

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Andrew Ramanandi
Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Blaydon
Croftdale Road
Blaydon-on-Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE21 4BG

Dear Mr Ramanandi

Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Blaydon

Following my visit to the school on 22 January 2019, 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 January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You challenge and support the whole school community to ensure that pupils achieve the best they can. You listen carefully to pupils and staff and empower them to contribute to the school's improvement. This work has helped to develop an extremely strong culture of learning and positive behaviours in pupils, and strong levels of professionalism in the staff.

Leadership at all levels is characterised by a considerable determination to make any improvements needed. You provide many opportunities for staff within school to effectively take on new responsibilities. This trust and faith in their ability to lead and develop initiatives is clearly appreciated, as shown in the overwhelmingly positive responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire. Equally, it impacts on the high

standard of teaching that pupils overall experience across each key stage. Through regular formal and informal monitoring, leaders have a detailed understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. All leaders play a clearly defined and effective role in monitoring the effect of the work of the school. New ways of working are carefully evaluated to ensure they are having a positive effect on pupils' progress.

A continuous focus on ensuring that pupils receive the most effective teaching and learning is evident across the school. Ongoing assessment is rigorous and it is used effectively to inform teachers' planning and identify any additional support required for individual pupils. Detailed analysis of performance information enables staff to know the learning needs of their pupils extremely well. This results in very focused teaching and the production of personalised resources for individual pupils that carefully target their needs. Staff have regular, planned opportunities to access high-quality training both within the school and also via the local authority. This enables staff to further develop their expertise and share good practice with their colleagues. However, leaders are aware of the need to even further extend teachers' opportunities to benefit from the expertise in school, therefore developing even greater consistency.

All children begin their education at St Joseph's in Reception and make increasingly strong progress from different starting points. Further work is needed by leaders to ensure the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception continues to increase and is in line with that seen nationally. This is an area for improvement. Leaders are very aware of this and are already putting into place appropriate actions.

In 2018, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1 was above the percentage that did so nationally. However, in terms of achieving a greater depth of understanding, particularly in mathematics, pupils by the end of Year 2 did not reach the national standards. Decisive action has been taken by yourself and the leader for mathematics and this is already improving the proportion of pupils achieving a greater depth of understanding. In discussion, pupils say they are seeing the change in the teaching of mathematics and recognise the positive effect it is having on their learning.

In key stage 2, pupils are currently making strong progress. In Year 6 in 2018, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected and higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined was well above the percentage that did so nationally. In writing alone, however, the proportion of middle-ability pupils achieving the higher standard in 2018 was below the national average. You and the leader for English have already taken swift action and current evidence in pupils' workbooks indicates that an increasing proportion are now achieving the higher standard.

Governors have a very strong understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They apply their expertise well. Governors with professional experiences in a wide variety of areas, including safeguarding, finance and early years, use their knowledge to provide appropriate support and challenge. The chair of the governing body with her team have devised appropriate committee structures to hold leaders to account. They receive regular information on pupils' outcomes and question leaders, including subject leaders, on all aspects of progress. Governors carry out regular visits to the school to gain direct insight into pupils' perceptions and development.

You have addressed areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Middle leaders, through the effective use of assessment information in pupil progress meetings, hold all teaching staff to account for the standards achieved in their subjects. In addition, middle leaders monitor and evaluate the effect of the actions teachers subsequently take to address any identified gaps in learning. You and your staff have continued to extend the high level of challenge provided for all ability groups of pupils. For example, in Year 1 pupils in mathematics were able to explain which methods they had used and why when working on a problem-solving question, using appropriate mathematical language. They were then able to translate the answer into a written format using appropriate symbols.

Parents and carers are extremely supportive of the school. They very much appreciate the level of care and guidance that is given to their children as a matter of routine. As one parent stated, 'St Joseph's nurtures children and not only allows them to make good progress but also allows them to grow and develop into happy individuals.'

You and your team engender a culture of mutual respect and tolerance where the uniqueness of every child is valued. Pupils appreciate opportunities to take on responsibilities and Year 6 pupils provide support for children in Reception. Pupils value their education and this is reflected in their desire to come to school on a regular basis. Pupils can explain clearly the school's mission statement and talk passionately about how it is put into practice by everyone within school. As one young pupil spoken to said, 'Everyone is special, cared for and challenged to be the best they can be.'

Safeguarding is effective.

