

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Priory Road, Chalfont St Peter, Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire, SL9 8SB

Inspection dates 12–13 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Early years provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Pupils do not achieve well enough. Pupils' standards in writing at the end of both Year 2 and Year 6 have dipped below those in mathematics and reading in recent years.
- Pupils do not always use their basic skills to write in a variety of subjects or for a range of purposes.
- Pupils do not make consistently good progress in writing in the different year groups in Key Stage 2. The quality and quantity of writing in other subjects, such as science and history, are often less than that in their English books.
- Children in the early years do not make as much progress as they could, especially in developing early writing skills.
- Teaching is not yet consistently good in all year groups. Work is not always set at the right level of difficulty for pupils, slowing their progress.
- The new marking policy, to give pupils clear advice about how to improve their work, is not yet applied consistently by all teachers.
- Tasks set for the most able pupils are not always challenging enough to help them develop thoughtful and detailed responses. As a result, they do not make the progress that they could to achieve the highest levels.
- Very newly appointed middle leaders check pupils' work methodically, but are not yet holding teachers to account in their given areas of responsibility.

The school has the following strengths

- Last year, pupils in Year 6 performed significantly above the national average in spelling, punctuation and grammar because basic techniques are well taught. Pupils in Year 1 also attained above-average standards in the screening check for phonics (linking sounds and letters).
- Opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are strong and prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain
- Behaviour is good. Pupils enjoy school and feel very safe. Parents have confidence that their children are looked after very well.
- Leaders and governors recognise that expectations were not high enough in the past. Leaders and the governing body are setting more ambitious targets for staff. They have clear expectations for good teaching and pupils' learning. As a result, the school is improving.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 20 lessons or parts of lessons taught by 14 teachers. One session was observed jointly with the headteacher, who also joined an inspector on a further visit to a series of lessons to check writing in Key Stage 2. The deputy headteacher joined inspectors in checking pupils' workbooks.
- Inspectors also observed pupils' activities during break and lunchtimes and at an assembly.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils, representatives of the governing body, and with both senior and subject leaders. A telephone discussion took place between an inspector and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors took account of the 87 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), as well as having informal discussions with parents. The views of staff were taken into account through meetings and the 37 responses to the staff survey.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and discussed their choices of reading books.
- The school's own attainment and progress records for the previous and current academic years were analysed in addition to published information on pupils' achievement.
- Inspectors examined records relating to pupils' safety and welfare, including security checks on staff. They also checked behaviour logs and attendance records.

