

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mrs Joan Cullen  
Headteacher  
Sacred Heart Primary School  
Langford Drive  
Stopsley  
Luton  
Bedfordshire  
LU2 9AJ

Dear Mrs Cullen

### **Short inspection of Sacred Heart Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 23 February 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 June 2011.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. I was impressed by the warm welcome I received from all staff and pupils on arrival. Every corner of the school is spick and span, reflecting the enormous pride that staff take in creating an orderly, safe and inviting place for staff and pupils in which to work. Well before the pupils arrive, staff are busy in the classrooms discussing their plans and preparing for the day ahead. Adults promote a strong, dedicated work ethic with high expectations for good learning that pupils relish and share. This is evident in pupils' excellent attitudes, which have a profound impact on the good progress that they make.

Pupils thoroughly enjoy learning and are very proud of their school. They are keen to talk about their work and do so eloquently. The oldest pupils show a level of maturity beyond their years. This typifies the school's effectiveness in nurturing its pupils to become well-rounded, successful learners with a strong sense of social responsibility. Parents' contributions are valued highly for the part they play in supporting their children to achieve well academically and socially.

You have created an inclusive culture in this harmonious community where everyone feels valued, respected and looked after, especially the pupils. You are particularly skilful in coaching staff to become effective leaders. They share your ambition to be the best teachers that they can be, to enable pupils to excel.

Teaching is good or better and is structured very carefully to make sure that pupils learn new skills and concepts in the right order. However, pupils would benefit from more opportunities to use and apply their knowledge and skills in creative, problem-solving and investigative activities in art, craft and design, science and mathematics.

Senior leaders and middle leaders talk about their work passionately and are able to provide secure evidence to show that the school is continuously improving. They are focused sharply on raising achievement. If steps taken to make improvements are not working, they think again and try new approaches with the support of all staff. For example, standards are improving rapidly in all year groups in reading and writing following the introduction of a scheme to accelerate pupils' literacy skills. In Year 1, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the 2015 national screening check on phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) was significantly above average.

You and governors have pressed on determinedly with making the improvements that inspectors recommended in the previous inspection to make the school even better.

- The leadership of provision for, and the teaching of, pupils with disability and those with special educational needs were identified as key areas for improvement. Leadership is now strong and, through consistently good teaching, this group of pupils make good progress. The number of pupils requiring additional help has reduced markedly as a consequence.
- All pupils receive regular teaching to develop their computing skills in the school's well-resourced computer suite. They also use other technologies such as iPads widely in all subjects. Pupils are advanced in their understanding of e-safety.

You, and governors, know that standards in mathematics are in line with national averages but are not improving as rapidly as they are in reading and writing. Mathematics features as a priority in the school's plans for future improvement. You have ensured that the subject leaders are guiding staff in how to implement the school's new scheme for mathematics. They check frequently to see if the current practice is helping pupils to grasp new concepts securely and to develop their problem-solving skills. Your plan features the right actions to make a difference but the criteria set to measure success lack precision. The plan does not express clearly leaders' responsibilities in making improvements, or deadlines for their completion. Governors do check to see that the improvement plan is being implemented but are not using a wider range of strategies to ensure that their view is independent from yours.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Keeping children safe is a top priority and safeguarding is seen as everyone's responsibility. The school is vigilant about health and safety on the premises and parents are confident that their children are safe. Training for staff and governors ensures that they keep up to date and are suitably qualified and confident to implement the school's policies.

The school makes all of the statutory checks on new staff to ensure their suitability to work with children. Recruitment procedures are secure and reflect the Department for Education's guidance. The school does not hesitate to make referrals following any concerns about individual pupils. Staff work closely with families whose children are in need of extra support. Procedures to reduce possible risks work well, for example the careful planning for off-site day and residential visits, especially for pupils with additional needs.

