

Inspection of a good school: St Thomas Catholic Voluntary Academy

Church View, Ilkeston, Derbyshire DE7 4LF

Inspection dates:

14 and 15 February 2023

Outcome

St Thomas Catholic Voluntary Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy coming to this welcoming school. They have strong, positive relationships with staff. Pupils say that all staff are caring. Pupils know a trusted adult they could speak to if they had a problem. The pupils at this school feel safe and happy.

Leaders have woven the school's five gospel values into the curriculum as well as all parts of school life. Teachers develop all pupils to show respect, forgiveness, honesty, love and friendship. The school operates as one cohesive community.

Pupils and parents and carers agree that staff have high expectations for all pupils who attend this school. Consequently, pupils behave very well. Pupils know what bullying is and they know that it has no place in their school. Pupils say that teachers will not tolerate bullying.

Children in early years are eager to learn. They benefit from well-planned provision and staff who nurture and look after them well.

The vast majority of parents would recommend this school to other families. One parent's comment summed up the views of many parents: 'The school has a very welcoming atmosphere. Staff are kind and helpful to children and parents.'

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

The curriculum encompasses a broad range of subjects that give pupils the knowledge and skills that they will need for the next phase of learning. Leaders have continued to refine some elements of the curriculum. This is particularly when assessment and/or results from national tests are not in line with national expectations. For example, in mathematics, subject leaders have increased the time pupils spend on arithmetic. Problem-solving activities are more frequently planned, taught and assessed. These refinements are effective. Pupils are now achieving better than they were before.

In all subjects, subject leaders have considered the aims that they want pupils to achieve. Subject leaders have broken these aims down into smaller components. The logical sequence of these components helps pupils link what they are learning now with what they already know. This helps pupils to know and remember more.

Teachers have good subject knowledge. Teachers mostly use activities that help pupils grasp new learning quickly. On occasions, the activities are not as effective as they could be. This slows the pace at which pupils learn. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) study the full curriculum. Teaching is skilfully adapted to ensure that pupils with SEND achieve as well as they can.

Teachers ensure that pupils get opportunities to revisit prior learning. Teachers encourage pupils to recall important, fundamental knowledge. They check that pupils understand this knowledge before they move on. As a result, pupils gain detailed understanding across many subjects. For example, pupils in Year 4 can talk confidently about the digestive system using scientific vocabulary. Pupils in Year 6 can discuss why certain biomes are more likely to exist closer to some lines of latitude. In a small number of foundation subjects, pupils' recall of important knowledge is not as secure as in other subjects. Some teachers do not teach the essential knowledge in these subjects explicitly enough.

There is a well-planned approach to teaching reading. Children start to learn to read as soon as they start in Reception Year. Adults listen to pupils read regularly. The books pupils read match closely to the sounds they know. Staff are well trained to teach early reading. Story time and whole-class reading are engaging. Pupils become fluent readers quickly, and all pupils develop a love for reading.

Children in early years get off to a flying start. Activities have a clear intent in developing children's understanding across all areas of learning. For example, children experiment with materials to build stable houses after listening to the fateful tale of 'The Three Little Pigs'. This helps them develop an understanding of the world while being creative through play.

The curriculum teaches pupils about different faiths and cultures. Pupils understand the diversity they will encounter in modern Britain. Pupils have a firm understanding of British values. Pupils benefit from sports and gardening club and they enjoy singing. School councillors and members of the pupil parliament help improve the school and wider community.

Pupils commit to their study. They show positive attitudes towards learning. Purposeful, well-managed classrooms enable pupils to spend most of the time learning.

Leaders consider staff workload and well-being before they introduce new initiatives. Staff value and benefit from the expert training they receive from the trust. This helps them to continue their professional development.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that they frequently brief all staff on safeguarding issues and how to respond to these. As a result, staff are highly vigilant. They know the signs pupils may show when they are at risk. Leaders have trained staff to use a consistent approach to report their concerns.

Leaders engage with external agencies swiftly when they need to. Leaders keep detailed records of the concerns that staff raise about pupils. Actions taken are appropriate and quick.

Trustees and governors understand their statutory safeguarding responsibilities. They monitor closely to ensure that safeguarding procedures remain effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers do not always use the most effective activities to help pupils learn the curriculum. As a result, some pupils do not learn as quickly as they could. Leaders must ensure that teachers use activities that support pupils to learn the intended content.
- In a few foundation subjects, teachers do not teach the essential knowledge that is set out in curriculum plans explicitly enough. As a result, some pupils struggle to recall the important, fundamental building blocks that they need for the next stage of learning. Leaders must ensure that all teachers are familiar with the essential knowledge in foundation subjects and that they teach it more explicitly.

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 predecessor school, St Thomas Catholic Primary, to be good in May 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](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	146145
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	10254883
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	234
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Sarah Noon
Headteacher	Michael Sellors
Website	www.stthomasilkeston.srscmat.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The headteacher took up his substantive post in November 2022.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- The school is part of St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi Academy Trust.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils, and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector listened to a sample of pupils in key stages 1 and 2 reading to a familiar adult.
- The inspector scrutinised curriculum plans, visited lessons and looked at the work pupils had produced for a range of other subjects.

- The inspector met with leaders responsible for behaviour, provision for pupils with SEND, personal development and the early years foundation stage.
- The inspector met with groups of pupils from key stages 1 and 2.
- The inspector met with the safeguarding leaders to discuss the actions taken to keep pupils safe. He reviewed a range of documents related to safeguarding, including the school's single central record.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan.
- The inspector met with members of the local governing body and trustees.
- The inspector spoke with representatives of the trust.
- The inspector considered the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and considered the results of Ofsted's questionnaires for pupils and for staff.

Inspection team

Rakesh Patel, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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