regular training means that staff are fully aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. All pupils spoken to feel safe at school. Almost all parents and carers agree that pupils feel safe.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum is not well designed, and some subjects have been marginalised. Leaders need to review the school's curriculum offer and ensure that it provides sufficient breadth and opportunity for pupils to learn well in all subjects. Leaders need to review the scope and breadth of the curriculum content to ensure that this is at least as ambitious as the requirements of the national curriculum.
- The curriculum is not yet planned coherently in all subjects. While leaders have begun to review the curriculum, their plans are currently not well advanced. They need to strengthen their work to develop the curriculum. They need to ensure that knowledge and skills build sequentially in all subjects to support pupils in knowing and remembering more.
- In some classes and in some subjects, pupils with SEND are not supported well enough in lessons. Tasks are not adapted well enough to meet some pupils' significant needs. Leaders need to make sure that staff receive further guidance, training and advice to help them meet pupils' needs more effectively.
- Some teachers do not have high enough expectations or take enough account of what pupils already know and can do. Leaders need to ensure that teachers have a better understanding of pupils' previous learning and take this into account when planning lessons. Leaders need to make sure that teachers provide more consistent challenge and have higher expectations, especially for the most able pupils.
- Leaders are aware that the quality of teaching in early years is not consistently strong enough. Some activities during children's independent learning times lack appeal and do not provide enough challenge to sustain children's focus. Leaders need to ensure that where teaching is not strong enough, teachers receive training and guidance to improve their knowledge and skills.
- Leaders' records relating to safeguarding are not well organised. Without delay, leaders need to ensure that any safeguarding concerns and actions taken are clearly recorded and well organised.
- The few incidents of poor behaviour are not recorded systematically. This means that leaders do not have a clear enough oversight of this aspect of the school's work. Leaders need to make sure that they routinely record incidents of poor behaviour and how the school has followed these up.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Maidenhead to be good in July 2012.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	139882
Local authority	Windsor and Maidenhead
Inspection number	10111302
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	305
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Hans Daems
Headteacher	Sandra Barry
Website	www.stmarys-maidenhead.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	2 March 2016

Information about this school

- St Mary's is one of five schools in the Frasscati Academy Trust. The school joined the trust in July 2013.
- The school is designated as having a religious character. It received its section 48 inspection in May 2018, when this aspect of the school's work was judged to be good.
- The headteacher joined the school in September 2017. The deputy headteacher left the school in the previous school year. There are currently two acting assistant headteachers who are sharing additional responsibilities while the school is recruiting a new deputy headteacher. A new deputy headteacher has now been appointed and will take up post in 2020.

Information about this inspection

- I met with the headteacher and other leaders, including the two assistant headteachers.
- I held a meeting with six members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair of governors. Two of these governors are also trustees from the Frasscati

Academy Trust. I held a telephone conversation with a governor with responsibility for safeguarding.

- During this inspection, I did deep dives in reading, writing and history. I met with subject leaders and teachers, visited lessons, talked with pupils and reviewed pupils' work in books. I also listened to pupils read.
- I observed pupils' behaviour during lessons, around the school and during lunchtime.
- I reviewed the school's safeguarding records and records of recruitment checks for staff. I considered other safeguarding documents and policies.
- I spoke with parents at the beginning of the second day of the inspection and considered the 54 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and parents' free-text responses. I also considered the contents of a letter from a parent.
- I took into account the views of staff from the 17 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. I also considered staff views during meetings with them.
- I held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.

Inspection team

Sue Cox, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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