

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



28 November 2016

Mr Paul Ackers  
Headteacher  
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School Leigh  
Mather Lane  
Leigh  
Lancashire  
WN7 2PW

Dear Mr Ackers

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

Following my visit to the school on 9 November 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 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school has continued to improve because of your focus on high expectations and consistently good-quality teaching and learning. Your strong, transparent leadership and passion for providing pupils with a memorable educational experience are highly effective. You, and all staff, have created a strong sense of care and nurture for the whole school community. All staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire are proud to be part of St Joseph's and strongly agree that the school is well led, and that they are treated fairly and with respect. You and your deputy have led staff in a shared commitment and enthusiasm to improve the school. The high expectations you have set ensure that there is a strong focus on achieving the very best for your pupils.

The overwhelming majority of parents who spoke to me, or responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, are very positive about the school and would recommend it to others. A number of parents particularly appreciate that the school is supportive and that you and your staff are welcoming and approachable. The vast majority of parents commented on the school being, 'caring and nurturing'. Comments from parents such as: 'our children thrive', 'our child can't wait to get to school each day' and 'the headteacher is wonderful, he stands outside school to welcome each child personally', are typical. This is a happy and purposeful school where pupils, parents and staff have a strong sense of being part of a school community.

In 2016, a high number of children reached a good level of development at the end of Reception and the percentage of pupils that met the expected standard in the national phonics screening check was well above that of pupils of a similar age nationally. Pupils' attainment and progress at the end of key stages 1 and 2 were comparable or above the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling.

At the end of key stage 1, the percentage of pupils working at greater depth was not as high as you would have liked and was below that of pupils of a similar age nationally, particularly in reading and writing. At the end of key stage 2, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standard in mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling was well above that of pupils nationally. However, the proportion reaching the higher standard in reading and writing was not as high. You are mindful that for pupils with the potential to achieve at higher standards, the picture is mixed, and could be further improved, particularly by ensuring that pupils are challenged in all lessons to think more deeply about their work. The plans you have put in place are already leading to improvement in this area and pupils are now on track to achieve as well as they should.

The most able disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are very well supported by staff and they make good and better progress through school.

Since the previous inspection, the curriculum has continued to develop imaginatively. You have responded well to the recent national changes and have added your own innovations to create a curriculum that is distinctive and a strength of the school. You have done this through combining your strong gospel values, high-quality reading texts and learning challenges to bring the curriculum alive for pupils. They talked excitedly to me about their learning and say it is 'really fun'. They describe how they can't wait to explore learning challenge questions such as, 'Is One Direction the new Beatles?', 'Could I be the next Mo Farah or Laura Trott?' or 'Were canals the early motorways?' These challenges are enriched further by visits and experiences to hook pupils in to their learning.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified a need to raise achievement by ensuring that teachers use questioning to extend pupils' learning and develop the marking of pupils' work so that it guides them to improve. They asked teachers to provide pupils with greater opportunities to use their calculation skills in mathematics, to solve problems and to apply their skills across the curriculum. Leaders were also asked to increase their activity in checking on teaching and providing precise guidance on how teachers could improve their practice, as well as building the checking skills of subject leaders and managers so that there was a consistency in approach.

Leaders have addressed the vast majority of these effectively and have ensured that the following improvements have taken place:

- Teachers are skilled at asking questions that aid pupils' thinking, draw out learning and help them move on. Marking is used well to support pupils in

improving their work; it is consistently applied across the school in accord with the school's policy.

- Pupils are given plenty of opportunities to practise their mathematical skills, and regularly use their calculation strategies to solve problems. Pupils are also eager to tackle additional mathematical challenges that further extend their problem-solving skills. As a result, the standards in mathematics across the school have improved significantly since the last inspection. At the end of key stage 2, the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard in mathematics was nearly twice that of pupils of a similar age nationally.
- Leaders have developed a rigorous cycle of checking on the quality of teaching throughout the school. This has had a very positive effect on developing staff skills and knowledge, ensuring a consistency of approach and enthusing staff to be creative and exciting in their teaching. The senior leadership team has been extended since the previous inspection and this team has been developed effectively. As a result, they play a crucial part in ensuring high expectations and accountability. This programme of training is now beginning to be extended to subject leaders.

### **Safeguarding is effective**

There are well-maintained systems in place in all areas of safeguarding and staff understand them. Safeguarding arrangements are regularly reviewed to meet statutory requirements. Appropriate training for staff and governors is undertaken and up to date, including that related to the 'Prevent' duty. You and your staff ensure that pupils are kept safe and that their welfare needs are met. Your vigilance around the care and support of vulnerable pupils is of a high standard. Leaders have effective relationships with other agencies, and are persistent in situations where vulnerable pupils need extra support or advocacy.

Pupils were unanimous in saying they feel very safe and well cared for in school. They are confident that adults will help them if needed. Pupils develop effective personal skills within a nurturing environment. Pupils talk with knowledge about the ways they can stay safe in a range of situations, including personally and online. The vast majority of parents feel that you and the staff keep their children safe and well looked after. As a result, pupils are very happy and keen to come to school.

### **Inspection findings**

- Leaders' self-evaluation and school development plans are of a high standard. They are accurate, reflective and used effectively to ensure that everyone in school is clear about the direction they are heading. You and your leadership team have good capacity for further improvement.
- Your drive for improvement has been focused effectively on establishing high expectations, raising standards further and ensuring consistency in the quality of teaching and learning.
- You know each teacher's strengths and areas for development very well. Staff have benefited from a range of high-quality training and development led by the enthusiasm and expertise of your deputy headteacher.

