

Inspection of a good school: St Alban's Catholic Primary School, Walker

Westbourne Avenue, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear NE6 4HQ

Inspection dates:

26 and 27 March 2024

Outcome

St Alban's Catholic Primary School, Walker continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Martin Smith. This school is part of 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, Anita Bath, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Harrison.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Alban's Catholic Primary School is a safe and happy place for its pupils. Pupils relish coming to school. Their positive rates of attendance reflect their high levels of engagement. Pupils enjoy warm and respectful relationships with their peers and with staff. This helps them flourish socially.

The quality of pupils' education is a high priority in the school. The school commits to enhancing pupils' life choices. Pupils experience learning across a broad range of subjects. Pupils are also taught to read effectively. This helps them take advantage of the ambitious curriculum the school provides. Children in the early years benefit from the support of expert staff. They read daily and enjoy learning activities linked to their stories.

High expectations for behaviour are the norm in the school. Pupils thrive in the calm and nurturing environment the school has created. They live out the school's key principles to 'be safe, learn lots and be happy'.

Pupils are proud to take in leadership responsibility in their school. They particularly enjoy being house captains and meeting regularly with school leaders. Pupils can also engage in a range of extra-curricular activities. This includes attending boxercise classes with their parents and carers.

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

Trust and school leaders have established an ambitious and effective curriculum. They have carefully identified the important knowledge they want pupils to learn. The school's curriculum is also highly inclusive. Leaders have the same high expectations for all pupils,

including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils achieve well and enjoy their lessons. However, pupils' achievement in writing throughout school lags behind that in reading and mathematics. The school has been swift to respond and efforts to strengthen its approach to the teaching of writing across the school are now underway. These revised approaches are not yet fully implemented.

Teachers and support staff ensure that they teach the curriculum well. In lessons, teachers provide clear explanations for pupils. They break learning down into manageable chunks. Pupils rapidly grow in confidence. Staff also set high expectations for pupils' use of subject-specific words. This helps pupils talk about their learning in a meaningful way. For example, pupils in Year 6 explain algebra using terms such as substitute. They also apply prior knowledge, such as mathematical rules, to solve complex problems.

Children join the early years with a range of prior knowledge and experience. The school quickly checks what the children know. Leaders then plan an effective curriculum to address any gaps. Focused teaching activities support children's learning. For example, children in Nursery benefit from sessions to develop their mathematical knowledge. They select random numbers up to five and then count the correct number of chicks into a nest. However, children do not get enough sustained opportunities to practise their learning. For example, when they move on to independent learning following adult-led teaching activities, some children do not concentrate well. What children are to learn during these times is unclear. This means that opportunities to further develop children's knowledge and skills are missed. By the end of Reception, some children have gaps in their knowledge and are not ready for learning in key stage 1.

The school has prioritised early reading during recent years. As a result, pupils become increasingly fluent readers over time. Well-trained staff deliver phonics lessons with enthusiasm and precision. The school carefully checks how pupils are progressing in reading. This leads to rapid and effective intervention. Expert staff support the pupils who need the most help. Pupils then catch up quickly with their peers. Reading remains a focus as pupils move out of phonics. Older children enjoy listening to their teacher read. They are also proud to read to younger Reception-aged 'buddies' on World Book Day.

Leaders make sure pupils experience a wide range of enrichment activities. This includes visiting a contemporary arts centre. Year 5 also enjoy visiting Newcastle's bridges. This enhances their learning in design and technology (DT). In addition, the school provides a taught curriculum that supports personal development. Pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding of the wider world. They are clear about how they can stay safe on- and offline.

The school is an important part of the local area. Leaders engage well with a range of stakeholders. The school regularly encourages parents to take part in school events. Parents appreciate this opportunity to experience the ethos of the school first hand. One parent represented the views of many when they said the school is like a family. Governors commit to supporting staff workload. They make this a priority for discussion in meetings and visits to school. Staff enjoy coming to work. They feel valued and listened to by leaders. Leaders are, rightly, proud of the way in which the school builds links with the community.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils are not secure in the knowledge and skills required to support their development in writing. Pupils do not become consistently effective writers as they move through the school. The school should intensify actions to improve its approach to developing pupils' writing.
- Early years children do not benefit consistently well from meaningful learning in continuous provision. By the end of Reception, some children have gaps in their learning and are not ready for learning in Year 1. The school should continue its work to improve the implementation of the early years curriculum so that children's gaps in learning are rapidly closed and they are ready for key stage 1.

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 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 would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which 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 Alban's RC Primary, to be good in September 2017.

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	148447
Local authority	Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number	10297528
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	238
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Harrison
Headteacher	Martin Smith
Website	www.stalbansrcnewcastle.co.uk/
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is of a Catholic religious character. The most recent section 48 inspection took place in May 2018.
- St Alban's Catholic Primary School, Walker converted to be an academy in April 2021. When its predecessor school, St Alban's RC Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- The school does not use providers of alternative provision for its pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement 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 their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, assistant headteachers and other leaders from the trust over the course of the inspection. The inspector also held a virtual meeting with the chief executive officer.

- The inspector held a phone call with a member of the board of trustees. They also met with the chair of the local governing committee and two other governors. The inspector reviewed documentation relating to governance, including minutes from governor meetings.
- The inspector held a telephone call with the deputy director of education from the Diocese.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, mathematics and DT. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspector also discussed the history curriculum with the subject leader and looked at a sample of pupils' work in this subject.
- The inspector met with the leader responsible for early years.
- The inspector met with the special educational needs coordinator.
- 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 met with leaders responsible for personal development.
- The inspector met with groups of pupils formally throughout the inspection and spoke with them informally at social times and in lessons.
- A range of school documents was reviewed, including the school's self-evaluation and the school improvement plan.
- The inspector considered the views of pupils, parents and staff gathered through Ofsted's questionnaires.

Inspection team

Hannah Millett, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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