

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Axminster

Lyme Road, Axminster, Devon EX13 5BE

Inspection dates

2–3 July 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The new headteacher has worked tirelessly to improve the school. Her actions have created a learning environment in which pupils thrive.
- Pupils now make good progress from their different starting points in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Leaders are forensic in their use of additional funding. As a result, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) achieve well from their different starting points.
- Pupils behave well. They are polite and respectful. Pupils are motivated and enthusiastic about their learning.
- Leaders promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding well. As a result, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders have successfully improved pupils' attendance. Pupils now attend school regularly.
- Children in the early years make good progress in all areas for learning. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education. This is because the quality of teaching is good.
- Leaders and governors have established a culture where safeguarding is the fulcrum of the school's work. Staff are vigilant and know how to spot signs of abuse.
- The use of the physical education (PE) and sport premium enables pupils from all abilities to enjoy sport. A very large majority of pupils take part in extra-curricular sport. Equality of opportunity is a strength of the school.
- Leaders have not fully established a systematic approach to teaching mathematics. As a result, pupils do not reach their full potential.
- Pupils in key stage 2 enjoy a rich and varied curriculum. They have secure knowledge and understanding of languages, humanities, the arts and science. This prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education. However, the curriculum in key stage 1 is not as varied and requires further refinement.
- New local governors are committed to school improvement. However, they have not yet fully developed the skills and systems needed to provide effective challenge to school leaders.
- In mathematics, pupils are sometimes given work that is not well matched to their abilities and does not provide them with sufficient challenge. Too few pupils have achieved at a greater depth in mathematics.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enhance the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the new local governors develop their skills further so that they can hold leaders rigorously to account
 - in key stage 1, curriculum plans reflect improved sequencing of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills across all subjects.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - the teaching of mathematics systematically builds upon and deepens pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding
 - teachers use their knowledge of what pupils can already do, to match work in mathematics more accurately to pupils' needs.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the last inspection, the school has undergone a significant change in staffing at all levels. The new headteacher started to establish stable teaching from January 2018. Teaching is now settled and standards are being driven up. The headteacher's passion and determination have brought about rapid change to the school.
- The overwhelming majority of parents who spoke to the inspector or who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, say that the school has been transformed. One parent's comment that encapsulates many, was: 'The school has improved rapidly over the last 18 months, it now has strong consistent teaching and provides pupils with confidence and resilience.'
- The very large majority of staff who responded to the staff survey are proud of the school and enjoy working there. The headteacher has built on the new positive culture and ethos and raised teachers' expectations. Staff who met with the inspector said the school is unrecognisable from 18 months ago. There is a positive and happy atmosphere throughout the school.
- Leaders have a precise and accurate view of the school. Leaders reviewed the school's assessment system to ensure that the information it provides is accurate. Leaders use other sources of evidence, such as external verification and moderation of writing, to verify pupils' attainment. They know what the school does well and what they need to do to improve further.
- Middle leaders are knowledgeable about their areas of responsibility. They are keen to develop their skills further. They know the areas needing further improvement and demonstrate a clear ability to continue to drive up pupils' progress and attainment.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness well through a wide range of curriculum activities. Pupils learn about other religions and cultures through their religious education (RE) studies. They fundraise for local, national and international charities, such as the British Heart Foundation and the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD). During the inspection, the school's 22-piece orchestra performed in a concert for the local community, showcasing their musical talents.
- Pupils, parents and carers speak positively about how every pupil in the school is given the opportunity to share their individuality in 'St Mary's Got Talent'. Staff draw out and find the talent that exists in every pupil. A strong sense of being valued and belonging permeates the school.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. For example, pupils in Years 4 to 6 learn about the value of democracy through a parliament week. Pupils from across the school have opportunities to vote on changes to the school. They recognise that the majority vote is democratic. Pupils also demonstrate a good understanding of what constitutes individual liberty, tolerance and the rule of law.
- Leaders use the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils effectively. They forensically identify individual disadvantaged pupils' barriers to learning and provide

pupils with carefully tailored support. This contributes well to pupils' progress. As a result, disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as other pupils nationally.

