

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



19 January 2017

Patrick O'Leary
Headteacher
St Bernard's Catholic Primary School
Wake Green Road
Birmingham
West Midlands
B13 9QE

Dear Mr O'Leary

Short inspection of St Bernard's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 January 2017, 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 May 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 instilled in all pupils and staff a strong sense of respect and support for each other. Pupils from different backgrounds and beliefs work and play together harmoniously. This underpins the inclusive culture set within the school. Pupils have a good understanding of, and adhere to, the key values taught within the school. These are promoted consistently by all adults. As one pupil put it, 'The headteacher and deputy headteacher act as good role models for us to learn from.'

Good-quality teaching enables all pupils to achieve well. You have created a dedicated and united staff team who strive hard to ensure that all pupils reach their potential. Staff morale is high, as evidenced by the very positive views shared by staff in their questionnaire responses. Good relationships exist in all classes and pupils have positive attitudes to learning and want to succeed. The curriculum is enriched well with a variety of clubs, visits and visitors. This adds to pupils' enjoyment of school.

Good progress has been made since the previous inspection. You have successfully addressed the areas identified for improvement. You have improved teaching and learning by carrying out regular checks on teaching and providing feedback and support to staff to help develop their practice. Lessons move at a brisk pace and pupils can choose how to present their findings in some subjects. Pupils apply their mathematical knowledge and skills more widely. As a result, attainment, particularly

at the end of key stage 1, has risen and progress in key stage 2 has been consistently above average in reading and mathematics.

While children make good progress in the early years, further work is needed to raise the achievement of boys. This is because, on occasion, adults do not intervene swiftly enough or engage boys in purposeful activities. Additionally, although pupils are suitably challenged in English and mathematics activities, the tasks set in history and geography are too easy. Consequently, pupils' skills and understanding in these subjects are not developed well enough and the quality of work produced is not as good as it could be. This is because leaders do not check pupils' progress in these subjects or ensure that the transferable skills acquired in literacy are utilised fully and developed further.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You and the two other designated leaders for safeguarding have ensured that all staff are fully trained and know precisely what to do if they have any concerns about pupils. Leaders are not afraid to take action and make swift referrals to outside agencies to access support and ensure that pupils are safe. Staff are suitably vetted prior to appointment to check they are fit to work with children. Regular reminders to pupils and parents are given through newsletters and school activities about the importance of internet safety.

Pupils feel safe at school and their parents agree. Personal safety is strongly promoted across the curriculum and materials made available in the children's zone on the school website. Pupils participate in regular theatre workshops and school events, which teach pupils the importance of keeping healthy and staying safe. For example, through the 'life caravan' visit and through assemblies and theme weeks, such as anti-bullying week. Pupils receive paramedic training and governors and staff carry out regular site checks to ensure that it is safe for pupils and staff. The culture of safeguarding within the school is therefore well established.

Inspection findings

- As the headteacher, you have a strong presence in the school and a detailed knowledge of pupils and their families. You have a clear and accurate view of how well the school is doing. You are ably supported by an effective deputy headteacher and senior leadership team. Together you ensure that good-quality teaching leads to good outcomes for all pupils. Where pupils are in danger of falling behind, swift intervention and additional support is provided. This support is highly effective. High levels of nurture and care emanate throughout the school. This is recognised by parent comments which stated: 'Our children look forward to school every morning due to the school's wonderful, caring, nurturing and positive culture.'
- You and your leadership team carry out regular and robust checks on the quality of teaching to ensure that pupils are making good progress. Good support and

feedback are provided to enable teachers to improve their practice. For example, all staff have observed colleagues teaching in other schools or within St Bernard's and areas for improvement are identified following lesson observations or checks of pupils' work. However, these activities are heavily centred on English and mathematics and work seen during the inspection in key stage 2 books in history and geography was not of the same high quality as in writing and mathematics books. You and your leadership team acknowledge that less focus has been placed on monitoring foundation subjects in the curriculum and agree that this is an area for improvement.

