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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Jacqueline Lance
Headteacher
St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School
Preston Road
Withdean
Brighton
East Sussex
BN1 6UT

Dear Mrs Lance

Short inspection of St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 April 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have also ensured that the school is a happy place to be, where pupils are cared for well and enjoy coming to school to learn. Parents hold you in high esteem and are clear that the school's continued improvement is very much due to your dedication and the tireless work of the staff you lead.

Your partnership with the governing body is strong. Governors carry out their statutory responsibilities diligently and know the school well. They were able to discuss with accuracy the school's strengths and areas that need developing. It is clear that they hold you and other leaders to account for improving the school.

Partnerships with the local authority and diocese are productive, although light touch in nature because of the many strengths of the school. The diocese particularly values your own contribution in supporting other headteachers and your work on the various boards and steering groups that you are a member of.

Classrooms were busy when you showed me around the school. Pupils were enjoying what they were doing and told me that they relish the challenges that teachers present them with. One older pupil told me, 'the way we learn is good; teachers don't confuse us'.

It is clear that teachers know pupils well and constantly assess progress during

lessons and over time. As a consequence, most pupils are making good or better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. During visits to classrooms, I witnessed good levels of support for individuals or small groups, often as a result of teachers realising that pupils had not completely grasped different aspects of learning. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are also provided for well, including with one-to-one support, ensuring success for these pupils during lessons and over time.

Pupils were very positive about the new 'reading spine' books you have introduced in order to encourage a love of reading. Year 6 boys in particular were enthused, telling me that they were already reading more since forty new titles had suddenly, 'just arrived' in their classroom. When I listened to pupils of different abilities read, it was clear that reading is given a high profile at the school. Phonics skills are well developed by the time pupils finish Year 1. One girl struggled with the name of a dinosaur, but used her knowledge to successfully pronounce 'apatosaurus', followed by a beaming smile as she realised she had got it right almost first time.

During the inspection, pupils behaved very well. Classrooms were hives of activity where relationships between pupils and adults were clearly very positive and respectful. During my formal discussion with a group of pupils, they made it very clear that they enjoy school because of the interesting things they learn about and the way they are treated by staff. This is reflected in the school's attendance figures, which are much better than those seen in many schools nationally.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors recognised the many strengths of the school, including: the early years where children were making good progress; levels of attainment at the end of Year 6 which were significantly above the national average; and the good attitudes to learning shown by pupils. They also identified the need for the overall quality of teaching to improve and that pupils needed to develop a clearer understanding of the next steps in learning in writing and mathematics. Leaders have addressed these matters effectively, providing good evidence that the quality of teaching has improved over time, leading to better outcomes for pupils, including in writing and mathematics.

Since the last inspection, school leaders have continued the process of self-evaluation in order to identify the most important priorities to improve the school. You were able to explain the school's many strengths, as well as the areas that need to be developed. These include improving outcomes in writing so that they replicate the very good outcomes in reading and mathematics, and ensuring that the progress that boys make in reading and writing increases to match that of girls. We also agreed that the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning could be refined to ensure that it does not become overly detailed.

Safeguarding is effective.

Arrangements to ensure that pupils are safe are robust. Policies, procedures and systems are fit for purpose and day-to-day routines are sound. Governors and school leaders ensure that pre-employment checks to ensure the suitability of staff

and other statutory requirements are fully in place.

Parents were overwhelmingly positive about the levels of care their children receive and particularly like the 'family ethos' that underpins the school's culture. They told me that they think staff 'really care', and spend a lot of time making sure that their children are happy in school.

Inspection findings

- You know the school very well and lead with an understated authority, which is recognised and admired by pupils, parents and staff alike. Due to your high aspirations, the school has continued to improve since the last inspection, and pupils are receiving a very good quality of education.
- All staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They know what is expected of them and share your vision to provide the very best care and guidance. Because of this, pupils thrive at St Bernadette's, and staff are overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of working at the school.
- Self-evaluation is extremely thorough, leading to very detailed improvement planning. During the inspection, you agreed that some refinement to the amount of detail will give plans greater clarity, allowing leaders to focus on the few key areas that need developing. Governors also agreed that this would be helpful.
- Classrooms are happy places. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good because of the good quality of teaching and the wide range of interesting things they learn about.
- The school's wider curriculum is a strength. Topics are well chosen and specialist teachers, of French for instance, ensure that that pupils benefit from staff with strong subject knowledge and high expectations.
- Most pupils make very good progress across all phases of the school. Children leave Reception well prepared for the rigours of Year 1. This year, all pupils achieved the expected standard in phonics before they moved to Year 3.
- Pupils of all ability enjoy reading at St Bernadette's, and are able to put their phonics skills to good use when required.
- Standards at the end of key stage 1 compare favourably to those seen in many schools nationally, because most pupils continue to make good or better progress after leaving Reception.
- Pupils make very good progress in mathematics in key stage 2. This is the same in reading, where the school's provisional national test and assessment results in 2016 indicate that the school performed significantly better than other schools nationally. Progress in writing is good, but not as strong as that seen in reading.
- Leaders have identified that boys do not make as much progress as girls in reading and writing, and that outcomes in writing across the school are not as strong as those seen in reading. These aspects are already a major focus for school improvement planning.
- Most-able pupils do very well because of the high expectations of staff and the

well-pitched level of challenge offered to pupils. The proportion of pupils achieving at greater depth by the end of key stage 2 is consistently higher than national averages.

- The very few pupils who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those capable of achieving at greater depth, do well at St Bernadette's. School leaders and governors track their progress with keen interest, ensuring that their academic and pastoral needs are given the highest priority.
- Children in the early years get off to an excellent start. Parents were particularly impressed with arrangements at the start of the school year, saying their children make 'astounding' progress in their reading and writing as soon as they join the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress that boys make in reading and writing increases, so that their outcomes improve to match those currently seen for girls
- outcomes in writing improve to match those seen for reading and mathematics across the school
- self-evaluation and improvement planning are refined, so that leaders and governors can concentrate on the key aspects of the school which need to improve most.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Brighton and Hove. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Clive Close
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Throughout the inspection I focused on the safety and behaviour of pupils, as well as the quality of provision in key stage 1, the progress of boys in reading and writing, and the progress of most-able and disadvantaged pupils. I met with you, middle leaders, the chair of the governing body accompanied by one other governor, parents, pupils, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the diocesan board. You accompanied me on visits to all classrooms, during which I talked to pupils and assessed the quality of their work. I also listened to a number of pupils read. I observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms

and as they moved around the school. I talked to parents at the beginning of the school day and took into account 101 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Staff responses to the online staff questionnaire were also considered. I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies, minutes of meetings, and pupil progress information.