- The few pupils in school with SEND have effective support. The leader responsible for these pupils is highly ambitious that they reach their full potential. The vast majority of pupils are making strong progress.
- Leaders have ensured that they use the physical education and sport premium to provide wider opportunities for all pupils and to develop the teaching of PE across the school. Teachers teach alongside qualified sports coaches to develop their own practice. The school takes part in a range of sporting events, competing against other schools locally. Equality of opportunity, with a vision of 'sport for all' runs through all decision-making. Leaders provide a 'super star' club for pupils who are reluctant to engage in sport or who are lacking in confidence. Over time, there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils attending the wide range of sporting opportunities on offer.
- The school has had effective support from Plymouth CAST (the trust). Strong support has been in place to ensure that the quality of teaching is good. This has helped to improve the school and pupils' outcomes.
- The school's curriculum is not broad, balanced and stimulating across key stage 1. In key stage 2, however, the curriculum is effective, and teachers make connections with other subjects to bring learning to life. For example, in Year 6 science, pupils use their knowledge and skills to write an explanation of the digestive system. However, in key stage 1, these opportunities are not as frequent and well thought out. Leaders are in the process of redesigning the curriculum.

Governance of the school

- The trustees, who have overall responsibility for the school, have been effective in their role. They provided timely support during the difficult period the school has faced, caused by turbulence in staffing. They have ensured that the school has gone from strength to strength since the previous inspection. Collectively, they have in equal measure supported and challenged the leadership of the school. This has ensured that the school is flourishing.
- The local governing body is passionate and committed to continuous school improvement. However, several members are new and have not yet fully developed their skills. Because of this, some of their practices are not rigorous enough to improve the school further. Nevertheless, they are keen and determined to improve their capacity under the strong leadership of the chair.
- Governors keep themselves informed through regular visits to the school and the reports leaders provide. They use this information to question leaders about their work. However, minutes show that some of the questioning is not pertinent or precise enough to help form an accurate view of pupils' progress. Therefore, governors are not as well informed as they should be, and this hampers their ability to hold leaders to account for improving pupils' outcomes.
- Governors have a good understanding of their responsibility for safeguarding. They routinely check the school's safeguarding procedures to check that they are effective

for keeping pupils safe. Governors oversee recruitment of new members of staff and ensure that the correct checks to appoint suitable applicants are followed diligently.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The culture of safeguarding in the school is strong. Leaders place a high importance on keeping pupils safe and have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.
- Procedures for keeping pupils safe are rigorous. Leaders ensure that staff receive regular and relevant safeguarding training and updates. During the inspection, staff spoken to knew what to do if a safeguarding incident were to be disclosed to them. They were able to recognise the signs and symptoms of any pupils at risk of child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.
- All pupils who spoke with the inspector, and nearly all pupils who responded to the pupil survey felt safe in school. This view is echoed by the very large majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey.
- The governor responsible for safeguarding meets regularly with leaders to check that the single central record is compliant and up to date.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Typically, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. The activities they organise motivate most pupils and pupils are keen to take part in their learning. Occasionally, work in mathematics does not deepen pupils' knowledge. This is because teachers do not always base work on what they know pupils have already secured and learned. As a result, pupils' progress in mathematics is hampered and some pupils do not reach their full potential.
- The small proportion of pupils with SEND is well supported. Teachers and teaching assistants have a good understanding of the different needs of pupils and, through regularly monitoring, support is adjusted and adapted to ensure that these pupils make the progress of which they are capable.
- Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. They provide effective support when working with individuals or small groups of pupils. They use questioning well, both to check pupils' understanding and to make them think harder. This ensures that pupils who work with teaching assistants make strong progress.
- The teaching of reading is good. Leaders have worked relentlessly to improve reading standards across the school. Leaders overhauled the approach to the teaching of reading and invested in a range of high-quality resources that have had a positive impact upon pupils' outcomes. Pupils who read to the inspector said that they enjoy the new reading material. They read with fluency and understanding appropriate to their age and ability. They have developed a range of reading skills that allows them to infer meaning with accuracy. This is because, over time, reading skills are taught well.
- Changes to the teaching of writing are having a positive impact upon pupils' outcomes. Teachers have adopted a more systematic approach. This approach focuses on improving specific writing skills relevant to the genre they are learning. When

developing skills, teachers provide pupils with stimuli which help them formulate their ideas. Pupils are given opportunities to hone their writing skills in extended pieces of writing. Pupils have made strong progress since the introduction of this initiative. Work in current pupils' books is mostly of a high standard.

