

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



23 March 2018

Mrs Angela Bennett
Headteacher
St John's Catholic Primary School
Oldfield Lane
Bath
Somerset
BA2 3NR

Dear Mrs Bennett

Short inspection of St John's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 2018, 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

As headteacher, you provide clear-sighted and purposeful leadership to drive forward improvements. Since your appointment in September 2017, you have sustained the best aspects of the school, in particular the way the school cares for pupils and fosters their enthusiasm for learning. You quickly initiated new approaches to teaching that effectively meet the demands of the new national curriculum. You are well supported by governors and staff. They share your vision and determination that pupils at St John's receive the best possible education.

You have acted on the recommendations from the previous inspection to improve teaching by providing a range of extensive training opportunities for staff. Your new leadership team takes a greater role in checking the quality of teaching and helping teachers to plan successfully to meet pupils' varying needs. You have taken effective action to raise the achievement of Year 1 pupils in phonics. In addition, you are ensuring that achievement in writing improves in key stage 2. Focused teaching is increasing pupils' ability to write in an engaging way, using imaginative vocabulary. A significant strength of the school is the clear and timely guidance teachers give pupils, enabling them to produce work of good quality. Current standards in writing show improvement, although you are aware that there is more to do in this respect.

You have an accurate and realistic understanding of the school's current

performance. Your plans set out precisely what needs to improve further, with specific, measurable targets. You identified that not enough pupils achieved a high standard in mathematics at the end of Year 6 and took prompt action to address this. Teachers set more challenging work for the most able pupils than previously. However, pupils lack opportunities to explain their thinking and methods in aspects of mathematics other than number to deepen their understanding still further. Nevertheless, a greater number of key stage 2 pupils are achieving high standards this year.

Most parents and carers are extremely positive about the school's work. They praise your approachability and that of your staff. In their words, they say they are proud that their children attend this 'amazing' school where their children are valued as individuals. Since your arrival, they feel their views are taken into account and acted on accordingly. Adjusting timings at the start of the school day is an example of this. Warm and effective relationships between staff and pupils help to promote high standards of behaviour and enjoyment in learning. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the exciting topics they study and the interesting range of places they visit.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governors place a high priority on keeping pupils safe. You have created a vigilant culture within the school, making sure that arrangements are fit for purpose. You check that staff follow policy guidelines and review them each year to improve their effectiveness. Procedures for recruiting staff follow the statutory guidance rigorously. You check that the school's single central record is maintained accurately. Staff and governors receive regular training in the latest requirements for safeguarding, including how to keep pupils safe from extremism and radicalisation. Staff are clear about how to report any concerns about pupils. All risks are thoroughly assessed and updated annually, for example with regard to fire safety and educational visits.

You work well with other agencies, making timely referrals should the need arise. Staff keep a close eye on the welfare of any pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Records are detailed and of good quality. Parents recognise the lengths to which you go to provide a welcoming and inclusive school where their children are safe and happy. Pupils confirm that they feel secure in school because staff are very supportive, saying that there is always 'someone to help you' and 'you never feel alone'.

You have reduced pupils' absence, and attendance rates are above average. You teach pupils how to stay safe through your curriculum. They know, for example, not to give out any personal information when on online on the computer. Pupils have a clear understanding of what constitutes bullying and how to combat this, although they say it seldom happens here.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I met with you to discuss the school's progress since the previous inspection. We agreed the following lines of enquiry: how well leaders are increasing progress rates in writing to enable key stage 2 pupils to reach high standards; how effectively the most able pupils are challenged in mathematics in key stage 2; how successfully leaders are raising achievement in phonics in key stage 1; and how well the school keeps pupils safe.
- Following progress scores in 2017 at the end of key stage 2 that were average in reading and mathematics and just below in writing, you took swift action to improve teaching and raise teachers' expectations of pupils' achievement. You ensure that teachers provide clear targets to speed up pupils' progress. As a result of extensive staff training, teachers are skilled in guiding and showing pupils how to improve their work and achieve these targets. Pupils write regularly at length across subjects and with obvious enjoyment as teachers present them with interesting tasks. During my visit, we observed Year 3 and 4 pupils writing with imaginative vocabulary to good effect as they created atmosphere in their 'suspense' stories. We also looked at a range of pupils' books and agreed that pupils are extending their skills effectively, making strong progress from the start of the year. However, you acknowledge that pupils do not yet show the consistent mastery of different styles of writing needed to reach the highest standards.
- While the most able pupils achieved the expected standard in mathematics at the end of Year 6 in 2017, few exceeded this. You quickly introduced a new approach to teaching mathematics, providing staff with high-quality training based on advice from external consultants. Teachers are now better able to plan work to develop pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts, using a range of practical resources and new strategies. The work in pupils' books shows that this is having a positive impact on their mastery of number and place value. Pupils are making faster progress than previously. Increasingly, teachers present pupils with tasks that require them to think more deeply to solve complex problems, particularly in calculation. However, pupils' ability to explain their reasoning and methods is not extensive enough to deepen their knowledge and understanding further in other aspects of mathematics.
- In response to a dip in results in the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2017, you have improved staff skills with high-quality training. You have ensured that phonics is now taught well. Teachers organise the learning of letters and sounds precisely to meet pupils' needs. They move the most able pupils on quickly to a greater level of challenge. Where necessary, they give pupils additional help to catch up quickly. Consequently, a greater proportion of Year 1 pupils are on track to meet the expected standard in next term's check. Across key stage 1, pupils read fluently and with obvious enjoyment. They use a range of strategies, including their knowledge of phonics, to ensure that they read accurately and with clear understanding.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils continue to develop their writing skills so that they achieve the highest possible standards
- teachers continue to help pupils develop their reasoning skills in mathematics by requiring them to explain their methods and thinking more extensively.

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

Yours sincerely

Sandra Woodman
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and discussed the school's self-evaluation, information about pupils' progress and improvements since the previous inspection. Together, we observed learning in classrooms and looked at a range of pupils' work in books. I listened to several pupils reading from key stage 1 and met with pupils to talk about their experience of school life. I held meetings with middle leaders and with four governors. In addition, I met with an external adviser who supports the school. I looked at a range of written evidence, including documents relating to safeguarding and attendance information. I took account of the written comments of 63 parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also took account of the views of 20 members of staff and the 130 pupils who returned the online questionnaires.