

St Nicholas Catholic Primary School

Ringswell Avenue, Exeter, EX1 3EG

Inspection dates

25–26 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Leadership and management are good. The roles and responsibilities of senior and middle leaders have been clarified and strengthened. All leaders work well together as an effective team.
- Governors have improved the way they check the performance of the school. Their skilled work in helping to recruit and support new staff has also helped to raise the quality of teaching.
- Staff promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development strongly through supportive relationships and a very caring, inclusive atmosphere.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils mix and learn well together. Most show good attitudes to their work. These qualities help to sustain their good and improving learning.
- The school's work in keeping pupils safe and secure is outstanding. All pupils are treated equally and benefit from high quality care.
- Teaching is typically good across the school. Teachers have improved the way they mark pupils' work and this is promoting faster progress.
- The above average standards that pupils attain by the end of Year 2, and increasingly by the end of Year 6, reflect their good achievement.
- Pupils across the range of abilities make good progress across the school. Many are making rapid progress in response to more stable and consistent teaching and additional support.
- Early years provision for children in the Nursery and Reception classes is good. As a result, children enjoy school, achieve well and are ready to make a good transition into Year 1.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough outstanding teaching. The best practice is not shared well enough to ensure that all pupils are enthusiastic and the quality of their learning is always exceptionally high.
- Occasionally, a few pupils do not do their best and do not always finish work in their books.
- Standards in mathematics are not strong enough. The skills of lower ability pupils to recall number facts quickly and accurately are not good enough.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors attended one assembly, looked at learning in 23 lessons, and saw the work of 15 teachers. The inspectors also observed the breakfast and after-school clubs. They were accompanied either by the headteacher or an assistant headteacher during many of these observations.
- A wide range of documents was scrutinised, including systems for checking progress, records relating to behaviour and attendance, safeguarding procedures and the school's analysis of how well it is doing and how it plans to improve. Records of checks on the quality of teaching were examined, along with records of visits to the school made by the local authority.
- The inspectors talked to pupils about their work, and listened to individual pupils from Years 1, 2 and 3 read. They also looked at samples of pupils' work across a range of subjects and classes, especially writing.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing body, school staff and groups of pupils, including members of the school council. Inspectors spoke to individual pupils in lessons and around the school. A meeting took place with the adviser of the multi-academy trust.
- The inspectors took account of the views expressed in the 71 online responses from Parent View and informal meetings with parents at the school during the inspection. Questionnaires from 24 members of staff were also analysed.
- The inspectors considered the school's use of primary sport funding.
- Inspectors also examined the school's work in updating procedures for checking pupils' progress within the new National Curriculum.

Inspection team

Alexander Baxter, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Wendy Marriott

