

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Voluntary Academy

Lowry Drive, Marple Bridge, Stockport, Cheshire SK6 5BR

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 December 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is John Nish. This school is part of the St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi-Academy 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), Kevin Gritton, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Sarah Noon.

Ofsted has not previously inspected St Mary's Catholic Voluntary Academy as an academy under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 as, until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last graded inspection of the predecessor school.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Mary's is a welcoming and nurturing school, which cares about its pupils. Pupils are very polite and well mannered. They are articulate and have a thirst for learning.

Pupils learn the 'St Mary's Way'. This teaches them how to behave in lessons and around school. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are a credit to the school. Pupils are very well supported to develop valuable skills for life. Their strong understanding of the three 'pocket principles' guides their behaviour. As a result, the school is a place of calm.

The school has high expectations of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils enjoy their lessons and they achieve well. Pupils enjoy supporting one another. Year 6 pupils particularly value and enjoy their role as 'special friends' with children in the Reception class.

Pupils have a remarkably strong sense of justice. They have the confidence to speak out if something is not right. Pupils support one another and are kind in both word and deed. Pupils make a highly positive contribution to their school and local community. For instance, some pupils joined other local schools to sing Christmas carols at a local festival.

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

Reading is at the heart of the school's curriculum. In the early years, children listen attentively during story time and join in with enthusiasm. This helps them to develop a love of books and reading. The phonics programme begins as soon as children start in the Reception class. Well-trained staff teach children how to link letters and sounds. Parents are invited to school, so that they know how their children will learn to read. The books that pupils take home to practise reading are well matched to their phonics knowledge. Regular checks ensure that pupils who need extra help are identified and receive the support that they need to catch up. This enables pupils to become fluent readers by the time they move into key stage 2.

The curriculum for pupils in Years 1 to 6 and for children in the early years is ambitious. Thoughtful links are made between the subject content and the local area. This includes a range of trips, which enable pupils to learn more about where they live.

Careful consideration has been given to the order in which pupils learn new knowledge. Teachers regularly check that pupils have remembered what they have learned. As a result, most pupils achieve well. In some subjects, some pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to complete the activities which have been set to deepen their learning. This limits the progress that some pupils make through the curriculum in a small number of subjects.

The school ensures that the needs of pupils with SEND are identified effectively. Teachers adapt the delivery of the curriculum, with the needs of individual pupils in mind. This enables pupils with SEND to learn successfully alongside their peers. In addition, the school draws on the expertise of external agencies to make sure that pupils get the support that they need to learn well.

The school expects pupils to behave very well and they do. From the early years, strong routines are quickly established. Pupils across the rest of the school also have highly positive attitudes to learning. They listen attentively to their teachers and they are respectful to staff and to one another. The small number of pupils who need extra help to behave well are nurtured by staff and supported by their friends. Outside of lessons, pupils behave impeccably around school. They play happily together on the playground.

The way the school prioritises pupils' personal development is impressive. Pupils learn about healthy relationships and how to stay safe. Pupils are extremely tolerant. They respect the differences between themselves and others. They deepen their understanding of the wider world by learning about other religions and cultures. Pupils learn to be active citizens. They can take on leadership roles that benefit the whole school community. For example, the eco-defenders help to look after the school grounds and the community custodians encourage parents to park safely. Extra-curricular opportunities are of a high quality. Pupils can develop and extend their talents and interests at a wide range of clubs, such as pottery, cross-country and choir.

Parents and carers, including those of pupils with SEND, hold the school in high regard. They said that their children are happy and learn well because of the staff's caring approach.

Staff and pupils are well supported by the local governing board and the trust. They know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. The trust invests time and resources into staff development, so that teachers have the tools that they need to be confident and highly skilled. Teachers value the training that they receive and appreciate the impact that this has on helping them to maintain a reasonable workload.

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 subjects, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could. This is because they are given insufficient opportunities to complete their work and

deepen their knowledge. The school should ensure that teachers give pupils enough time to refine, practise and build on their knowledge and skills.

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	146189
Local authority	Stockport
Inspection number	10242370
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	221
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Sarah Noon
CEO	Kevin Gritton
Headteacher	John Nish
Website	www.stmarysmarplebridge.srscmat.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Ralph Sherwin Catholic multi-academy trust.
- St Mary's converted to become an academy school in September 2018. When its predecessor school, St Mary's Catholic Primary School Marple Bridge, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding overall.
- The last section 48 inspection was carried out by the Nottingham Roman Catholic Diocesan Education Service in May 2022. The next inspection is due to take place in 2026.
- The school provides a breakfast club and after-school care.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and computing. For each deep dive, inspectors visited some lessons, met with subject leaders, discussed the curriculum with teachers, looked at samples of pupils' work and spoke with some pupils.
- An inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors also considered the curriculum in some other subjects. They met with subject leaders, spoke with pupils and looked at a sample of pupils' books.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: 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.
- Inspectors observed behaviour around school, during lessons, at playtime and lunchtime. They discussed behaviour and bullying with pupils and staff.
- Inspectors considered the views of pupils and staff who responded to Ofsted's pupil and staff surveys.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents who responded to Ofsted Parent View. This included free-text comments. Inspectors also spoke with parents in the morning as they brought their children to school.
- An inspector spoke with members of the local governing board, including the chair of the board.
- Inspectors spoke with school leaders. They also held discussions with members of the board of trustees, including the chair of the trust.

Inspection team

Frith Murphy, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Ian Cooper

Ofsted Inspector

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