

St Mark's RC Primary School

Bardon Close, Westerhope, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear NE5 4BT

Inspection dates

4–5 July 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and governors are uncompromising in their ambition. They have created a culture in which everyone strives to achieve. As a result, outcomes are rising and differences in attainment between different groups are diminishing. Leaders are demonstrating the capacity to sustain the school's improvement.
- Provision for pupils' personal development is outstanding. Pupils feel very safe. They grow and mature into kind, thoughtful and responsible young people.
- The outstanding early years provision ensures that children make rapid progress. The addition of the Nursery has strengthened early years provision and ensures that children get off to an excellent start.
- Reading is taught effectively across the school. Almost all pupils attain the standard in the national phonics screening check. A carefully structured programme ensures that pupils develop strong reading skills as they progress through the school.
- The quality of teaching is good. Teachers provide a structured programme of learning in English and mathematics. This helps most pupils to make good progress and an increasing proportion to make excellent progress.
- Occasionally, lessons develop too slowly, and at times, the tightly structured teaching inhibits some pupils from achieving their potential in writing.
- Most pupils make strong progress in mathematics. However, pupils do not get enough opportunities to apply their mathematical knowledge to solving problems.
- Leaders are successfully refining the already broad and balanced curriculum. The content taught within most subject areas challenges pupils effectively. There are good opportunities for pupils to learn modern foreign languages. Planning in a few subject areas does not fully support pupils' progress in knowledge.
- Leaders are raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. Excellent support helps pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and pupils who speak English as an additional language to make strong progress.
- Behaviour in the school is outstanding. Pupils manage their own behaviour, show positive attitudes and are kind towards one another.
- Attendance is in line with the national average. Leaders have rapidly reduced the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and improve outcomes, by;
 - moving learning on as soon as pupils are ready
 - refining the mathematics curriculum, so that pupils are more frequently challenged to reason and solve mathematical problems
 - providing more opportunities for pupils, especially the most able, to develop their own ideas when they write
 - further developing the depth of content being taught in some of the foundation subjects, such as computing, music and art.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leaders have fostered a culture in which teachers and pupils are increasingly excelling. Their principled and passionate approach ensures that pupils develop strong values and a determination to succeed. Pupils come to school enthusiastic to learn and ready to give of their best. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and pupils with SEND flourish because careful thought goes into meeting their needs.
- A real strength of the school is the provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school's carefully planned curriculum successfully addresses the core values of a happy and successful society. All members of staff and pupils believe in these values. The school provides a very wide range of opportunities, such as the Prince William Award, bush-craft and various community roles to support these values and beliefs. This work begins when children first enter school. Children's first experience of school is a very calm, loving and purposeful environment. Pupils place great faith and trust in the adults who support them. Pupils know that they are cared for and they know that all adults are there to keep them safe.
- Leaders are also successfully improving the academic curriculum. For example, improvements made to the science curriculum have ensured that pupils now gain an excellent understanding of the subject. Senior leaders know there is more to do in some subjects. They are ensuring that middle leaders have the training and time they need to strengthen the curriculum in these areas.
- There is strong capacity to improve the school further. Over time, senior leaders have demonstrated that they improve the aspects of the school they focus on. For example, over the last year they have shown real determination to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The pupil premium has been used effectively. As a result, the difference in attainment between the school's disadvantaged pupils and others has diminished considerably in some year groups this year. Leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils have full access to the curriculum and that they get extra help to catch up.
- Other sources of additional funding are also used very well. There is good provision in place to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. In addition, the primary sports funding is used purposefully. Pupils have good access to coaching from external specialists across a variety of different sports and games.
- Senior leaders have developed the skills of middle leaders very well. In turn, middle leaders provide good support to their teacher colleagues. Consequently, over time, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has strengthened. Teachers regularly debate and discuss how to improve their practice.
- Leaders have responded quickly to the school's changing context. They have moved resources into the early years to provide for the greater number of children with SEND in the Nursery and Reception Years. They have also recognised that the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language has increased. Consequently, they provide specialist extra help for these pupils, and teachers provide good ongoing support to help pupils quickly acquire vocabulary.

