

# Inspection of St Mary & St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School, Blaydon

Stella Lane, Blaydon-on-Tyne, Tyne and Wear NE21 4NE

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|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Inspection dates:         | 15 and 16 October 2024                                             |
| The quality of education  | <b>Outstanding</b>                                                 |
| Behaviour and attitudes   | <b>Outstanding</b>                                                 |
| Personal development      | <b>Outstanding</b>                                                 |
| Leadership and management | <b>Outstanding</b>                                                 |
| Early years provision     | <b>Outstanding</b>                                                 |
| Previous inspection grade | Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 |

The headteacher of this school is James Craig. This school is part of Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Nick Hurn OBE, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Martin Gannon.

Ofsted has not previously inspected St Mary & St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School, Blaydon under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. However, Ofsted previously judged St Mary & St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School to be outstanding for overall effectiveness, before it opened as St Mary & St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School, Blaydon as a result of conversion to academy status. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils at St Mary & St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School are extremely happy, confident and articulate members of the school family. They have every opportunity to blossom and thrive in a remarkable, nurturing environment. A sense of care and mutual respect is at the core of everything the school does. Relationships are warm and highly positive. Pupils understand and follow the school's 'back pocket principles' of being ready, respectful and responsible.

The school has incredibly high aspirations and expectations for every pupil. Talented and well-trained staff ensure all pupils have every chance to succeed. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve exceptionally well.

Pupils demonstrate exemplary standards of behaviour. Their conduct in lessons and around school is of the highest standard. Pupils have high levels of empathy for others. Older pupils relish opportunities to help younger children, calling them 'our soon-to-be special friends'.

Parents and carers are extremely supportive of the school. Their comments were all of a similar theme such as, 'Staff know my children both academically as well as personally. They show a genuine interest in their lives, meaning they feel valued and safe.'

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

Early years staff immerse children in rhyme, story and song within an exceptional curriculum. Adults model adventurous language and vocabulary extremely well. This helps pupils develop their communication skills. Children quickly build secure knowledge and skills through high-quality provision. Skilled adults guide children through their learning and play. They ensure that all children benefit from the superb provision on offer. A very effective approach to early reading ensures that pupils quickly develop the phonics knowledge they need for key stage 1. Nothing is left to chance. As a result, children are very well prepared for the next stage of their education. Pupils in key stage 1 build systematically on their existing phonics knowledge. They develop into fluent, confident readers.

Highly trained and knowledgeable staff teach the curriculums in school with notable expertise. They identify individual pupils' needs and put highly effective support in place. All pupils achieve exceptionally well across the curriculum, including those with SEND.

Across the very high-quality, well-sequenced curriculum, pupils develop a secure and substantial bank of knowledge and skills. They talk about their learning with deep understanding. In a Year 2 geography lesson, for example, pupils talked about the differences in vegetation between Skiddaw in Cumbria and Mount Everest. Pupils in a Year 5 history lesson drew on prior learning on Rome as a republic. They then used this to secure their understanding of change in the Roman empire.

Pupils show consistently exceptional attitudes to both learning and to each other. The respectful and considerate behaviour of pupils radiates throughout the school. The school puts in intelligent and effective support for those pupils who may, from time to time, not meet the incredibly high expectations. There are exciting, engaging lessons and strong friendships in the school. As a result, pupils want to come to school. Attendance is high. Where this is not the case, the impact of leaders' actions to improve attendance is evident. The school rigorously monitors both behaviour and attendance to maintain the highest standards.

Pupils' personal development is at the heart of all the school does. Exceedingly high-quality provision is in place to extend pupils' learning well beyond the academic. There is an unswerving focus on pupils making exceptional contributions to both the school and wider community. This includes charity work both in the UK and across the globe. Staff encourage pupils to develop a fundamental understanding of respect and tolerance for all through a detailed spiritual, moral, social and cultural curriculum. Pupils take pride in seeing the impact of their voices being heard by leaders. For example, more well-being and mindfulness activities in school, more gospel garden time and more opportunities to cook are the result of leaders' decisions that were initiated by pupils. There is high pupil participation in a wide range of clubs and educational visits which promote healthy lifestyles, resilience and teamwork. Pupils of all ages and needs benefit from these. Older pupils also speak warmly about the opportunities they get to present on the school's own radio station, Stella FM. They use this to broadcast upcoming events in school. They share prayers with their fellow pupils.

Leaders at all levels are relentless in their pursuit of excellence. They have crafted an ethos in school of the very highest expectations. Staff benefit from an exceptional programme of professional development. There are high levels of support for staff workload and well-being. Governors and the trust work highly effectively in tandem to hold leaders to account. They fulfil their roles with diligence and understanding.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **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

|                                            |                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b>             | 149052                                                                                                       |
| <b>Local authority</b>                     | Gateshead                                                                                                    |
| <b>Inspection number</b>                   | 10346812                                                                                                     |
| <b>Type of school</b>                      | Primary                                                                                                      |
| <b>School category</b>                     | Academy converter                                                                                            |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                 | 3 to 11                                                                                                      |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                    | Mixed                                                                                                        |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b> | 237                                                                                                          |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>               | Board of trustees                                                                                            |
| <b>Chair of trust</b>                      | Martin Gannon                                                                                                |
| <b>CEO of the trust</b>                    | Nick Hurn OBE                                                                                                |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                         | James Craig                                                                                                  |
| <b>Website</b>                             | <a href="http://www.stmaryandthomasaquinasblaydon.bwcet.com">www.stmaryandthomasaquinasblaydon.bwcet.com</a> |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>         | Not previously inspected.                                                                                    |

## Information about this school

- The headteacher was appointed in April 2023. The deputy headteacher was appointed in September 2023.
- There has been a significant change in staffing since the predecessor school was last inspected in October 2007.
- This school is one of 47 academies in the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- As this school has a religious character, it is inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005. The last Catholic School Inspection was in March 2023. The next inspection is due before April 2028.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements

(quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection 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.
- The inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other senior leaders, other school staff, representatives of the local governing committee, a representative of the trust board, a representative of the trust central team and a representative of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, history and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors 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 pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects and looked at samples of pupils' work in these subjects.
- An inspector listened to pupils from Years 1, 2 and 3 reading to a familiar adult.
- An inspector met with some parents at the end of the school day.
- 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 analysed the responses to Ofsted's staff survey and Ofsted's pupil survey. They reviewed responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.

## Inspection team

Richard Beadnall, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Angela Spencer-Brooke

Ofsted Inspector

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