- The teaching of phonics is good. Teachers use a consistent approach, and this helps pupils build upon and develop their reading skills further. The school's books to support early reading help develop pupils' knowledge of phonics. This ensures that pupils are able to develop their fluency and access suitable texts.
- In mathematics, pupils are making better progress than they have in the past. As the leader responsible for mathematics has identified, teachers once used a mixture of approaches, which could confuse pupils. However, following a curriculum review, a new approach to mathematics has been adopted. Nevertheless, leaders have not sequenced the curriculum well enough to ensure that it systematically builds upon what pupils already know, can do and understand. This hampers pupils' progress, particularly that of the most able.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The school is the hub of the local community and pupils and families value the role the school plays in bringing the community together. One parent told the inspector, 'I absolutely love the atmosphere and ethos of the school.' Pupils thrive in a caring and nurturing environment.
- Leaders provide a range of enrichment experiences to broaden pupils' horizons. For instance, pupils can apply to become school councillors or sports leaders. The school also provides many extra-curricular opportunities, such as singing in the choir or playing a musical instrument in the school's orchestra. Parents and pupils appreciate the opportunities leaders provide.
- Pupils know how to lead a healthy lifestyle. Pupils from across the school take part in running a mile a day. They understand the importance of regular exercise and the impact that it has on the body. Work in pupils' books demonstrates that pupils have a strong understanding of what constitutes a healthy meal and the value of eating a balanced diet.
- Pupils have a clear awareness of how to keep themselves safe. For example, they explained clearly and with confidence what actions they should take if they feel vulnerable. Pupils know how to stay safe online and how to respond should they feel at risk. They say that staff are quick to respond to any concerns they may have and are confident that staff will resolve any issues swiftly.
- Pupils who spoke with the inspector are adamant that bullying does not exist in the school. The very large majority of pupils who responded to the pupil survey also agree. They told the inspector that, should bullying occur, they have complete confidence that staff will deal with it quickly.

- The recently appointed pastoral worker, supported by senior leaders, has had a positive impact on pupils. She works closely with families and pupils who find managing daily school life challenging. Tailored support has ensured that pupils are able to access learning and make positive progress.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Leaders have worked hard to eradicate poor behaviour. Pupils' behaviour has improved since the previous inspection. The school is a calm and orderly place for pupils to learn in. Pupils work well together in lessons and enjoy their social time together. They are polite and friendly. Pupils know the expectations of the school's behaviour policy and what is expected of them.
- Incidents of low-level disruptive behaviour are few. A very small minority of pupils do not meet the high behaviour standards leaders, and indeed their peers, expect. This is more prevalent when work is not well matched. The vast majority of parents have no concerns about the behaviour of pupils.
- Leaders and staff have worked tirelessly to improve pupils' attendance. They established increased systems of accountability and worked closely with the educational welfare officer. As a result, pupils' attendance is now similar to that of other pupils nationally.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Since 2018, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stages 1 and 2 was above the national average. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher standards at the end of key stage 1 was also above the national average. However, the proportion of pupils attaining greater depth by the end of key stage 2 was above the national average in reading and writing, but below in mathematics. This is because work is not always well matched to ensure that pupils can grapple with their mathematics and deepen their understanding further.
- Since 2016, pupils' progress by the end of key stage 2, in reading, writing and mathematics, has improved rapidly. Current pupils continue to make strong progress and typically pupils reach standards comparable to those seen nationally.
- Over time, the proportion of pupils achieving the national standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been in line with the national average. Pupils currently in the school continue to achieve well in their phonics development. This is because the teaching of phonics is effective.
- A love of reading is promoted well. Pupils enjoy a wide range of high-quality texts and can talk enthusiastically about their favourite authors. One pupil in Year 6 told the inspector that having read Daniel Almond's book 'Skellig' in Year 5 developed his enthusiasm to read.
- The additional funding for pupils with SEND is used effectively. Leaders make regular individual progress checks on the small number of pupils with SEND. Pupils typically make strong progress from their starting points. However, due to small number of pupils in each year group, outcomes do fluctuate across the school.