- Parents and carers who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, were very positive about the school. Many praised the school's ethos. Nine out of ten parents who responded would recommend the school.

Governance of the school

- The governors are knowledgeable about the school. They provide strong strategic leadership and, in partnership with the headteacher, have successfully improved aspects of the school since it was last inspected.
- Governors are highly committed to ensuring that the school provides a loving and caring environment that nurtures and develops each child. This sustained vision ensures that pupils' personal development and welfare are outstanding.
- The governors hold leaders to account effectively. Records of their meetings show they review in-year performance data thoroughly, ask pertinent questions and visit the school to check that leaders' actions are making a positive difference.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders ensure that staff receive regular training and have careful systems in place. These ensure, for example, that any member of staff who is absent catches up with training they miss. Vetting of all adults who work in or visit the school is thorough.
- Senior leaders have considerable knowledge and experience in safeguarding. The headteacher is currently a member of the Newcastle Schools Safeguarding Partnership. Leaders also commission ongoing advice and guidance from external safeguarding specialists.
- Leaders maintain detailed and thorough records of the actions they take to protect children. These records show they are tenacious in seeking a quick resolution of concerns, and that they are not afraid to challenge their counterparts in social services about the quality of help being provided.
- The local authority has great confidence in the school's leadership of safeguarding. St Mark's RC Primary is one of a cluster of schools to have been awarded a significant grant to develop local capacity to address mental health and trauma issues, in conjunction with the child and adolescent mental health service.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is of a good quality. It is not outstanding because, over time, teaching has delivered broadly average rates of progress across key stages 1 and 2. There are clear signs that teaching has begun to deliver stronger progress for many pupils. This is because leaders have galvanised the staff and fostered a strong and committed team approach. Teachers receive good support from middle leaders and are clear about how curriculum plans should be implemented in the classroom.
- Most lessons are well planned. At the beginning of lessons, teachers typically revisit topics and check pupils' understanding of content covered the previous day. Through

their probing questions, most teachers skilfully determine if pupils are ready to move on. However, inspectors found that teachers sometimes spend too long recapping the previous day's learning, when it is clear pupils have a secure grasp of the content they have covered.

- Teachers typically adapt and tailor the work they set for pupils. This ensures that the level of difficulty is usually appropriate for pupils with different starting points. Occasionally, however, teachers miss things, such as providing key words and spellings for lower-attaining pupils when they settle down to write. This slows their progress. In addition, scrutiny of pupils' workbooks shows the most able pupils do not get onto the more challenging activities often enough, such as the 'challenge questions' teachers prepare in mathematics. In discussion, some capable pupils told inspectors they would like their mathematics work to challenge them more consistently.
- Reading is taught very well across the school. Teachers consistently foster a love of learning through the interesting texts they use. Almost all pupils acquire a secure knowledge of phonics and quickly move on to become fluent readers. Guided reading sessions across key stages 1 and 2 further develop pupils' reading skills. Inspectors found pupils could discuss the books they read maturely and in a discerning manner.
- Leaders have, over time, refined the way they implement the curriculum in English. Topics covered link to other subjects, allowing pupils to build up a breadth of understanding. Pupils are taught to improve their work by reflecting on their first draft and/or responding to the teacher's helpful and pertinent feedback. Repeated redrafting helps most pupils to improve their work and ensure that they write with a high degree of technical accuracy. However, opportunities for pupils to independently explore their own ideas are more limited.
- Work done this year to improve the quality of curriculum planning has begun to raise standards more widely. Science is now much more carefully planned, and teachers are providing rich opportunities for pupils to investigate and draw conclusions. Recent work, done in partnership with a feeder secondary school, has improved planning in history and geography. As a result, pupils have begun to acquire subject-specific skills and knowledge more effectively. Leaders acknowledge there is more work still to do in some other subject areas, such as computing, art and music, to ensure that provision is equally strong.
- Pupils show an appetite to learn. They work hard in lessons and are keen to participate. They commit to improving their work, and take real pride in their presentation and handwriting. Positive relationships between teachers and pupils ensure that pupils are not afraid to ask questions or seek extra help.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils feel very safe and secure in school. The curriculum helps them to understand and appreciate a wide variety of risks. As a result, they know how to stay safe when online. They also know about groups in society with different protected characteristics and that they must treat people equally and be respectful and tolerant.

