

Inspection of a good school: St Monica's Catholic Primary School

Currier Drive, Neath Hill, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK14 6HB

Inspection dates: 11 and 12 June 2024

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school where pupils like learning and teachers enjoy teaching. Every pupil receives a warm welcome at this happy, friendly school. Pupils get on well together and any disagreements are quickly sorted out. They value the friendships they forge and that everyone is included. Pupils behave well and try their best in lessons. The school's mission to 'let trust, respect and love live here' is reflected in pupils' lived experiences.

Pupils benefit from many extra activities and clubs. From choir to multi-sports, there is something to spark every interest. Many pupils take on additional responsibilities, such as being a 'restorative friend' or a 'well-being ambassador'. They love having their achievements celebrated in the weekly assemblies. As one pupil commented, 'This gives you a great feeling inside.'

The school has high aspirations for pupils. Everyone wants pupils to enjoy school and to leave the school well prepared for the next steps in their education. Most pupils achieve well overall across a broad range of subjects, reflected in published outcomes in 2023. However, some pupils with the most complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) at the school are currently not progressing well enough. This is because the curriculum and support for these pupils is not shaped carefully enough around their needs.

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

The new leadership team has worked with integrity and a strong moral purpose to steer the school through a period of significant change. These changes include a rise in the proportion of pupils with SEND and an increase in the complexity of their needs. Throughout this time, the school has maintained its purposeful direction. Strengths in pupils' behaviour and their personal development continue to shine. Governors have kept

appropriate oversight and provided support and challenge. Staff are dedicated and work as a close-knit team. They greatly value leaders' consideration of their well-being.

Overall, the school's curriculum is ambitious, broad and coherently sequenced. This begins in early years, where the curriculum builds the foundations for future learning. In many subjects, the school has identified the most important knowledge they want pupils to know and remember. Nevertheless, in a few subjects, such as geography, there is sometimes too much content for staff to teach meaningfully. Consequently, some content is not taught in the way that leaders intend.

The school is working hard to adjust provision for pupils with SEND to reflect the school's changing population. There are effective processes to identify pupils' additional needs. Class teachers provide well-considered support and adapt learning activities so that most pupils with SEND can achieve success. However, the curriculum and teaching approaches for pupils with the most complex needs at this school are not as effective as they need to be. Provision is not tailored precisely enough around these pupils' individual needs. This is particularly so for pupils with speech, language and communication needs, including those who use alternative means of communication, such as signing.

Reading is a priority. Training and ongoing support give staff the confidence and expertise they need to teach phonics effectively. A love of reading is promoted and, throughout the school, pupils experience many good-quality texts. This introduces pupils to new vocabulary and supports their learning in other subjects such as history. Most younger pupils get off to a good start to learning to read. However, while most pupils are achieving well, some younger pupils have not kept pace with the school's reading programme. Rightly, the school is providing extra support to help these pupils to catch up but this is yet to have had enough impact.

Across the school, pupils learn interesting topics and staff bring learning to life. Staff model and explain things in a way that supports pupils to understand new concepts. They revisit previous knowledge to help keep learning fresh. In subjects such as mathematics, 'flashback fours' help teachers to identify and address any gaps in pupils' understanding. In most subjects, teachers plan sequences of lessons that help pupils to connect with what they have previously learned. Nonetheless, in some wider curriculum subjects, teachers do not always check that pupils have the knowledge they need to successfully learn new content.

The school provides very well for pupils' holistic development. This includes a well-judged curriculum for personal, social and health education. Pupils learn about topics such as healthy relationships, and how to live healthily and keep safe. They have a good understanding of the important safety protocols they need to follow when online. Diversity is cherished and there are many opportunities for pupils to take part in cultural celebrations. Pupils learn about other religions and know to value everyone, no matter their beliefs, cultural heritage or family background.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum and teaching approaches for pupils with more complex SEND is not effective enough. Provision for these pupils is not tailored precisely enough around their individual needs, particularly with respect to communication and language. As a result, these pupils are not achieving well enough and gaining the knowledge they need to communicate their needs or express themselves. The school needs to ensure that the curriculum for these pupils meets their individual needs fully. The school must ensure that staff working with these pupils are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to implement the curriculum effectively.
- In some foundation subjects, aspects of the school's curriculum and assessment processes are not as effective as they could be. Sometimes the curriculum has too much content for staff to meaningfully cover and staff do not always check what pupils have learned and remembered before introducing new knowledge. This means pupils do not achieve as well as they could. The school should refine the curriculum in the foundation subjects. They should ensure that staff check what pupils have learned and remembered and use this information to plan future learning effectively.
- A number of younger pupils are well behind the expected stage in the school's phonics programme and are still at an early stage of learning to read. The school needs to continue its sharp focus on helping these pupils so that they catch up as quickly as possible.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2015.

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	110482
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	10321782
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	439
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Michael Manley
Headteacher	Natalie Shanahan
Website	www.st-monicas.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	28 November 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a Catholic voluntary-aided school within the Diocese of Northampton. The school's most recent section 48 inspection took place in June 2023. The next section 48 inspection is due to take place in the school year 2027/28.
- In September 2023, a new senior leadership team was formed. The headteacher and deputy headteacher took up their current roles at this time. Prior to this date, both held senior leadership roles in the school. The current leaders for lower key stage 2 and key stage 1 took up their posts in September 2023 and January 2024 respectively. The leader for provision for pupils with SEND was appointed to this role in September 2023.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has repurposed a room in the school building to make an inclusion room. This room is known as The Treehouse. The provision here is designed to cater for pupils with complex SEND. Most pupils who access this provision currently spend most of the school week here.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

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 her evaluation of the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, the inspector held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of work. The inspector also heard some pupils read.
- The inspector met with the chair of governors and held a separate meeting with a representative from the local authority.
- 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 visited the school's inclusion room, The Treehouse, and met leaders to discuss the provision for pupils with SEND. She also held meetings with leaders to discuss other aspects of the school, including pupils' behaviour and attendance and pupils' wider development.
- The inspector considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. She also spoke with parents at the end of the school day on the second day of the inspection.
- The inspector took account of the views of staff during meetings with them and through their responses to the Ofsted staff survey. She took account of pupils' views during discussions with them and when talking with pupils during visits to lessons and at other times of the day, such as during lunchtime.

Inspection team

Sue Cox, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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