- Pupil premium funding is used successfully to support disadvantaged pupils to make good progress. The very large majority of pupils make strong progress and achieve the same standards as other pupils nationally.
- Work in current pupils' books shows that teachers are using assessment information to set activities which effectively develop pupils' learning in most subjects. However, in mathematics, these tasks are not always sharply matched to pupils' needs, which results in pupils not making the progress of which they are capable.

Early years provision

Good

- Many children enter Reception with skills typical for their age. Children make good progress and many children make enough progress to reach a good level of development in line with what is seen nationally. Most children are ready to enter Year 1 and are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Leaders have created a calm and focused learning environment in which children can succeed. The outdoor learning environment is stimulating, spacious and highly effective in use. Leaders have developed the school grounds further by introducing a 'forest school' provision. During the inspection, the inspector observed children being highly motivated, curious and inquisitive to follow instructions to find hidden treasure outside. Children work well together to solve problems. This is because their personal and social development is well established.
- Children behave well. They quickly settle into the routines of the day and know what is expected from them. Staff have established warm, nurturing relationships where children want to work hard and please their adults.
- Leaders plan the curriculum around children's needs and interests. They seek out what motivates children and use this as a stimulus. Children are confident in exploring the well-planned opportunities on offer. Children are able to sustain their concentration and ask inquisitive questions.
- Adults use conversations and questions well to encourage discussions and probe children's thinking further. For example, during a phonics session, questioning was used effectively in order to develop children's language comprehension. This enabled children to use what they learn and apply their knowledge of phonics to their 'wriggly writing'. The work in current children's writing books is of a very high standard. This is because the teaching of phonics is effective.
- Leaders have recently introduced an online platform to record the development of children's skills. Staff use assessment information carefully to fill any gaps they identify in children's learning. Parents regularly contribute to children's learning journeys and this supports leaders in ascertaining a complete view of children's progress.
- Adults in the early years have established positive relationships with parents. One parent's comment that sums up many, was: 'Reception is absolutely wonderful, and I am so thankful. My son was only just 4 when he started school but despite this he has flourished.'
- All statutory welfare requirements are met.

School details

Unique reference number	140772
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10088332

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	129
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	John Burnett
Headteacher	Elaine Mannix
Telephone number	01297 32785
Website	www.stmarysaxminster.devon.sch.uk
Email address	admin@stmarysaxminster.devon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	21–22 March 2017

Information about this school

- St Mary's Catholic Primary School is smaller than the average-sized primary school and is part of the Plymouth CAST. The trust was formed in April 2014. The work of the trust is overseen by a board of directors. The trust is responsible for one nursery, one first school, 32 primary schools and two secondary schools across six local authorities in the south-west region.
- The majority of pupils are of White British background.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is below the national average. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is above the national average.

- The school is designated as having a religious character and received its section 48 inspection in Feb 2016 when the school was graded as requires improvement.
- The headteacher has been in post since January 2018.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning across the school. All observations were undertaken jointly with the headteacher. He also observed pupils' behaviour around the school and at social times.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, middle leaders, the leader with responsibility for pupils with SEND, the leader of early years and a sample of support and teaching staff.
- The inspector held a meeting with six governors including the chair of the local governing body.
- The inspector spoke with pupils formally and informally during their break and lunchtimes and in class. He also listened to groups of pupils read.
- The inspector examined a range of documentation provided by the school, including minutes of meetings of the local governing body, the school's self-evaluation document, the school's improvement plan and documentation relating to the safeguarding of pupils.
- The inspector held a meeting with a representative from the trust who has responsibility for school improvement.
- The inspector examined a large sample of pupils' books from across the school.
- The inspector spoke with a sample of parents as they arrived at school. He also considered 35 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, 10 responses to the staff survey and the 32 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Matt Middlemore, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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