Inspection team

Patricia MacLachlan, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Colin Lower	Additional inspector
David Westall	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Joseph's Catholic Primary School is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who receive support through the pupil premium (extra money provided by the government for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after) is well below the national average.
- The majority of pupils in the school are of White British heritage. The proportion of those with other backgrounds, such as Other White and Indian heritages, is in line with the national average.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations of attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Early years provision consists of two full-time Reception classes.
- The headteacher took up her post four terms ago in September 2013. A substantive deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher were appointed in September 2014. Middle leadership appointments of leaders for literacy, mathematics, early years and special educational needs were all made recently this academic year. The literacy leader is currently on maternity leave and two very recently appointed reading and writing leaders are now leading in this subject.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that all is good or better by:
 - making sure that all teachers plan work that matches pupils' needs and builds on their previous learning
 - further developing teachers' subject knowledge so they plan tasks and pose questions which are sufficiently stretching for the most able pupils to attain the highest levels of which they are capable
 - ensuring that teachers give most able pupils enough time to fully engage with more challenging tasks and questions so they can push at the boundaries of their knowledge and understanding
 - making sure that all teachers implement the school's marking policy by providing clear guidance for pupils so that they understand how to improve their work
 - developing the roles of the newly appointed middle leaders so that they hold teachers to account for improving pupils' achievement in their respective areas of responsibility.
- Improve pupils' achievement in writing by:
 - making sure that pupils write accurately, in more detail and at greater length in subjects such as science and history in Years 1 to 6
 - giving increased emphasis to teaching early writing skills and setting more ambitious targets for children in the Reception classes
 - devising activities that challenge pupils, particularly the most able, to attain the highest levels of which they are capable.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Leadership and management are good because the recently formed senior leadership team has secured marked improvements in teaching among staff at early stages of their professional lives. They have also improved the quality of pupils' writing in Years 5 and 6.
 - The headteacher and deputy head make regular observations of pupils' learning and examine their work. This enables senior leaders to identify quickly where improvements are needed and to provide focused support. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving.
 - The headteacher has succeeded in motivating staff at all levels to strive for quicker improvement to ensure equality of opportunity for all pupils. Well-organised support programmes are helping teachers to improve their work and to develop and share good practices. Newly qualified teachers appointed last year have benefitted from the headteacher's training and encouragement to develop strong classroom performance and to take on leadership roles this year.
 - Leaders have introduced a detailed scheme for pupils to respond to teachers' marking across a wide range of subjects. Where this has been effective, in Years 5 and 6 for example, it has raised teachers' expectations and pupils' understanding of how to improve their own performance. However, leaders recognise that marking is not always consistently good across all years and subjects and have made this a priority for staff training.
 - Last year, progress for all groups at Key Stage 2 for was in line with that in other schools nationally in reading and mathematics. Progress was significantly above the national average in spelling, punctuation and grammar tests. This shows that reading and mathematics policies have had a positive impact. Writing outcomes were not as strong, but leaders are starting to address this by appointing new middle leaders, who are acting as role models for their colleagues.
 - While middle leaders are very new to their roles, they have organised training for staff, for example to improve the teaching of writing skills. They do not yet check the impact of the training that they lead on their colleagues' teaching. Although plans are in place to involve middle leaders in holding teachers to account for progress in their subjects, this is not yet under way.
 - Strong systems have been developed to make sure that only those teachers who meet the ambitious targets that are set for them move up the salary scale. The headteacher is resolute about engaging in difficult conversations about performance when these are necessary to secure improved teaching.
 - The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development positively. Pupils develop spiritual understanding during class retreat days; prayers are part of the daily routine. This helps to foster good relations and respect for others, including respect for different religions. It prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. Differences between right and wrong are discussed in assemblies and lessons. Pupils are encouraged to listen to each other respectfully when discussing ethical questions in class, promoting the value of tolerance.
 - Stimulating music lessons that culminate in public performances extend cultural horizons and develop pupils' self-confidence. Pupils benefit from opportunities to serve the school on the pupil council or as 'eco-warriors'. School journeys and visits from speakers who run workshops to help pupils to express their feelings encourage pupils' social development well.
 - The government's sports funding has been used effectively. A specialist physical education teacher is helping class teachers to improve their skills in teaching gymnastics and other sports. Pupils of all ages now experience better-quality physical education, and this has had a positive impact on their health.
 - The pupil premium grant to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils is used effectively to reduce the gaps between their attainment and that of their peers.
 - Safeguarding systems meet current requirements and policies are applied consistently, so that pupils are safe and well cared for. Leaders promote equal opportunities and do not tolerate any discrimination.
 - The local authority has provided support by making frequent visits to check pupils' progress, joining leaders in lesson observations, and recognises that achievement needs to improve quickly. It has also provided systematic governor training.
 - Leaders work with other schools in the area and in Hertfordshire to develop assessment arrangements for the new curriculum. The school joins other schools to check assessment standards, moderate pupils' work and share in professional development.
- **The governance of the school:**
- Members of the governing body, currently being re-organised into two focused committees, know the standards of achievement and teaching in the school. This is because local authority training has helped

them to ask more challenging questions about pupils' performance than in the past. Governors now supplement their questioning with organised visits to check that reported improvements are taking place.