- There is a lovely atmosphere at social times because pupils are consistently kind towards one another. The members of staff who supervise outside organise sports and games activities and participate themselves. The similar numbers of boys and girls who choose to play football together reflects the obvious equality of opportunity present in school. At St Mark's RC Primary School, pupils from different cultural backgrounds fully integrate and mix harmoniously.
- There is well-developed provision in place for pupils who are more vulnerable. The school has good partnerships with a range of external organisations to support pupils' mental health.
- The school offers a wide range of carefully chosen enrichment activities. For example, pupils have learned about safety and the rule of law through working as community wardens. Opportunities to work with external providers on initiatives such as the Prince William Award and through the 'St Mark's Challenge' have helped to develop teamwork and leadership skills. During the inspection, pupils engaged readily with visitors from the Red Cross, and learned how to administer chest compressions and place an injured person in the recovery position.
- The school council is a very active body in the school. Members of the school have had the opportunity to visit the House of Commons and learn, first-hand, from members of parliament about the workings of government.
- Parents who responded to Parent View praised the work the school does to broaden their children's understanding of the world. One parent wrote, 'Based on the foundations of a safe and caring environment my child has grown in confidence and his learning has exceeded what I thought was achievable.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils are extremely polite, cheerful and friendly towards one another.
- In lessons, pupils work hard and apply themselves particularly well. They can regulate their own behaviour, sustain their concentration and abide by the school's behaviour policy. A focus on praising and rewarding good behaviour means sanctions are only required on rare occasions. As a result, exclusions are infrequent and, when they are used, they are applied proportionately and as a last resort.
- Last year, the overall level of absence was in line with that seen nationally for similar schools. However, the proportion of pupils who missed school regularly was above the national average. Leaders have focused on this issue and, this year, have reduced the rate of persistent absence by almost half.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Well-focused and effective leadership and management at all levels are improving outcomes. Pupils make strong progress across the curriculum and develop their skills and understanding effectively.
- High-quality early years teaching has ensured that, in recent years, pupils have entered Year 1 increasingly well prepared to study the school's curriculum. Pupils who

completed Year 2 last year made good progress across key stage 1 and attained standards in reading, writing and mathematics that mirrored the national picture. Teacher assessments for this year indicate standards are rising at the end of key stage 1, particularly in reading, where a greater proportion of pupils have attained both the expected standard and greater depth.