Additional Inspector

Phil Banks

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Nicholas Catholic Primary School converted to become an academy school on 1 June 2013. When its predecessor school, also named St Nicholas Catholic Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be a school causing concern and was placed in special measures.
- The school is a member of the Plymouth CAST multi-academy trust (Catholic and Anglican School Trust.) The academy trust contains in total 35 schools.
- This school is much larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The majority of pupils attending the school are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils from a minority ethnic background and the proportion of pupils who have English as an additional language are close to the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs is well above the national average and is consistently high from year to year across the school.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is well below average. This is additional government funding provided to give extra support to disadvantaged pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Children in receipt of early years provision attend the school's Nursery on a part-time basis and transfer on a full-time basis into two Reception classes.
- The school provides breakfast and after-school clubs.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the overall quality of teaching so that all pupils make as much progress as possible by:
 - sharing the best practice more widely in order to enthuse pupils and help them excel
 - ensuring that pupils always do their best and finish work in their books.
- Further raise pupils' achievement in mathematics, especially for lower attaining pupils, by:
 - strengthening pupils' ability to recall number facts quickly and accurately and so improve their confidence and problem-solving skills.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Leadership and management are good. With effective additional support from the multi-academy trust, the headteacher has driven the school forward through a challenging period of continuing staff change.
- Leaders share a united determination to bring about improvement. This has re-established a culture where good teaching and behaviour can flourish equally. The school has also improved the way it works with parents. Their renewed confidence in the school is boosting pupils' attitudes and success in learning.
- Senior and middle leaders and governors have strengthened their leadership skills and roles. Leaders at all levels work well in teams to identify the right aspects to be tackled. They also ensure that actions put in place to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' learning are effective. As a result, over the past year, better teaching has increased pupils' progress, especially by the most able. The pupil premium is used successfully. Strengthened additional support for disadvantaged pupils has accelerated pupils' progress effectively. All of this demonstrates the school's capacity to bring further improvement.
- Leaders recognise that leadership and management are not outstanding because they have not yet secured the best possible teaching and learning for all pupils. They also acknowledge that the strongest teaching evident in the school has not yet been fully shared with all staff to improve their work.
- Leaders and managers ensure that current vetting of staff and other statutory safeguarding arrangements fully meet requirements and keep pupils safe.
- Representatives of the governing body and of the multi-academy trust provide the school with good support. They manage the performance of the headteacher effectively. The headteacher, aided by other senior leaders, ensures that teachers' pay and movement along pay scales are focused efficiently on improving teaching and pupils' learning.
- Staff do not tolerate discrimination and work diligently to provide all pupils with equality of opportunity. This is evident in the way increasing numbers of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, often with English as an additional language, are welcomed and supported effectively.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs also benefit from good teaching and guidance. Disadvantaged pupils aided by additional government funding learn well because of the additional adult help they receive.
- The curriculum has good breadth and balance and includes an effective emphasis on English and mathematics. Although improved, pupils' knowledge of basic number facts is not always emphasised enough. The curriculum includes a wide range of activities and themes that strongly promote the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, the theme 'Knowing me, Knowing You, Knowing Us' extends the pupils' understanding of the heritage and cultures of pupils in the school.
- Assemblies, displays in all classrooms and regular celebrations of the rich cultural mix of the pupils in the school secure the pupils' understanding of cultural diversity and British values. As a result, pupils are well prepared for life and democracy in modern Britain. Professional relations are fostered strongly. Parents receive good information about the curriculum on the school website and this helps them to support their children's learning at home.
- The primary sport funding is used effectively. A specialist sports teacher leads staff training and teaches pupils multi-skill activities at break times and during new after-school clubs. School leaders check the impact of this work on pupils' health, welfare and participation. For example, a staff survey showed increased participation of boys in dance sessions and that forty pupils attend the after-school clubs.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors fully meet their statutory requirements. Since entering the multi-academy trust, the governing body has welcomed new members, completed an audit of skills and has organised governors' roles more efficiently. As a result, governors have significantly strengthened the way they undertake their duties and work with staff leaders to bring about rapid improvement. For example, governors have comprehensively improved the recruitment and vetting of staff and how they check the performance of the school. Governors rigorously check data of pupils' progress and gather information from staff leaders about the quality of teaching. Governors receive detailed reports from staff leaders and visit the school regularly to see the work at first hand. Governors commissioned an external review of the work of the school in November 2014 to test the accuracy of the school's views of its strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, governors know about the quality of teaching and that procedures for checking teachers' performance are effective. Governors also know that their decisions are based on accurate information about how actions are impacting on pupils' achievement. Governors question senior leaders closely and hold them to account to ensure that good teaching is rewarded and underperformance tackled.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**are good****Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are polite and their pride in the school is clearly evident in the way they so willingly welcome visitors. One pupil, reflecting views of others, exclaimed, 'We are all friends here!'
- Staff and pupils get on very well together. They share highly supportive relationships which underpin pupils' good attitudes to learning. As a result, the school is a harmonious community.
- Most pupils are proud of their work and give of their best. In particular, the diligent way that some pupils share their ideas is often a key factor behind their rapidly improving progress.
- Behaviour is not outstanding because, occasionally, a few pupils need reminders from staff to concentrate fully in lessons and to finish their work.
- Pupils undertake their various responsibilities well; for example, members of the school council diligently represent the views of other pupils. Older pupils also welcome opportunities to support younger pupils in their classes and at break times.
- Pupils who attend breakfast and after-school clubs value the comforting support provided by staff, and enjoy many friendships with other pupils.
- The pupils' above average level of attendance reflects their love of school and the positive relationships between school staff and parents.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- All staff provide a very caring and inclusive atmosphere in all parts of the school. Pupils in most need are particularly well supported.
- School safeguarding procedures are extremely well documented and fully implemented by all staff in order to keep pupils safe.
- Pupils say that they feel very safe in school. This is also the view of all the parents interviewed by an inspector and the vast majority of those who responded to the questionnaire. One parent, typically representing the views of other parents, commented, 'Behaviour is managed much better now than in the past.'
- Pupils are taught e-safety (how to use computers safely) and understand how to keep themselves safe, both inside and outside school. Pupils have a good understanding of bullying and the different types of bullying, including physical, racial and cyber bullying.
- Pupils express confidence in the swift and effective way that staff deal with inappropriate behaviour and the very few incidents of bullying. Consequently, pupils express little concern regarding bullying in school.

