

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

Dene House Road, St. Mary Magdalene RC Primary School, Dene House Road, Seaham, County Durham SR7 7BJ

Inspection dates:

11 to 12 March 2025

Outcome

Evidence gathered during this ungraded (section 8) inspection suggests that the school's work may have improved significantly across all areas since the previous inspection. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Andrea Goodwin. This school is part of Bishop Chadwick 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), Brendan Tapping, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Daniel O'Mahoney.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish at St. Mary Magdalen's School. This nurturing and inspirational school has high expectations for all. Pupils are happy, safe and enjoy learning. They attend school regularly and achieve extremely well.

Parents are highly supportive of the school. One parent captured the sentiments of many when they said, 'My children love it here. We appreciate the exceptional education and support that my children receive.'

Pupils' behaviour is exceptional. Conduct in lessons and at playtime is impeccable. Pupils are resilient and motivated learners. They work hard and take pride in their work.

Through the school's buddy system, pupils develop a great sense of responsibility. They are confident and considerate. Pupils support younger children at playtimes. This helps children in the Reception class to settle quickly and feel part of the school family.

The school enhances the curriculum with carefully chosen visits and visitors. For example, visitors from a local business come to talk about sustainability. These opportunities inspire pupils' curiosity.

There is a rich offer of clubs and leadership roles. Pupils are extremely proud of their valuable contribution to the local parish and wider community. For example, the 'Ave Maria' group enjoyed Irish dancing with the local parish.

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

The curriculum is highly ambitious and carefully designed to take into account the school's mixed-aged classes. In every subject, key knowledge, vocabulary and skills are clearly identified. Everyone knows precisely what pupils should learn. Beginning in the early years and throughout key stages 1 and 2, subject curriculums are logically sequenced. Pupils make excellent progress through the curriculum and produce work of a high quality. Pupils in Year 6 leave school very well prepared for the next stage of their education.

The curriculum is taught effectively. Appropriate resources are selected to deepen pupils' knowledge and connect earlier learning with new content. Pupils recall their learning over time. They talk with confidence about how new knowledge connects to what they already know.

Teachers are highly skilled. They implement the curriculum with expertise. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to present new information clearly. They carefully check what pupils have learned and adjust the tasks effectively to address any misconceptions. Pupils receive clear feedback. They use this to improve their work.

The school places the highest priority on making sure that pupils learn to read quickly. The phonics programme is implemented with precision. Staff check pupils' learning often and provide personalised support for those who need it. Books are carefully matched to the sounds that pupils are learning. This helps pupils to read with fluency, confidence and enjoyment.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are exceptionally well supported. Dedicated and well-trained staff swiftly identify pupils with SEND. Pupils fully access the same ambitious curriculum as their peers. The school adapts the delivery of the curriculum incredibly well. Expert support helps pupils to learn with increasing fluency and independence.

Pupils benefit from strong pastoral care. From Reception class, children learn strategies that help them to manage their emotions and behaviour. Pupils learn about healthy relationships. They have a solid understanding of right and wrong. This is modelled throughout the school by both adults and pupils. Pupils treat one another with compassion. Older pupils are exceptional role models, displaying respect and kindness. They form strong, trusting relationships with their younger peers.

Pupils' personal development sits at the heart of the school. The carefully crafted curriculum provides a wealth of opportunities. Pupils develop an understanding of democracy through a range of activities, including the election of the head boy and head girl. Pupils show respect for the beliefs and traditions of people from different faiths. They learn how to keep themselves safe while online and in the community. For example, they know how to stay safe at the local beach. These learning opportunities help to prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain. The school encourages pupils to be aspirational for their own futures. Pupils enjoy the annual careers fair where they learn about a variety of possible jobs.

Staff are proud to work at the school. Morale is high. Staff appreciate the school's consideration of their well-being and workload. Highly regarded leaders have a clear vision and are ambitious for the school. The trust and those responsible for governance are knowledgeable. They provide effective support and challenge to leaders at all levels.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 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 Magdalen's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School) to be good for overall effectiveness in January 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	149165
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10346823
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	Daniel O'Mahoney
CEO of the trust	Brendan Tapping
Headteacher	Andrea Goodwin
Website	www.st.marymagdalens.durham.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St. Mary Magdalen's Catholic Primary School is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, which consists of 30 schools in total. The school converted to become an academy in June 2022. When its predecessor school, St Mary Magdalen's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good for overall effectiveness.
- The school is part of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.
- The school has a Roman Catholic religious character. Its most recent section 48 inspection was in October 2023. The next section 48 inspection will be within five school years.
- There is a new headteacher and deputy headteacher since the previous inspection.
- There are no pupils attending alternative provision.

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 the evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator and other leaders.
- The inspector also met with members of the local governing committee, and representatives of the trust.
- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at other times around school. The inspector met with groups of pupils formally and informally, including some of those who hold positions of responsibility within school.
- The inspector reviewed information on the school website and considered documents provided by the school, including the school's self-evaluation and minutes of the local governance committee.
- 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 responses to Ofsted's questionnaires for parents, pupils and staff.

Inspection team

Alison Stephenson, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
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