

St Joseph's RC Lower School

Chester Road, Bedford, MK40 4HN

Inspection dates 5–6 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1
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.

- Outstanding leadership by leaders at all levels, including the governing body, has caused teaching and achievement to improve rapidly since the school became an academy.
- Progress in writing is outstanding in Key Stage 1.
- The many pupils who join the school speaking little or no English quickly become proficient in the language because staff meet their needs very well.
- The inclusion team ensures that support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is good and that they make good progress.
- Teaching is good. Teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils and explain clearly what they are going to learn.
- Teachers question pupils skilfully to deepen their understanding and move their learning on.
- Provision in the early years is good. Activities match the needs of children and feed their curiosity.
- Pupils behave well and take care of one another. They say they feel safe in school, a view shared by all parents who expressed a view to inspectors.
- Staff are united in wanting the best for pupils and work together extremely well to drive improvement.
- The Academy Trust provides excellent support and encourages leaders from St Joseph's to support other schools.
- The governing body is highly effective and provides a very perceptive level of challenge for leaders.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- At times, the most-able pupils are not challenged sufficiently in mathematics.
- Marking is not consistently rigorous, especially in ensuring that pupils' spelling improves.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed learning in 46 lessons or parts of lessons, including 15 jointly with the headteacher or assistant headteacher. An inspector also attended an assembly celebrating World Book Day.
- Members of the inspection team heard pupils read and, with the headteacher, looked closely at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors looked at a wide range of school documents, including development plans, policies, self-evaluation reports and safeguarding records. They considered evidence of the school's partnership work and the information provided for families.
- Inspectors held meetings with groups of pupils chosen at random. They also held discussions with senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers and other staff. An inspector talked to the Executive Principal of the St Francis of Assisi Multi Academy Trust, and the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors.
- The inspectors took account of the 18 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. They also spoke informally to parents.
- The inspectors considered the 35 staff questionnaires that were completed.

Inspection team

Nick Butt, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Caroline Evans	Additional Inspector
Caroline Stone	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Joseph's Roman Catholic Lower School converted to become an academy school on 1 April 2013. When its predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be satisfactory overall.
- The school is part of the St Francis of Assisi Multi Academies Trust, a well-established partnership of four Catholic schools in Bedford. These share an Executive Principal and an overarching governing body. Each school has its own headteacher and operates autonomously within the Trust.
- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school. There are two classes in each year group.
- Early years provision is part time in the Nursery and full time in the Reception classes.
- The great majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. More than three quarters of pupils speak English as an additional language. This is four times the national average. Pupils speak a total of 28 different languages and come from 56 different countries. Pupils from a range of different faiths attend the school.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and looked-after children) is above average.
- The proportion of pupils identified as disabled or as having special educational needs is above average.
- There is no comment included in the report about whether the school meets the current government floor standards, as the school does not have any Year 6 pupils.
- The Executive Principal is a national leader in education (NLE).
- The school runs a breakfast club and an after-school club.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make teaching and achievement outstanding by:
 - setting more challenging work for the most-able pupils in mathematics
 - increasing the effectiveness of marking so that it is consistently rigorous and places more emphasis on showing pupils how to improve their spelling.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher has established a very strong culture centred on pupils' learning, and has set out a clear vision that enables good teaching to flourish and pupils to behave and achieve well. She has built an excellent team of leaders who are passionate about their roles and responsibilities. They all contribute highly effectively to driving improvement. As a result, the school has come on in leaps and bounds since it became an academy.
- Rapidly rising standards and teaching that is improving at a fast rate testify to the leadership team's relentless drive for excellence. The leadership of teaching and learning is outstanding. Leaders support teachers extremely well in improving their practice. They are especially successful at helping those new to the profession to grow into good or better teachers.
- The St Francis of Assisi Multi Academy Trust provides first-rate support to the school. This has also created opportunities for leaders from the school to share best practice with other schools, for example in the promotion of religious education.
- Middle leaders, including in the early years, lead their areas of responsibility very well. They are energetic and active in making a difference to provision in their subjects and areas. For example, an innovative project to combine learning in science and art has enriched pupils' experiences and produced work of high quality. Middle leaders are fully involved in checking the school's work and record their findings meticulously. They follow up any areas for development promptly.
- The management of teachers' performance is rigorous. Leaders set challenging targets for staff that are linked to whole-school priorities and pupils' progress. Senior leaders review how well teachers are meeting their targets on a regular basis.
- The school makes very good use of the pupil premium to support eligible pupils, both in their academic development and in increasing their access to a range of additional activities. As a result, they make good progress and gaps in attainment have been closing rapidly. Disadvantaged pupils benefit from attending the breakfast club and the many other different clubs and visits the school hosts. Leaders ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities to succeed. They foster good relations and make sure that teachers and pupils show not the slightest hint of discrimination in their dealings with each other.
- The range of subjects taught in the school, and the way they are linked together, is highly imaginative and ensures learning is a very enjoyable experience for pupils. Much thought has gone into creating a vibrant curriculum that is relevant to pupils and helps to develop their language skills, as so many speak English as an additional language. There are also many opportunities for pupils to take part in music and the arts. For example, pupils have entered public-speaking competitions and performed at a local Bedford arts festival.
- Leaders take every opportunity to support pupils in celebrating the diverse cultures represented in the school and in respecting one another's faiths. The school is uniquely sited near a mosque, a gurdwara and a parish church, and this means pupils can visit different places of worship easily. The school's deeply held values align closely with British values. Pupils learn about democracy through the work of the school council and the recent visit of the Member of Parliament. They learn to embrace justice and fair play. The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness extremely well, and this also helps to prepare them very well for life in modern Britain.
- The primary physical education and sport premium is spent effectively, particularly on promoting swimming. The school has its own pool and employs an instructor so that all pupils swim regularly. In addition, more clubs have been provided for pupils and their participation in sport has increased. They play golf, basketball and hockey among other sports. As a result, pupils have greater confidence when in the water and are keen to keep fit.