- Governors are knowledgeable, supportive and provide good levels of challenge. They are dedicated and committed to securing further improvement. They are actively engaged in monitoring activities and receive regular reports from you and other leaders in the school. As a result, they are well informed and have a good overview of the quality of teaching and its impact on learning. Governors have a secure understanding of pupils' outcomes and the reasons behind the school's key priorities. They recognise the strengths within the school but are also realistic about where improvements can be made.
- Children get off to a good start in the early years and make good progress. This is because they are taught well and the early years is led effectively. Children participate enthusiastically in activities and behave well. Good use is made of the indoor and outdoor learning areas. Practical equipment is used effectively in mathematics and supports children's early number development. While adults provide good levels of care and additional help, on occasion adults do not intervene quickly enough to check that children are on task and learning from well-focused activities, especially boys. This slows their progress rates. In 2015 and 2016, fewer boys reached a good level of development compared to girls and their attainment was lower in all areas of learning.
- Phonics is taught well from the outset. By the end of Year 1, the proportion reaching the level required in the national reading check is above average. Books are provided at the right level for pupils of different ability levels and are decodable. Pupils successfully learn to break down and blend unfamiliar words. Pupils read regularly at home and at school and additional reading opportunities are provided for those who are struggling.
- Good levels of challenge are provided for the most able pupils in reading and writing, but work is particularly demanding in mathematics. Pupils use their mental mathematical skills well and can give reasons and explanations for methods used. Problem-solving skills are also well developed, with impressive levels of extended thinking demonstrated in Year 6 during the inspection. Pupils had to generate their own problems in relation to addition and subtraction of mixed fractions. This led to high levels of engagement and pupils demonstrated excellent levels of understanding and reasoning because this was facilitated skilfully by the teacher's questioning. Able pupils are skilled in their use and accuracy of grammar, punctuation and spelling and use high-quality language in their English work. However, these skills are not demonstrated in other subjects, such as history and geography, because tasks are less demanding and pupils are not given the opportunities to develop their writing skills in other subjects. This curtails the progress they make in writing.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or

disabilities make good progress alongside others in the school. This is due to the timely intervention and additional support they receive either in lessons, through one-to-one support or through small-group work. Their progress is carefully monitored and good use is made of the additional funding received.

- Pupils enjoy school and most attend well. Attendance is broadly average. However, attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was below average in 2015. You carefully track attendance and incentives are offered to encourage pupils to attend regularly. Due attention is given to attendance on weekly newsletters and contact is made with parents where an individual's attendance falls below the threshold expected. Figures checked for this year show that the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs support has improved. However, attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains below average. You were able to provide clear evidence to explain the reasons behind specific low absences of individual pupils, such as medical reasons or difficult family circumstances. You also demonstrated that you are taking appropriate action to tackle this issue.
- Pupils benefit from the wide range of subjects taught and the enrichment opportunities offered. For example, all pupils learn to play a musical instrument in Years 4 and 5 and lots of pupils participate in the sports clubs and activities offered at lunchtime and after school. The girls football team is having particular success in local tournaments due to your strong belief in equality of opportunity. Good-quality artwork is also evident around the school and regular drama opportunities are provided to stimulate pupils' creative development. Science books checked show that pupils carry out investigations and know how to present their findings logically. High expectations are set in religious education, with pupils encouraged to present their work in their chosen format. While progress is good in most subjects, progress in history and geography is not as strong. This is because tasks set are low-level and do not extend and develop the skills needed and leaders do not monitor these subjects as carefully as others.
- Pupils make good progress in all year groups. Outcomes at the end of key stage 1 have been historically above average but were average in 2016. This is because teachers were cautious in assessing pupils on the new curriculum. However, work checked in books shows that a good proportion of pupils are working at greater depth, both within key stage 1 and in current Year 3. Attainment at the end of key stage 2 has remained above average since the previous inspection. Progress is particularly strong in reading and mathematics for all groups of pupils.
- Pupils behave well and are courteous and polite. They are proud of their school and describe the school as 'a happy place to be' and one where 'everybody gets on well together and everyone is welcome'. Pupils have an excellent knowledge of how to stay safe and the different forms of bullying. They are confident that if problems are reported, they are dealt with quickly. They feel very comfortable in reporting concerns to their teachers. They have a good understanding of British and key values as these are given a high priority within the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching enables boys to achieve as well as girls in the early years in all areas

- the quality of work produced in history and geography matches that seen in literacy and numeracy and leaders check the progress of pupils in these subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Lines of enquiry pursued during this inspection focused on:

- the quality of provision in the early years, especially for boys
- how writing is taught and how teachers cater for pupils of different abilities
- how leaders monitor the attendance of pupil groups
- how well leaders check the progress of pupils in different subjects, including English and mathematics
- the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures.

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, leaders for each key stage and nine members of the governing body. I discussed the work of the school with you, including the processes and procedures in place for safeguarding. You and the deputy headteacher joined me on visits to several classrooms. I spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at the work in their books. I listened to pupils read and met with older pupils to gather their views about the school.

I looked at a range of school documents, including the school's information about pupils' achievement and attendance. I also reviewed the school's own evaluation of its work, together with the school development plan. I took account of the 23 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Additional information was collected from parents at the end of the school day, together with the school's own surveys of parents' views. There were 22 responses to the staff questionnaire and their views were considered.