- Governors have developed an accurate understanding of how pupils perform compared with national standards. They have been trained to use the published information to compare pupils' performance with other schools'.
- Governors are increasingly aware of the link between teachers' pay increases and pupils' progress. They recognise that the quality of teaching dipped since the previous inspection and members of the pay committee are aware of what support has been provided to improve teaching and how any underperformance has been tackled.
- The governing body checks that the pupil premium funds are spent on the intended groups and governors methodically hold school leaders to account for the impact of the expenditure on pupils' performance.
- British values of democracy and tolerance are actively promoted because governors welcome the celebration of diverse cultures among the pupils and teachers from different faiths and cultures.
- Governors are conscientious in ensuring that safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.
- The budget is carefully managed to support the school improvement plan.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Their attitudes are very positive. Pupils like the system of earning rewards and 'golden time' for good behaviour inside and outside the classroom. They clearly understand and value the system. These routines, introduced by the new headteacher, were explained by pupils: 'Teachers care here and they try to help us.'
- Because reflection upon their own actions is routinely encouraged, pupils aim to improve their own behaviour. Typically, pupils conduct themselves well around the school because they want to live up to the high expectations that are now set for them. For example, older pupils are proud of the way that they undertake responsibilities as play leaders and helpers in Key Stage 1.
- Pupils work willingly with adults and each other in lessons. 'Pupils here encourage each other,' was a typical remark. In the early years, cooperative play and helpful relationships are fostered by attentive adults. Behaviour is good rather than outstanding because it is not exemplary across the school. Pupils' attention can occasionally wander if activities do not engage them or provide enough challenge.
- Pupils take pride in their attractively decorated classrooms and corridors that celebrate their work in vibrant displays. They treat their environment with respect and are well supported by active 'eco-warrior' teams. The overwhelming majority of the staff who responded to a survey believe that behaviour is well managed in the school.
- Attendance rates are in line with national averages. Following up absence assiduously with parents has helped to improve attendance among the small groups that have found regular attendance difficult in the past. Behaviour management is effective and there have been few exclusions.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. A typical comment from pupils is that all adults are very helpful. All the pupils to whom inspectors spoke could name at least one adult in whom they could confide any concerns and they were confident that these would be addressed. Pupils maintain that bullying is rare and that if any incidents do arise they are dealt with quickly by the teachers.
- Pupils have a very strong awareness of personal safety, including when using the internet, because it is explained well in lessons and assemblies. Pupils understand and can explain the importance of cyber-safety habits as well as the school's 'lock-down' procedures in the event of an emergency.
- The school keeps a close eye on pupils' concerns and responds effectively. In addition, governors make regular visits to check that pupils feel safe in school and that the children in the Reception classes are well looked after.
- The parents who responded to Parent View are overwhelmingly happy that their children are safe in school and that the school provides a safe and caring environment.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it has not yet secured consistently good progress, especially in writing, as a result of low expectations from some teachers in the past.
- Teaching is now improving quickly as a result of more focused leadership, decisive performance management and effective support for staff. However, teaching is not yet consistently good across all year groups and subjects.
- Marking is regular and accurate. Many teachers make helpful comments on pupils' work, particularly in their English books. However, comments by teachers about what pupils should do next to improve their writing in other subjects are not always as helpful.
- Teachers do not always set high expectations for extended writing in other subjects because they do not make links with pupils' literacy targets clear enough. As a result, progress is variable. For example, inspectors saw strong application of writing skills in pupils' topic work and religious education in Years 2 and Year 5, but this was less evident in other year groups. When leaders check pupils' work, they are now focusing closely on how well teachers use pupils' literacy targets across different subjects.
- Tasks in mathematics are designed to challenge the pupils' thinking and to stimulate discussion about how to solve problems. When teachers plan activities at the right level of difficulty for different pupils and set high expectations, then pupils make good progress. For example, in a Year 6 activity on probability, the teacher's insistence on using accurate vocabulary promoted lively discussions among pupils about their proposed answers. On occasions, not all teaching is effective in developing pupils' learning in all groups within the class.
- Pupils who find the work difficult usually benefit from skilful support in class that helps them to understand the learning. The most able pupils are sometimes set extension challenges but these do not always stretch their capabilities by demanding the detailed responses needed for higher levels of attainment. In addition, these pupils do not always have time to consider in sufficient depth the questions set by the teacher.
- Teachers encourage good reading habits across all year groups. Leaders have provided well-equipped reading areas and an attractive new library to help pupils select books for reading sessions in school and at home. Pupils' reading is checked frequently by adults in detailed record books. Lessons to develop pupils' comprehension skills are now timetabled and this is helping to improve standards. For example, pupils are now challenged to read different books to enliven their work in other curriculum areas and to improve their own story-writing.