- Parents are very supportive of the work of the school. They feel they receive useful information about how their children are doing and find the school easy to approach. The school makes use of interpreters to ease communication and translates important information for parents into a range of languages. Parents attend regular workshops related to pupils' learning, for example on reading and mathematics. The school's 'Pentecost Picnic' is supported by all groups of parents and is a celebration of many cultures.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and are effective. Leaders make all the required checks before staff are employed and ensure they are kept fully up to date with matters relating to pupils' welfare and safety.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governance of the school is highly effective. The academy support and improvement group focuses on St Joseph's and contains a national leader of education (the Executive Principal) and a national leader of governance (the vice chair). Governors form a very experienced and knowledgeable team and have an excellent grasp of data, including data showing how groups of pupils are doing. Through regular reports and their own visits to the school, governors form a clear picture of the quality of teaching. They are fully involved in drawing up the school's development plans for improvement and the management of teachers' performance.
 - Governors know how the school rewards good teaching and how well it tackles underperformance. They hold leaders rigorously to account for their effectiveness and impact on the school's performance.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Staff manage pupils' behaviour well. All staff are thoroughly familiar with what the behaviour policy says and pupils fully understand the school's system of rewards and sanctions.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They enjoy coming to school and speak with enthusiasm about all the new things they are finding out. They fully embrace the school's deeply held values and this makes them kind and fully accepting of one another.
- Pupils take their responsibilities very seriously as members of the school council and as 'buddies' to younger pupils. They throw themselves wholeheartedly into all that the school is doing. For example, almost all pupils came to school on 'World Book Day' dressed as their favourite fictional character.
- Attendance has improved rapidly since the school became an academy and it is now a little above average. There are no significant variations in the attendance of different groups of pupils.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say they feel safe at school. All parents who responded to Parent View or who spoke to inspectors expressed similarly positive views about their children's safety.
- Pupils have a good understanding of different types of bullying, including cyber bullying and racially prejudiced bullying. They say that bullying in school is very rare but that, should it occur, they are confident that the adults would deal with it effectively. They take measures to make one another aware of how to tackle bullying, for example in designing posters.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe and know what to do in the event of potentially dangerous situations, such as coming upon a fire. They know about the importance of e-safety. Pupils are aware of the risks of certain types of drugs and how to stay healthy.
- The breakfast club gives pupils a safe and sociable start to the day, ensuring pupils enjoy a healthy cooked breakfast. The after-school club keeps pupils safe and fully occupied and enables them to relax at the end of the day. Pupils of all ages and backgrounds get on very well together.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers have high expectations of pupils and their teaching is consistently good. They give very clear explanations so that pupils fully understand what they are learning. They also show pupils what they want from them so that there is no confusion. This enables pupils to produce work of a good quality.
- In mathematics, skills are taught in a logical way so that pupils learn how to reason mathematically. This enables pupils to apply their knowledge to solving problems systematically. They are able to draw upon their understanding and choose the most efficient methods to arrive at a solution.
- The teaching of writing is good and is leading to rapid improvements in many aspects of pupils' achievement in this subject, particularly in Key Stage 1. Pupils have many opportunities to apply their literacy skills across different subjects. For example, during the inspection Year 3 pupils were writing accounts of what school was like in Victorian times and comparing them with what it is like today. Year 2 pupils were following instructions on how to make a cake. The presentation of pupils' work is tidy and their handwriting is neat.
- The school's reading programme is effective in helping pupils to make good progress as it is taught consistently well. Work is set at the right level for pupils and this enables them to read confidently and derive meaning from text.
- Pupils are helped to take their thinking deeper through the skilful questions teachers put to them. Teachers keep a close eye on how pupils are getting on in class and take steps to move them on quickly in their learning when they have mastered key concepts. This ensures most pupils are suitably challenged. This is not always the case, however, in mathematics for the most-able pupils, who sometimes complete work early without teachers providing more demanding activities for them to move onto.
- While marking is generally effective, it is not entirely consistent. Teachers are not always sufficiently rigorous in picking up spelling errors and this means that some common mistakes go uncorrected.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children join the Nursery with skills and abilities below those typical for their age, especially in language and communication and personal and emotional development. About a third of children arrive speaking no English at all and another third are at the early stages of acquiring the language.
- The school's systematic phonics programme (the sounds that letters make) is very effective in accelerating pupils' progress in reading. In 2014, the proportion of Year 1 pupils that reached the required standard in the phonics check was average, with boys and girls doing equally well.
- Standards at Key Stage 1 have been rising rapidly since the school became an academy. In 2014, standards were above average in writing by the end of Year 2 and average in reading and mathematics. This represents outstanding progress in writing from pupils' different starting points.
- Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 2. Most Year 4 pupils in 2014 had reached expected levels of attainment for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The most-able pupils make particularly good progress over Key Stage 2 so that a large proportion are attaining at above expected levels.
- The progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is good over time. This is evident from the work in their books. The school's very effective inclusion team measures the impact of programmes of support well. The team meets weekly to discuss the progress of these pupils and to check they are all achieving well. By such means, the school ensures that the education these pupils are receiving meets their needs well.