- Improvements in standards of reading at key stage 1 are a direct result of the thoughtful and systematic work done to improve the teaching of phonics. The school's phonics programme begins as early as the Nursery for children who are ready to start linking sounds and letters. The careful grouping of pupils and systematic teaching of phonics ensure that pupils make strong progress. In recent years, the proportion of pupils who have met the standard in the Year 1 national phonics screening check has been consistently above the national average.
- The school's curriculum broadens effectively as pupils progress through the school. For example, pupils' interest in modern foreign languages is fostered well using external specialists who teach Mandarin and French. Pupils' progress in science is strong and the quality of the curriculum in history and geography is strengthening.
- In recent years, pupils have made broadly average progress across key stage 2. Published data from the last three years shows rates of progress have steadily been improving. In 2018, the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was above the national average. The proportion of pupils who attained the higher standard was in line with the national average.
- Results from 2018 showed the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in the school was below that of other pupils nationally at both key stage 1 and key stage 2. Tracking data for this year shows disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are performing better. For pupils currently in Year 6, leaders expect disadvantaged pupils to attain standards in line with other pupils in the school.
- Good support is provided for pupils with SEND and for the increasing proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language. Consequently, both groups of pupils currently in the school are making good progress.
- Scrutiny of pupils' workbooks shows that the school's increasingly systematic and structured approach to teaching is further accelerating the progress of many pupils. National curriculum test results for 2019 were not available at the time of this inspection. However, the school's own assessment information indicates leaders expect standards to rise further this year, sustaining an improving trend over time.
- In English, the work in pupils' books shows most pupils are making strong progress. Pupils develop a good grasp of how to analyse different texts and how to write for different purposes and audiences. While the tightly structured approach works for most pupils, it can, at times, however, restrict opportunities for the most able pupils to express themselves fully.
- In mathematics, the school's curriculum focuses predominantly on developing and practising calculation skills. As a result, most pupils are good at arithmetic. However, there is, on balance, less emphasis placed on developing pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills. Results from practice national curriculum tests used by the school show some pupils perform less well when presented with unfamiliar problems.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- The clear vision and strategic leadership of the early years are now delivering outstanding outcomes for children. The decision of governors and the headteacher to introduce Nursery provision in 2016 has ensured that children get off to an excellent start.
- On average, children enter the Nursery with skills below those typical for their age. The Nursery staff do an excellent job of helping children to develop socially and emotionally and supporting their language and communication skills. Basic skills, such as going to the toilet independently and washing hands, are fostered effectively. Children's social skills and curiosity to learn are stimulated through the rich variety of activities provided for them. For example, an inspector observed children tenderly giving one another a massage during a 'calm time'. As a result, an increasing proportion of children now begin the Reception Year with skills that are typical for their age. Children who enter the Nursery with weaker skills or barriers to learning are quickly identified and provided with the extra help they need to catch up.
- Children continue to make strong and sustained progress across the Reception Year. Their progress is carefully assessed and tracked, so that teachers and other adults know exactly what type of activities each child needs next. Learning activities are made available for children to choose when they play or are skilfully led by adults.
- Early reading skills are systematically taught across the early years. Skilful teaching and careful grouping ensure that children with different starting points make very good progress. Books are carefully matched to the stage each child is at, enabling them to read successfully and grow in confidence.
- Activities are thoughtfully designed to foster children's learning. For example, an inspector observed children were being taught to throw and catch a ball, while other children learned to count in fives by counting the catches and recording them on a tally-chart. Adults are skilled at working with children to extend their thinking as they play. They ask good questions that make children think deeply about what they are doing.
- Children behave impeccably. They socialise happily with one another and show considerable care and consideration for one another. Children with SEND receive excellent care and attention. Last September, leaders recognised some children needed more support, so the school established a nurture room, which the support staff use to help children cope when they become anxious.
- The early years classrooms and outdoor spaces provide a safe and happy environment for children. Leaders have ensured that the statutory welfare requirements of the early years foundation stage are fully met. Parents who responded to Parent View and commented about early years provision were delighted with their children's progress. One parent wrote, 'I have seen a massive improvement in my son's learning. He absolutely loves going to school.'

School details

Unique reference number	108498
Local authority	Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number	10089005

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	239
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Monica Lowes
Headteacher	Alison Miller
Telephone number	01912 869 349
Website	www.stmarksrcprimary.co.uk
Email address	office@stmarksrcprimary.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	19–20 November 2014

Information about this school

- St Mark's RC Primary School is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- A broadly average proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and an average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average. An average proportion of pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school runs its own breakfast club.
- The school has offered Nursery provision from September 2016. Children can attend on a part-time or full-time basis.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, five governors, including the chair of the governing body, middle leaders and a group of teachers.
- Inspectors also met with groups of pupils and spoke to others more informally at social times.
- An inspector listened to some pupils read and discussed their interest in books with them.
- An inspector met with a representative of the local authority and the school's improvement partner.
- Inspectors visited lessons in each of the school's classes. Several observations were undertaken jointly with the headteacher. During lesson visits, inspectors talked to pupils about their learning and sampled a range of pupils' workbooks.
- Inspectors met with middle leaders to scrutinise a sample of pupils' books from across the full range of abilities in key stages 1 and 2. These included pupils' work in English, mathematics, science, history, geography and religious education. The sample of books included pupils who entered the school with different starting points, some of whom were disadvantaged pupils.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, policies and assessment information. Inspectors also looked at records of attendance and behaviour and safeguarding information.
- The inspector took account of the 37 responses to Ofsted's parent questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, the inspectors took account of the 17 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

Chris Smith, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Andrew James

Ofsted Inspector

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