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement is not good because progress in writing for many groups of pupils recently fell well below the national average by the end of Year 6. Attainment by the end of Year 2 was also significantly below national standards last year. Leaders have raised expectations for the teaching of writing across the whole school and have introduced new policies. However, these recent changes have not yet made a consistent impact on pupils' achievement in all year groups.
- The school's own records show that rates of progress in Key Stage 1 are higher than those seen last year. Pupils are now making faster progress in writing in Year 3 and Year 6, while in Years 4 and 5, progress remains slower than in reading and mathematics.
- The achievement of the most able is not yet good. The most able pupils in the current Year 6 now make better progress, given their starting points, towards the highest attainment levels. However, in other year groups, with the exception of mathematics, too few of the more able pupils make rapid progress. There is not yet enough emphasis on extending pupils' learning in a range of ways to help the more able pupils in Year 4 attain the highest levels.
- School records show that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs receive better-quality support in all year groups than was previously the case, but like others in the school, their achievement requires improvement.
- Pupils from different ethnic groups make similar progress to their classmates, as do the very small numbers for whom English is an additional language.
- Additional government funding is used to run small-group activities for disadvantaged pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2014 the funds were spent effectively to ensure that disadvantaged pupils attained a little higher than all pupils nationally in mathematics and were less than one month behind in reading. However, these pupils were three months behind their peers in school in writing and six months behind all pupils nationally. School records show that the picture is improving in some year groups, where pupils are doing better than others in the school and nationally.

The early years provision**requires improvement**

- Children joining the school in the early years usually have skills and levels of understanding typical for their age. They make steady progress to reach broadly average standards by the end of the Reception. In this respect, they are not prepared as well as they could be for their start in Year 1. Newly appointed leaders are aware of this and are in the process of introducing more ambitious targets.
- Both the indoor and the outdoor Reception classrooms provide a secure, safe and stimulating learning environment. Children respond by behaving well and enjoying the learning activities.
- Relationships are good and personal development is a strength. Role play, for example, is well supported by adults so that children engage enthusiastically and sustain their involvement in activities.
- Staff plan carefully to offer children a range of stimulating activities to promote personal, artistic and creative development. However, children do not make consistently good progress in developing a range of skills, including speaking and writing. Currently some children repeatedly opt only for their favourite pursuits, which means that they do not experience a sufficiently wide range of activities to extend their learning. This is not always picked up by staff. Leaders are aware of this and are adapting the way teachers plan routines and activities.
- The newly appointed leader has a clear understanding of the strengths of the early years provision and areas for development. For example, she is aware that not all staff in Reception use a variety of ways to prompt the children to apply their understanding of phonics or to develop writing skills. Plans are in hand to arrange training to improve this aspect of teaching.
- The school has established effective links with different nurseries so that children are well prepared to move into Reception. Parents are involved very well in induction activities and this helps them to support their children

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	110477
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	448739

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	420
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Wroe
Headteacher	Josephine Marsh
Date of previous school inspection	12–13 November 2009
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