The quality of teaching**is good**

- The quality of teaching is typically good and it is helping pupils to make better progress in literacy, reading and mathematics than in the past.
- Teachers have improved the way they work together in teams. They check pupils' developing skills and plan learning experiences that challenge pupils at the right level and promote their progress.
- These key features of the improved teaching across the school are particularly successful in quickening the progress of the most able pupils. For example, during mathematics in Years 5 and 6, pupils rose to the challenge of explaining what happens when addition and subtraction operations are repeated.
- Teachers check pupils' work effectively. They are raising expectations of what pupils should achieve to match those in the new National Curriculum. Most of the work currently seen in pupils' books reflects good learning. However, there is some inconsistency in the quality and amount of work some pupils complete. This shows that some pupils are still not always producing their best work.
- Teachers typically adapt their teaching methods well to match pupils' interests and understanding and manage behaviour effectively. As a result, pupils gain confidence and enjoy learning and this is quickening their progress.
- Teachers' marking of pupils' work is similarly effective in encouraging pupils to think about how to improve their work. For example, books in Years 3 and 4 show pupils' responses led to improved use of adverbial phrases and enriched their descriptive writing.

- Teachers work closely with teaching assistants to ensure that additional adult attention given to the pupils addresses their particular learning needs. This ensures that pupils across the range of abilities, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, are well supported.
- Reading skills and phonics (the sounds that letters make) are taught well. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who have English as an additional language also enjoy learning phonics and benefit from careful adult support.
- All staff are skilled in talking with the pupils and questioning them to ascertain their level of understanding. Teachers respond well to the pupils' answers and use them effectively to check whether they need to explain further or whether pupils are ready to move on.
- Pupils appreciate the value that all adults place on their opinions. In response, pupils confidently offer ideas about the methods they are to use to improve their learning. This is helping to raise pupils' achievement. For example, pupils in Years 1 and 2 shared their ideas with enthusiasm when setting different scenes to retell a favourite story, *How to Wash a Woolly Mammoth*.
- There is an increasing emphasis on developing the pupils' knowledge of the four rules in number and this is improving pupils' progress in mathematics. However, this has not yet been sustained to equally good effect in all classes. Consequently, some pupils, especially those with less ability, are still not proficient enough in recalling number facts accurately. This is restricting their problem solving skills.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils' progress is rapidly improving as new staff have settled into their roles and secured good teaching. The pupils' resultant good progress and much higher standards are fully reflected in the school's records of pupils' developing skills and their work in books.
- Inspection findings, which also include observations of pupils' learning and responses in lessons, show increasing proportions of pupils exceeding expected levels of skill for their age. As a result, attainment is on track now to be above average at the end of Key Stage 1 later this year.
- Accurate checks of pupils' skills indicate that standards are also on course to reach an above average level by the end of Key Stage 2 this year. At times, some pupils, especially those with less ability, lack confidence in mathematics because their basic numeracy skills are not always developed well enough.
- Pupils make good progress in reading as they move through the school. Pupils know the sounds that letters make and they use their understanding to read fluently and accurately. This was evident in the Year 1 phonic screening check (the sounds letters make) in 2014, when an above average proportion of pupils reached the expected level. Pupils continue to show interest in reading books and researching information on computers to aid their learning.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. This is due to careful checks of their understanding, which ensure that the support provided by the school effectively meets their needs.
- The achievement of the most able pupils, especially in Key Stage 2, is improving rapidly. In Key Stage 2 national tests in 2014, the proportion of pupils reaching above average levels of attainment matched the national average in reading and writing. Slightly fewer pupils reached this standard in mathematics. In response to challenging teaching consistently, school records show a substantially higher proportion of pupils working at higher than expected levels.
- Inspection findings confirm that the most able pupils make good progress. For example, the most able pupils in Years 5 and 6 show good skills in editing and improving their own and each other's descriptive writing. In mathematics, they show good understanding of how to construct and interpret pie charts. The supportive way that pupils willingly share and explain their ideas also accelerates their progress.
- White British pupils achieve well. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who have English as an additional language have their needs quickly identified and make good progress in response to effective adult help.
- Disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium funding have their needs tackled at an early stage. They are well supported by additional adult assistance in and out of classrooms and as other pupils make good progress.
- Often, within the different year groups across the school, a large proportion of the disadvantaged pupils also have complex learning difficulties. This leads to variation in levels of attainment. Even so, in 2014 the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 matched that of other pupils in the school and other pupils nationally in reading and writing. Their attainment was the equivalent of about a term and a quarter behind their classmates and other pupils nationally in mathematics.