- As an outward-looking school you have embraced and encouraged opportunities for your staff to work with other local schools as well as to share practice and skills between themselves. I agree with you that it would be useful for you and your team to continue to look at outstanding practice in teaching and learning. This will support your plans for the next stage of your school's improvement journey.
- Governors are effective and play an informed role in evaluating the school's effectiveness. Governors have used their own experiences well to play an active role in the life of the school. They share your passion for providing the best for pupils, they are very supportive but are also able to challenge where needed.
- The information you gather about pupils' progress is appropriate. Along with a few local schools, you have developed a successful system that, although it is changing and adapting to meet your precise needs, is used effectively by leaders, teachers and governors. This information identifies which pupils or groups are making progress and which need some additional support or challenge. It has also been effective in encouraging teachers in lessons to focus on the skills and attributes that pupils have and need to gain.
- Your regular checks and meetings ensure that all staff feel responsible for every pupil's learning and gives them an opportunity to reflect on how they could further adapt their teaching to meet their pupils' needs. Parents particularly mentioned to me how well you and your team 'go above and beyond' to meet their children's needs and, if required, are quick to support them to catch up or remove any barriers to learning they might have.
- Curriculum leaders are keen to make an important contribution to driving further improvements. They talk with enthusiasm and knowledge about their curriculum areas, particularly when it involves developing aspects that allow them to check how well the curriculum is being taught and the progress pupils are making.
- You have correctly identified the need to improve further the achievement of pupils to reach higher standards, through ensuring that pupils, particularly those of middle ability, are challenged to think more deeply about their work and practise their reasoning skills. To this end, you have taken decisive action, including refining your English curriculum. This is already having an impact and evidence suggests pupils are on track to make good and better progress.
- Attendance is above the national average. You have good-quality systems for monitoring attendance and punctuality and use them effectively. There is a range of rewards for good attendance. There is very little persistent absence because of the high expectations and the importance placed on pupils being in school. Where families are struggling, you are firm but supportive and exercise appropriate sensitivity on an individual family basis. As a result, you have had great success in improving the attendance of those that have needed encouragement.
- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are strengths. The school is packed full of beautifully presented examples of celebrating children's abilities and endeavours. For example, the 'Good Shepherd Award' for demonstrating Christian values on a daily basis and being an excellent role model to others. Displays and floor books demonstrate a comprehensive range of opportunities that pupils have to learn about other cultures, religions and what it means to be a good British citizen.

- Conduct around the school building and in class is of a high standard. Pupils are polite, kind and thoughtful to each other. Pupils talk confidently and with pride about the importance of their gospel values and the school motto, 'Love Jesus, love learning and love life'. One parent sums up the views of many by saying that the school ensures that all pupils are 'well-rounded, well-mannered children with a love of learning and positive, can-do attitude'.
- Teachers use their subject knowledge well to provide engaging and motivating activities in class. As a result, pupils have a very good attitude to learning. There is a consistent focus throughout the school on a high standard of presentation.
- In mathematics, pupils are encouraged to explain and talk about the skills they use. This they do with enthusiasm and confidence. Work in pupils' mathematics and writing books indicates good progress over time. However, some pupils, particularly those of middle ability, would benefit from even more opportunities to be extended, particularly in English.
- The importance of reading is prominent throughout the school. Your focus on generating a pleasure in reading and creating a passion for literature is having a very positive impact on pupils. They love their inspiring new library, with its stunning displays and cosy corners in which to read and enjoy good-quality literature. Pupils read well, including the most able. Pupils who struggle with their reading have a good range of strategies to help them.
- Opportunities to write across the curriculum are clearly evident, as are occasions to write for different purposes to a high standard. For example, in Year 3, pupils were excited and highly motivated by writing a persuasive piece about Lila's travels and experiences in 'The firework maker's daughter' (by Philip Pullman). They animatedly discussed with me how 'girls can do anything if they set their mind to it'.
- There is very good quality of provision and teaching offered to children in Reception. As a result, children make good progress by the time they leave. There is a wide range of stimulating, good-quality, learning experiences available to children and they visibly enjoy engaging in them. As a result, children are happy and keen to learn.
- Writing, phonics and number are a strong focus and, as a result, children's skills in these areas by the time they leave Reception are at least good. The effective use of assessment information ensures that provision and learning are matched closely to children's needs. Adults have very positive relationships with children and also parents, who describe staff as 'easy to talk to' and 'brilliant'. Parents particularly appreciate the time that staff take to find out as much about their child before they start in school, and the 'inspire' classes that help parents support their child with their learning at home.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to keep a close eye on ensuring that pupils, particularly those that are of middle ability, are challenged and extended in lessons to think more deeply about their work and practise their reasoning skills.

- they continue to develop and nurture the newly formed middle leadership team.
- every opportunity is taken to learn from each other and share best practice.

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

Sue Eastwood  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher, members of your senior and middle leadership team, your pastoral manager and the member of staff responsible for maintaining safeguarding records. I also met with pupils, six governors, including the chair of the governing body and representatives of the archdiocese and your local authority consortia group. We visited lessons and I scrutinised pupils' work. I took account of the 76 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the views of nine parents spoken to before or during the school day. I took account of nine responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and spoke to staff during the day. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school. I looked at a number of documents, including: information about pupils' achievement; your school self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; behaviour and incident logs and documents relating to safeguarding.

As part of this inspection, five lines of enquiry were followed:

- How have key issues from the previous inspection been addressed, sustained and moved further on to the present time?
- At the end of key stage 2, how well does the school cater for those pupils that are middle attainers who could potentially achieve at a higher standard?
- At the end of key stage 2, what is the school doing to further improve reading and writing so that outcomes are comparable to mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling?
- What strategies are in place to convert more of the middle-ability pupils in key stage 1 to greater depth in all subjects?
- What are pupils' starting points as they enter school in early years, as this would indicate the progress they make through school?