## **Inspection findings**

- Leaders and managers at all levels are effective. They keep a close eye on all aspects of the school's work, gathering evidence from a wide range of sources to support their judgements. Self-evaluation of the school's effectiveness and where it needs to improve is accurate. This was endorsed by the local authority recently and matches my findings. Leaders at all levels, and governors, frequently evaluate the effectiveness of provision and its impact on pupils' achievement. The school works effectively with other schools locally and the local authority to double-check that its view of the school is accurate.
- In all conversations with you and other leaders, ambition for improvement and high expectations for pupils' achievement came across strongly. Leaders are passionate about their areas of responsibility and are able to support their views with secure evidence.
- Governors fulfil their responsibilities to support the school and ensure that leaders are held to account. Systems to appraise staff performance are robust and pay awards are not approved unless targets are met. Governors visit the school regularly to check the quality of teaching and learning by talking to leaders, and looking at assessment information as well as the written work in pupils' books. However, the range of strategies they use to gather evidence is fairly narrow to form an independent view of the school's effectiveness.
- The school has been successful in addressing the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. The special needs coordinator's leadership has been strengthened with monitoring of provision at the point of delivery a priority. Evidence of pupils' improving progress is gathered through observations, drop-ins, case studies, pupil progress meetings, pupils' views, scrutiny of work and parent interviews.
- The school's computer suite is well equipped and every class uses it on a weekly basis. Pupils spoke knowledgeably about e-safety and gave examples of external providers coming in regularly to update and remind them of how to stay safe. They showed examples of their work using computers and iPads.
- You explained anomalies in the school's most recent national dataset convincingly because you analyse assessment information thoroughly. Together with other leaders, you back up your findings with plans to address any weaknesses. However, the criteria set for reviewing your plans lack precision, responsibilities are not always deployed with clear separation of duties in mind, and deadlines for completion of tasks are often too broad.

These diminish the usefulness of the plan as a tool for driving forward improvements.

- Subject leaders for mathematics have carefully unpicked the underlying reasons why pupils historically have not excelled in mathematics. The rationale behind a significant change in approach has been thought through carefully with senior leaders' support and approval. Teaching is now focused on the development of conceptual understanding and the development of problem solving. The change in approach is too recent to provide secure evidence of improvement but outcomes in mathematics are being monitored rigorously.
- Teaching seen jointly with you, your deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher was consistently effective. Your monitoring, and a recent review led by local authority advisers, confirm that it is never less than good and often outstanding, but historically weaker in mathematics than in English. Classrooms are well equipped and extremely well organised. Pupils in every classroom were all on task and were given work that was suitably challenging for their ability. Marking and feedback seen in exercise books was useful in helping pupils to improve.
- Some examples were seen where pupils undertook creative activities that did not allow them to show originality in expressing their ideas. The science leader confirmed that pupils undertake science investigations regularly, but rarely those that they choose themselves. In addition, in mathematics, scope for pupils to set out workings in their own way are fairly limited in some year groups, reducing the opportunity for teachers to pick up and tackle misconceptions.
- Pupils' conduct and their attitudes to learning were exemplary. They responded to teachers' instructions immediately and are clearly well trained in routines. They worked extremely productively in pairs. All of this happens without a single reminder needed from an adult. Strong relationships between staff and pupils are apparent in every class, which lends confidence to learning and promotes high standards of behaviour.
- Pupil premium funding is being used effectively to support and promote the achievement of the pupils for whom it is intended. Leaders keep a watchful eye on the progress all disadvantaged pupils both individually and as a group are making. If provision is not making a sufficiently marked difference then it is changed. Disadvantaged pupils are a target group for improvement.
- The school works closely with parents. Reviews of pupils' progress are regular. Trained staff are available to give families extra support if needed. The school runs workshops covering a range of topics, including e-safety. Of the 101 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) 95% would recommend the school to another parent. Most of the written comments were positive and confirmed that their children are safe, happy and make good progress at school.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's plan for improvement is tightened with measurable criteria set for success and identifying individuals to lead, monitor and evaluate progress and by specifying target dates for checking progress and completion
- achievement in mathematics continues to improve by embedding and refining the school's chosen approach in teaching the subject
- governors further develop strategies to form an independent view of the school's work
- pupils have more opportunities to make choices and be inventive in creative, problem-solving and investigative activities.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Northampton, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Luton Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

- Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) gathered a wide range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included short observations of lessons in all classes, jointly with you, with the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher, the sampling of pupils' current written work, especially in Year 6, and discussions with leaders.
- HMI talked to a wide range of pupils informally in classrooms. The school selected a group of six pupils from Year 6 to talk about what it is like in school on a typical day.
- HMI held meetings with senior leaders and the leaders of mathematics and science. She also met with the special needs coordinator, the Chair of the Governing Body and the special needs governor.
- HMI looked at a range of documentation including information about the school's self-evaluation and plans for future improvement.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff, arrangements for e-safety (keeping children safe online when using electronic media), referrals made to external agencies and risk assessments undertaken for educational visits.
- The views of 101 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into account.