The school ensures that the safety and well-being of pupils is a high priority. You have developed a dedicated team of staff to ensure that the standard of safeguarding is high and that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Thorough checks are carried out on all staff working within school and visitors are carefully monitored. Any pupil who feels unhappy or concerned is quickly identified, and then support is provided by caring adults. Those pupils and their families who are the most vulnerable are carefully nurtured, which enables them to feel secure

and to flourish in school. Pupils spoken to feel they can trust your staff and particularly value the care and guidance they provide. You and your staff know the families in the community very well and work closely with them to provide the appropriate support and guidance.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe online, both within school and at home. They are given good opportunities across the curriculum to explore their understanding of being safe overall and how they can keep each other safe. For example, in Reception, children visiting the forest school were clearly able to identify potential risks including how to approach a frozen pond!

There is a distinct culture of care across the school. From the very start of the day when parents and children are greeted as they come in to school, staff work to support and nurture pupils. Pupils of all ages are very responsive and considerate towards each other. St Joseph's Catholic Primary School displays an extremely inclusive approach to all families and their children.

Inspection findings

- Very effective leadership and high-quality teaching of mathematics has resulted in pupils being challenged successfully in key stage 1. This is because the subject knowledge of both teachers and teaching assistants in this key stage is strong. Both teachers and their subject leader have taken part in a research group and a range of training to further inform their work with pupils. This is indicative of the high level of commitment and the subject expertise of all staff in school, ensuring that pupils receive the best education possible.
- Daily reasoning and problem-solving tasks in mathematics are carefully planned to ensure an ongoing increase in the level of challenge for pupils. Evidence in pupils' workbooks shows that they have many opportunities to explain how they have tackled problems using specific mathematical language. Staff work hard to continually extend their own expertise to ensure that pupils make the best progress possible. As a result, an increasing proportion of pupils in key stage 1 are currently working at greater depth in mathematics.
- You have invested heavily in training and support to ensure that phonics teaching is consistent across Reception and key stage 1. Adults rightly emphasise children's language development as soon as they begin their schooling, so children are encouraged to talk and listen. There is a clear focus on all pupils being appropriately challenged, and an expectation that they will move on, when ready, to the next stage of development. In addition, workshops are provided for parents to develop skills in supporting their children's awareness of phonics and overall reading. As a result of pupils' achievement in the phonics screening check in 2018 being below the national average, leaders have reviewed the current practice in school and provided additional guidance, as necessary, to support the teaching of phonics. Leaders are very clear as to why a proportion of pupils did

not achieve the appropriate standard in the 2018 screening check. This was due to the very particular needs of a small group of pupils.

- Leaders within school are taking effective and focused action to ensure that pupils are achieving the higher standard in writing in key stage 2, particularly middle-attaining pupils.
- Effective and regular monitoring, by the English subject lead, of classroom teaching and also of pupils' workbooks, quickly identifies any gaps in learning. Appropriate guidance is then provided to support both teachers and pupils, as necessary. Evidence in pupils' workbooks over time indicates strong progress is being made and an increasing proportion of pupils are currently achieving the higher standard in writing.
- Pupils develop strong writing skills and demonstrate accomplished writing in their workbooks over time. They have the ability to write effectively for a range of purposes and audiences and their work is underpinned by strong standards of grammar, spelling and punctuation. Teachers teach pupils an understanding of grammar and punctuation in creative and relevant contexts and this enables pupils to use these skills to considerable effect in their own writing. Pupils are skilled in being able to critically assess the effectiveness of their own and others' writing. As a result, pupils can carefully identify where changes need to be made to ensure that their writing has the appropriate effect on its audience.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they further:

- increase the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception to that seen nationally or above
- extend opportunities in school to share good practice to ensure even greater consistency in the quality of teaching and learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Vernon
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your senior leadership team. I also met with middle leaders, including the subject leaders for mathematics and English. I held a meeting with a group of pupils, and I spoke to pupils less formally in lessons. I met with three members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. I also spoke with the school improvement adviser from the local authority by telephone. Together with you, your deputy headteacher and lead for mathematics, we visited Reception, Year 1, Year 2, Year 5 and Year 6 to observe the quality of teaching and learning. I also looked at pupils' work in books for Year 1, Year 2, Year 5 and Year 6 with your subject leads for mathematics and English. I also looked at pupils' workbooks during visits to lessons. I examined the school improvement plan as well as other documents, including assessment information, pupil tracking and monitoring and evaluation files. I examined safeguarding documents, including the single central record of checks made on the suitability of staff to work with children. I took account of 58 free-text responses from parents and 71 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also took account of 15 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.