

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



15 May 2017

Mr David Iliff
Headteacher
St James' Catholic Primary School, Skelmersdale
Ashurst Road
Ashurst
Skelmersdale
Lancashire
WN8 6TN

Dear Mr Iliff

Short inspection of St James' Catholic Primary School, Skelmersdale

Following my visit to the school on 3 May 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. St James' Catholic Primary is a happy and friendly school where pupils thrive both academically and in their personal development.

The school has continued to improve since the previous inspection as a result of your strong, assured leadership. You have created an environment that fosters the care and nurture of the whole school community successfully, driven by your Christian values. You are ably assisted by your leadership team. Staff, parents and pupils subscribe wholeheartedly to your school mission. A number of pupils were keen to tell me that 'at St James' we all belong to one big family'.

The overwhelming majority of parents who spoke to me or responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, are extremely positive about the school and would recommend it to others without hesitation. Parents particularly appreciate that you and your staff are friendly and approachable. For example, several parents commented how you are at the gates regularly to greet them and pupils in the morning, 'whatever the weather'.

All staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire are proud to be part of St James' and hold you in high regard. Staff share your vision and aspirations for the school. There is a strong sense of the team-working to achieve the very best for all pupils.

Children start school with skills and knowledge just below those typical for their age. There is a consistent approach across Nursery and the Reception classes. There is an emphasis on 'hands on' physical experiences to capture the interest and imagination of all groups of children. The good standard of provision ensures that by the time they leave early years, the vast majority of children are making good progress.

At the end of key stage 1, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard and greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics is comparable to or above national averages. Based on in-year checks on progress and in pupils' books, these improvements appear set to continue, confirming that pupils make good progress at the end of this key stage.

An above-average proportion of pupils reached the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling at the end of key stage 2. Similarly, the proportion of pupils achieving higher standards in English was above national figures. Although only just above national in writing, pupils' performance in reading was strong. You are mindful that the proportion of pupils achieving higher standards in mathematics needs to increase, particularly for pupils of middle ability. Similarly, you want writing to improve further. The actions you have put in place are already leading to further improvement.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified a need to ensure that the most able pupils are challenged, and that opportunities are given to pupils to reflect on and improve their work. You were also asked to improve your performance management systems for staff, to ensure that targets are closely linked to the progress that pupils make and staff are accountable for pupils' progress. Leaders have ensured that the following improvements have taken place:

- Performance management is thorough and detailed. Staff targets reflect the progress of pupils that they are responsible for. Teachers are accountable for the progress made at pupil progress meetings held throughout the year.
- Pupils are encouraged to be involved in their learning. They are familiar with their targets in English and mathematics. Pupils are regularly given personalised success criteria, which encourage them to take responsibility for the contents and quality of their work. Pupils of all ages are confident, talking about where they are in their learning and their next steps.
- The increased challenge and expectations in learning across the school has resulted in improved outcomes for pupils. For example, in 2016, an increasing number of pupils achieved greater depth and higher standards by the end of key stages 1 and 2. The small number of pupils identified as most-able within school attained above national averages in all subjects. However, I agree with you that there are a number of pupils identified as middle-ability who are not always achieving all that they are capable of. This is because pupils are not always asked questions that challenge their thinking. There are also not enough opportunities for them to apply their skills to demanding mathematical problems. As a result, there is still work to be done to ensure that this group, as well as the most able,

are further challenged and extended in their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your team have ensured that pupils have a safe and secure environment by promoting the clear message that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Safeguarding arrangements are rigorous and records are detailed and kept securely. Regular and appropriate training for staff and governors is undertaken and up to-date, including that related to keeping pupils safe from radicalisation and extremism. Your vigilance around the care and support of vulnerable pupils is of a good standard. Leaders have effective relationships with other agencies and are persistent in situations where vulnerable pupils need extra support or advocacy.

Pupils say that they feel very safe and well cared for in school and gave the inspector many examples of how adults do this. Pupils are confident that adults will help them if needed. Pupils confirmed that bullying and inappropriate behaviour is very rare and, if it does occur, adults deal with any situations quickly. Pupils of all ages talk with knowledge about the ways they can stay safe in a range of situations, particularly online. The vast majority of parents feel that you and the staff look after their children and keep them safe.

Inspection findings

- From the outset of the inspection, it was clear that you are a dedicated leader. You are complemented by a very effective deputy headteacher. Together, you both have an accurate, reflective and honest view of the school's strengths and priorities. The governing body is regularly involved in the life of the school; it is supportive and challenges you appropriately. There is a good capacity to improve the school further.
- Teaching is consistent across the school. Pupils have a very good attitude to learning and say that lessons are 'fun', 'interesting' and 'help you learn lots of new things'. Adults have a good level of subject knowledge which is conveyed clearly to pupils to support them in their learning. In mathematics, pupils demonstrate a good level of knowledge and skills. However, in a number of instances, the problem-solving activities that they are offered are not challenging enough for them to apply their skills fully and think about their work more deeply.
- Pupils are offered many opportunities to read and talk about books and texts. This is used effectively as a stimulus for written work. As a result, many pupils write confidently, using language and vocabulary that is rich and lively. However, some pupils are not stretched enough in these activities because the questions they are asked do not challenge their thinking sufficiently. This is particularly the case for some middle-ability pupils.
- Attendance is a high priority for the school and good attendance is celebrated. You have good-quality systems for monitoring attendance and have had notable successes in tackling individual pupil absence where it has been higher than it

should be.

- There are a number of strengths within the school. The care and consideration that the older pupils display to younger ones is striking. For example, older pupils 'buddy' with younger ones as they start school. Pupils talked with pride and affection about this relationship. Many older pupils play with younger ones and they are quick to pick up on a pupil playing on their own or looking sad. Older pupils speak to younger ones with gentleness and empathy.
- Pupils are proud of their school and value highly the enrichment opportunities they are offered. For example, singing at the Young Voices festival, performing in school productions such as 'Bugsy Malone' and being involved in events such as samba and 'British values' days. Key stage 2 pupils attend residential outdoor centres. These trips are eagerly anticipated and greatly valued by pupils, who say, 'We have fun and do things we never thought we could, it's amazing.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle-ability pupils are challenged and extended, so that more achieve greater depth and higher standards, particularly in mathematics and writing
- pupils are offered more opportunities to apply their skills to solve mathematical problems and consider their work more deeply
- teachers develop their questioning skills further, to challenge pupils' thinking.

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 Lancashire. 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 and the deputy headteacher. I also met with the person responsible for maintaining safeguarding records. I met with four governors, including the chair of the governing body, and I spoke on the telephone to a representative of Lancashire local authority. We visited lessons and I scrutinised pupils' work. I took account of the 29 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered the views of six parents who talked with me before the school day and one parent later in the day on the telephone. I took account of the 19 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and spoke to staff during the day. I also met with a group of pupils. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school. I looked at school documents, including:

information about pupils' achievement and their work books; your school self-evaluation; information on attendance; and documents relating to safeguarding.