

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Paul Roberts  
Principal  
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School  
Brook Lane  
Thame  
Oxfordshire  
OX9 2AB

Dear Mr Roberts

### **Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Thame**

Following my visit to the academy on 27 January 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in March 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the academy since the last inspection. Since taking up the position of Principal in September 2014, you have maintained and built on the academy's previous strengths. You have communicated a clear sense of purpose to all staff and they welcome the challenges you have set. Staff appreciate your open and inclusive approach. They feel motivated and respected. Crucially, you have created greater leadership capacity in the academy through the appointment of a deputy headteacher. This is helping to improve teaching further.

Relationships between pupils and teachers are positive and respectful. Pupils spoke of being a family where caring for each other is essential. Frequently during the inspection, pupils demonstrated this ethos in the way they worked and played with each other. Pupils are keen to learn and work hard. They demonstrate maturity and independence, often sharing ideas and helping each other when work is difficult. The vast majority of parents are very pleased with the education and care their children receive and say their children feel safe.

The quality of teaching has been strengthened since the last inspection. Teachers frequently work together to plan interesting lessons that carefully take account of pupils' starting points and their targets. Teachers effectively communicate to pupils what success will look like, so pupils know what they need to aim for and how to get there. Sometimes, middle-ability pupils are not given more challenging work quickly enough.

Middle leaders in particular feel empowered to drive improvements across the academy and their actions are helping to raise standards further. While these leaders feel well supported and appreciated, they would now benefit from more comprehensive and outward-looking training to develop their skills further.

Since the last inspection, you have taken appropriate action to address the areas identified as needing improvement. Teachers now plan mathematics lessons that closely meet pupils' needs and provide an appropriate level of challenge. As a result, standards continue to rise and pupils make good and sometimes better progress. Pupils are given detailed and regular feedback to help them improve. Pupils use this guidance effectively to improve future work and take responsibility for their own learning.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Pupils say they feel safe and well cared for by adults at the academy. Safeguarding procedures are well established and staff are well trained. Pupils say bullying is rare but that they are sure an adult would resolve any difficulties quickly. Pupils know about road and fire safety and how to use the internet safely. Pupils are supervised well at breaktimes, so they play happily and safely together.

### **Inspection findings**

- You and other leaders, including governors, have a secure understanding of the academy's strengths and areas that need further improvement. For example, the additional classroom support you have provided for Year 5 means that all pupils' needs are being supported effectively. You know what actions you need to take to ensure the academy continues to improve.
- As a result of the appointment of a deputy headteacher, improvements to the academy do not all have to be driven by you. The deputy headteacher provides valuable support in checking pupils' progress and improving teaching. Leaders of literacy and early years are driving improvements effectively in their areas of responsibility. These leaders would now benefit from a more formal programme of support and training to develop their leadership skills further.
- You work effectively with the other schools in the Dominic Barberi Multi Academy Company and with local schools in the Thame Partnership. Through this collaborative work, teachers have been able to check the accuracy of their assessments of pupils' work and they have benefited from valuable shared training.
- Governors play an active role in evaluating the academy's effectiveness. As a result of detailed and accurate analysis provided by the Principal, governors are well informed about pupils' progress and monitor performance closely.

- Pupils make good progress in mathematics, so that the proportion who achieve the expected standard is above that found nationally in Key Stages 1 and 2. This is because leaders have strengthened teaching. Some pupils make better than expected progress in mathematics. Additional support provided for the most-able pupils helped a fifth of Year 6 pupils to achieve Level 6 in mathematics last year, a figure well above the national average.
- The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. Teachers benefit from time to plan together, so that pupils' different needs are met effectively. Teachers ensure that pupils know what success will look like and how to get there. However, sometimes, middle-ability pupils are not moved on to more difficult work when they have grasped an idea.
- Teaching assistants provide good support for pupils who need it. They rephrase teachers' instructions appropriately to ensure that pupils understand and make good progress.
- The proportion of children achieving a good level of development in the early years has risen significantly in the last three years and is above national figures. The leader for early years has ensured classrooms are well organised and resourced. Children are able to access a wide range of activities to develop all aspects of their knowledge and understanding. Children are given frequent opportunities to practise their writing and phonics skills (the sounds letters and words make). Frequent and detailed observations by staff are used thoughtfully to plan children's next steps in learning and to keep parents informed regularly of their child's progress.
- Pupils receive detailed and frequent feedback about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Pupils value these comments a great deal and use them diligently to tackle their next piece of work. As a result, pupils take responsibility for their own learning. This high-quality feedback has had a positive impact in raising standards in mathematics.
- You have rightly prioritised further improvements in pupils' writing skills as an area for development. The creative nature of the curriculum means pupils are inspired to write. Some boys who were previously reluctant writers now write enthusiastically. Pupils are given frequent opportunities to write at length for a range of different purposes. Pupils use their reading experiences to develop their writing. For example, pupils frequently record words they like in their 'magpie' word books to use later in their own work.
- Pupils' learning is supported effectively by a well-organised and stimulating environment. Classroom displays are thoughtfully presented to reflect and support pupils' progress and celebrate their successes.
- Pupils behave well and work hard; they want to do well and help each other. They are enthusiastic and attentive. They talk articulately and self-confidently about their learning. Pupils are frequently identified as 'expert learners' to help others and share their understanding. Pupils relish this responsibility and rise to the challenge. For example, in a Year 2 lesson, two pupils worked closely together to work out how to tell the time. Pupils care for each other and show respect for the academy, staff and each other.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the leadership skills of middle leaders are developed further by appropriate training and support
- middle-ability pupils are given challenging work quickly enough when they have grasped basic ideas.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Academy Committee, the Director of Education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lisa Moore  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, other leaders, a group of pupils, members of the academy committee, and a representative of the Dominic Barberi Multi Academy Company. We visited parts of seven lessons and I looked at a range of pupils' work. I observed an assembly. I took account of the 24 responses to the staff survey, 43 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 67 responses to the pupil questionnaire. I observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime and around the academy. I spoke to parents at the start of the day. I analysed a range of the academy's documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, the academy improvement plan and safeguarding checks. We discussed your own evaluation of the academy's effectiveness.