

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



9 January 2017

Mr John Hanley
Headteacher
St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School
Church Lane
Shevington
Wigan
WN6 8BD

Dear Mr Hanley

Short inspection of St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 December 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Leaders have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is a welcoming place for pupils, staff, governors and visitors alike. Good relationships, underpinned by the school's Catholic ethos, help pupils to develop into well-rounded, caring individuals – a reflection of the school's motto, 'Growing together in faith, love and learning'.

Pupils' behaviour was very good during the inspection. Classroom routines are well established so that time is not wasted. Pupils, even the youngest, listened closely to each other and to adults. Pupils' personal development equips them well for their future lives. The curriculum in art and music coupled with the half-termly topics, alongside extra-curricular activities, visits and visitors, has helped strengthen pupils' cultural development which was an area for improvement at the last inspection. More remains to be done, however, on giving pupils a better understanding of multicultural Britain.

Pupils make good progress overall during their time at the school. The way pupils respond to the school's positive learning environment and the skills that teachers demonstrate suggest that they could achieve even more highly. This is especially the case for the boys who tend to lag behind the girls at all ages. The school should redouble its efforts to help boys catch up at the earliest possible stage. The scene for higher achievement is set, so be more ambitious, leaders and governors!

The school's track record of above-average standards in national tests and assessments faltered a little in 2016, particularly in Year 2. Senior leaders have reacted swiftly to ensure that the current Year 3 class makes up any lost ground. Assessment information for pupils currently in Years 2 and 6 show that they are poised to reach above-average standards in 2017. Pupils' progress and attainment in mathematics have risen markedly since the last inspection when mathematics was identified as an area for improvement.

In our discussions, you showed a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school's self-evaluation and development plan show that you are 'on the case' for the weaker aspects. Sometimes, you and other leaders tend to react to what has not worked well or has gone wrong, rather than picking up clues earlier and using that information to drive improvement. At other times, leaders are proactive, for instance in the way the special educational needs coordinator has worked with parents on reviewing the school's special educational needs and/or disabilities policy. Systems for monitoring the school's work are suitable but the information gathered is not always as sharp as it might be, for example the lack of subject-specific detail in checks on teaching. Also, the information is not always used strategically to support development. For instance, the available analysis of Year 6 pupils' performance in national tests showed some weaknesses in reading that included explaining the meaning of words in context and summarising ideas from more than one paragraph. Such analysis could help teachers plan this year's teaching and might identify an area for staff development.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's safeguarding policies and procedures are fit for purpose and suitably detailed records are kept. The culture that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility is well established and taken seriously. Appropriate checks are made when staff are recruited and on those volunteers who will visit the school regularly. The intention to increase the number of senior staff and governors trained in safer recruitment is wise. Staff ensure that pupils are taught how to keep safe, including when they are online, although the system for pupils' computer passwords needs tightening. The school's website provides helpful guidance for parents on e-safety. The school site is well managed and secure. The presence of staff at the gate at the start and end of the day works well. A close check is kept on those pupils who attend breakfast and/or after-school clubs.

Staff are trained in child protection and the 'Prevent' duty. They understand the steps to be taken in the event of any concerns being raised. All staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire agreed that the school is a safe place to be, as did all of the parents and pupils who completed the questionnaires.

Inspection findings

- Strengths in the school's work have been maintained over the four years since the school's last inspection. Work to address the areas for improvement has met with success with marked improvement in pupils' achievement in mathematics. The multicultural dimension of pupils' cultural development needs further work, especially as it is not naturally part of their day-to-day experience.
- You are aware of the few aspects of the school's work that need to be better and are taking action to tackle them. You are well supported by the three assistant headteachers and the governing body. Each of the four senior leaders brings different expertise to the team, which is a strength. Some are more experienced than others. The team would benefit from further support from the external consultant, particularly in helping to sharpen strategic leadership.
- Year 6 pupils, boys and girls, did well in mathematics in 2016 at both the expected and the higher standards. Projections for the current Year 6 pupils are even higher. The picture for reading and writing in 2016 was more mixed with girls doing much better than boys and too many boys who reached the expected level at the end of Year 2 not reaching it at the end of Year 6. Stronger outcomes are indicated for 2017. This chimes with inspection evidence. Reading has been an area of strength for some time at this school. Indeed, the school's good practice in reading is shared with other schools locally. The pupils who read to me were largely fluent with younger pupils using their good knowledge of phonics to read unfamiliar words. Able readers read with enthusiasm and often with expression, showing good understanding of the story and particular characters. Occasionally, though, despite being able to read a word, pupils did not understand its meaning and needed support to pick up clues to the meaning from the text and/or an illustration.
- Writing has shown sustained improvement over the last few years. My scrutiny of small samples of pupils' books showed that teachers regularly use text from other subjects such as history and geography to develop pupils' skills in retrieval, inference and authorial choice (known as 'RIC' by pupils and staff). While topic work is planned to draw on different subjects within the curriculum, opportunities to include science and mathematics are missed, for example in the project on London.
- The results of key stage 1 assessments in 2016 represented a dip following an improving trend over the last few years. Assessment information shows that standards are back on track in the current Year 2 class which is being taught by an assistant headteacher. Likewise, a senior leader teaches the current Year 3 class to ensure that these pupils make up any ground lost last year.