The early years provision**is good**

- The majority of children join the school with skills that are generally typical for their age. Often communication and language skills are less developed.
- In response to good teaching and very caring support, children settle quickly to develop their skills and make good progress.
- The leadership of the early years stage is good. An assistant headteacher provides additional oversight. Together with the early years leader, she encourages teamwork and manages the work of all staff effectively. This enables the Nursery and Reception classes to function well as an early years unit,
- Nursery and Reception staff work well together to plan learning activities that stimulate the curiosity of the children. For example, in response to thoughtfully posed adult questions, children developed their numeracy skills effectively through a wide range of interesting practical activities. These included counting 'sheep in a field' and 'animals in the café' and coloured pegs on a board.
- Children learn about other cultures; for example, they explore Chinese food and dance to Chinese music. Activities like this help them to appreciate cultures different to their own.
- All staff ensure that the children are extremely well cared for and kept very safe. Safeguarding procedures have been carefully adapted to cover all aspects of the early years provision. They are checked and implemented very effectively by all staff. As a result, children behave well and clearly feel safe as they confidently move from one activity to another, both indoors and outside.
- Children mix and play well together. They continue to learn well when adults leave their activity to support other children more closely. The children's good social skills are seen in the way the children relate warmly toward each other and willingly assist each other during 'tidy-up-times'. The friendly relationships promoted by adults, and shared between all the children, play a supportive role in lifting children's confidence, especially those with special educational needs.
- Newly arrived children from minority ethnic backgrounds with English as an additional language are warmly welcomed and quickly settle alongside their classmates. Staff are rising to the challenges presented by the variety of children's home languages, but acknowledge that provision to tackle this issue is not yet as strong as other aspects.
- All adults in the Nursery and Reception classes check the progress of children carefully. They keep detailed records about the children's improving skills and use these effectively to plan activities that develop and extend their learning further.
- Early years staff work closely and supportively with parents and keep them well informed about their children's progress. Parents who spoke with an inspector appreciate the way staff are quick to offer advice and support.
- By the end of the Reception, in 2014, two thirds of the children had reached levels that are above those typical for their age, and this is set to rise again this year. This represents good achievement from the children's differing starting points and shows that children are well prepared for future learning in Year 1.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	139394
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	449914

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	352
Appropriate authority	Plymouth CAST
Chair	Jane Wardle
Headteacher	Angela Folland
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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