- Members of the inclusion team are skilled at assessing whether pupils who join the school speaking English as an additional language also have special educational needs. If this is the case, they ensure that such pupils are given the right support quickly. All pupils who speak English as an additional language and those from minority ethnic groups make good progress. This is because teachers and support staff are adept at planning work that suits them, particularly in promoting their language skills.
- Pupils supported by the pupil premium make the same good progress as the other pupils in the school. In 2014, they did better than similarly disadvantaged pupils nationally. In 2014, disadvantaged pupils were less than half a term behind all pupils nationally in reading and just over a term behind in mathematics. They were ahead of all pupils nationally in writing. Pupils' attainment, compared with other pupils in the school, was half a term behind in reading and writing and just over one term behind in mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils currently in the school have similar attainment levels to their school peers in mathematics and so gaps have closed.

The early years provision

is good

- The leadership and management of the early years are outstanding. The early years leader has set up highly effective systems to assess and record children's achievements. Staff work together extremely well to provide children with stimulating experiences that fire their imaginations.
- Progress in the early years is good. Children enjoy a wide range of rich experiences that develop their early literacy, reading and mathematical skills well. They make an exceptionally good start in the Nursery because teaching staff know the children very well and plan work that is extremely well matched to their needs, especially in helping them learn English.
- Children behave well in the early years because staff make their expectations clear and establish routines quickly. This is especially so in the Nursery. Children learn and play in a safe environment. They learn to take turns and show consideration for one another.
- Because of the good teaching they receive, children achieve well and are well prepared for their learning in Year 1. They have a choice of activities that develop skills they have already been taught, so that they can practise them in a variety of different ways. For example, children were developing their dexterity through making finger pots out of real clay in the Nursery.
- There are excellent relationships with parents, who are encouraged to take an active role in supporting their children's learning both in school and at home. Parents are very positive about how quickly their children settle and the good quality education they receive in the early years.

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	139516
Local authority	Bedford Borough
Inspection number	449930

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	327
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christopher Donellan
Headteacher	Lisa Sumpter
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01234 352062
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