- Children join the school in Reception with around three quarters having attended the separately managed but neighbouring pre-school provision. The school's assessment of children's development on entering Reception shows that many are below, or significantly below, the development typical of their age, particularly in personal, social and emotional development and early writing. This is most marked for the boys and especially so for the current Reception class. You and the chair of the governing body are right to recognise that closer work between the two institutions is key to more children reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception, which is essential if children are going to be ready for learning in Year 1. The local authority has an important role to play with this. More children than in 2015 and 2014 reached this standard in Reception in 2016 – all of the girls but only half of the boys.
- Strong and very well-organised teaching and assessment in Reception is supporting children's rapid progress, particularly in literacy and in their personal, social and emotional development. However, the classroom and outdoor space are less rich in the way they support children's mathematical and technological development. The environment is short of large, tactile and/or movable resources, particularly those that might stimulate and hold boys' interest.
- A range of activities, visits and visitors help pupils to gain an understanding of the lives of others and the challenges that some people face, for example what it might be like to be a refugee and seek asylum. British values are promoted well.
- Exclusions have reduced – no pupil has been excluded for the past 18 months. Parents, in response to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were almost entirely confident in the way the school manages behaviour but around a quarter were concerned that bullying is not dealt with effectively. A group of key stage 2 pupils I spoke with talked about instances of name-calling, which they knew should not happen. They said staff deal with it. We agreed that it would be helpful if leaders look into how the school addresses these issues in order to strengthen further its work in eradicating all forms of bullying, and to inform parents about what you are doing.
- Governors bring a range of expertise and educational experience to the governing body. Individual governors have deeper knowledge through links to particular cohorts of pupils or responsibilities for specific areas of the school's work, such as special educational needs. I saw evidence of support and challenge in minutes of meetings. The governing body's reorganised structure has given all governors a greater knowledge of the breadth of the school's work. However, it may be squeezing time for discussion on key aspects, such as progress and impact of actions taken according to the school development plan, and the day-to-day quality of teaching and its impact on learning.
- The governing body has not ensured that the school's website contains all of the information that would enable the school to meet statutory requirements. Sensibly, some minor tweaks were made just before or during the inspection. The principal omission is the pupil premium strategy. Once this is completed, the governing body should check that the information is fully compliant.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the information gathered from leaders' monitoring of the school's work is sharply focused and used strategically to drive improvement
- boys' attainment is raised throughout the school, but particularly in the early years foundation stage, so that boys are as well equipped as girls for the next stage in learning
- the profile of mathematics and science is increased in topic work, displays and hands-on classroom resources.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Liverpool, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wigan. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jane Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I met with you to discuss safeguarding and the impact of actions you are taking to raise standards.
- You accompanied me on brief visits to observe teaching and learning in Years 2 to 6, where we observed the teaching of English and mathematics. We each looked at some pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning.
- An assistant headteacher and I visited Reception where we observed focused teaching of mathematics and pupils working on various activities and English in Year 1. We talked with some pupils about their learning. We looked at a sample of Year 1 pupils' books and Reception children's learning journals.
- I heard two pupils in each of Years 2, 3 and 6 read.
- I looked at a sample of Year 2 and Year 6 pupils' books, including topic work.
- I met with the chair of the governing body and an external consultant who is supporting the work of senior leaders.
- I met with a group of key stage 2 pupils. Three pupils completed the online questionnaire.
- I considered the 61 responses to Parent View.
- I reviewed the 26 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.

- I considered the school's website, various documents including the school's self-evaluation, the development plan, your most recent report to the governing body and information about the achievement of pupils.
- I considered the school's safeguarding arrangements, including the checks made on adults working in the school.

Several lines of enquiry were pursued during the inspection. These included identifying how strong attainment is for current pupils in the school in reading, writing and mathematics, particularly those in key stage 1 and Year 3; determining how well the curriculum and teaching support all children's development in the early years, particularly boys; investigating why more pupils do not reach the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics across the school; establishing the effectiveness of governors in supporting the school and holding leaders to account; and the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils.