

Inspection of a good school: St Finian's Catholic Primary School

The Ridge, Cold Ash, Thatcham, Berkshire RG18 9HU

Inspection dates: 30 November and 1 December 2021

Outcome

St Finian's Catholic Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils and staff enjoy positive relationships. Pupils know that teachers care about their learning and their well-being. They say there is always someone to help you with work or any problem. A caring approach encourages pupils to talk about their feelings and to manage them sensibly. By the time pupils are in Year 6, they are good role models. They like having responsibilities to help out at their friendly school. Typical of many, one pupil said, 'We learn to get on with everyone. It prepares us for the world.'

Children's enthusiastic attitudes to learning begin in the early years. They learn through creative play. Pupils enjoy their lessons in every subject because teachers make learning interesting. Physical education is a favourite subject because of the school's vast range of sports. Teachers have high aspirations for pupils to achieve their best. Pupils who need it get extra help with learning, though some need to catch up more quickly. Pupils are expected to work hard, and they do. As a result, their behaviour in lessons is purposeful.

Bullying is unusual. Pupils say it is not a problem. They are confident that, if they tell an adult in school about any incident, it will be dealt with quickly so that it does not recur.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Subject leaders have developed detailed content for the curriculum. They have provided training for staff to understand what makes each subject unique. Teachers ignite pupils' learning through active opportunities. In history, for example, Year 5 recently enacted a Viking raid. They then considered the Anglo-Saxons' perspective of their invaders. Subject plans support pupils to build knowledge. For example, they learn how to examine different sources of historical evidence. On occasion, some learning activities are not well focused. Pupils sometimes miss out on important content that they need to know.

Learning to read well is everyone's priority. Teachers use their expertise to foster success. Children in Reception are eager to read and quickly learn to love books. They particularly like voting for the shared class book at the end of the day. Teachers are adept at assessing where pupils are with learning phonics. Teachers know when to introduce the next sound

and pupils practise these to be expert. Teachers build on early reading skills effectively. They are attentive to the importance of developing pupils' reading comprehension. Teachers' sharp focus on comprehension skills enables pupils to make the most of the high-quality literature they read. Pupils are confident to use reading skills in other subjects to find out information.

Leaders have a firm grasp on the learning gaps that have arisen from the COVID-19 school restrictions. They know that progress in sentence structure and writing stamina has slowed. Leaders have made plans to ensure catch-up activities take place. Some key stage 1 pupils have fallen behind in phonics and reading. Teachers use assessment effectively and have strong subject expertise. Currently, however, there are insufficient opportunities for targeted teaching to support all pupils to develop fluency.

The Reception classroom is a hive of activity. Children enjoy working together and they become effective learners. Adults skilfully provide tasks for children to practise what they have learned. Children used their early mathematics knowledge to tally numbers in a ball game, find shapes in classroom objects and think about size at the carpenter's bench. Children's early interest in mathematics enables key stage 1 pupils to achieve well. They develop a thorough understanding of how numbers work. Pupils use practical apparatus and pictorial methods to think about different operations. They continue this approach as they move through the school. Pupils rise to the challenge of solving problems with increasing complexity. They become confident to explain how they have worked things out.

Teachers are quick to identify any emerging special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They have a good understanding of the needs of pupils with SEND. They provide appropriate support and work closely with parents to plan strategies. Pupils particularly appreciate the help that is available for their emotional development. Caring for the school's guinea pig is one of many successful means to promote quiet thinking.

Pupils are encouraged to develop their interests. They are proud to take part in competitive sports. They enjoy designing and making in art and design technology. Pupils like to sing and perform for their parents. These, and other activities, contribute towards the reflective young people that pupils become.

School leaders, including governors, share a continuous drive to improve the school. The strong staff team is positive about working at the school. They appreciate that their leaders consider their views and involve them in decision-making. Teachers say that they manage to have a sensible work-life balance.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Every adult in school has helpful safeguarding training. They know about the risks that pupils and families may face. Staff understand the importance of reporting concerns. This includes even small changes in pupils' behaviour.

The school's systems allow staff to pass on information promptly. Leaders make decisions that result in appropriate action. They ensure that timely support is available for pupils and their families. Leaders maintain positive working relationships with other agencies.

The governing body maintains a sharp focus on the school's safeguarding procedures. It ensures that leaders follow the school's comprehensive procedures.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils have fallen behind with basic skills, including in phonics and reading. Leaders need to support teachers with the materials and approaches to address identified gaps in pupils' learning. This will ensure that all pupils quickly develop reading fluency.
- In a few of the foundation subjects, pupils are not deepening their knowledge of some vital ideas and concepts. Leaders need to continue refining the foundation subjects, ensuring that all teachers focus precisely on the key content that is important for pupils to learn as they move through the school. This will enable pupils to know, remember and be able to do even more.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in November 2011.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	110037
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	10200392
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	192
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Philip Roberts
Headteacher	Anna Jarratt
Website	http://www.stfiniansprimary.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	22 November 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There has been a change of headteacher since the last inspection. The current headteacher took up her post in an acting capacity in February 2019 and was made substantive in March 2021.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation.
- The inspector met with school leaders and other members of staff, including the special educational needs coordinators. She also met with governors, including the chair of governors, and spoke by telephone with the local authority school improvement adviser.
- The inspector reviewed the school's safeguarding arrangements. She looked at relevant documentation, staff recruitment checks and training. Discussion took place about how well adults in the school act on emerging concerns about pupils' welfare.

- The inspector spoke with pupils, parents and staff to gather their views about the school. She looked at 55 responses to Ofsted Parent View, 76 replies to the pupils' questionnaire and 19 replies to the staff survey.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and history. This involved talking with subject leaders and class teachers about how these subjects are delivered, visiting lessons to see this in action, talking to pupils about their learning and looking at their work. The inspector also listened to some pupils reading to their teacher.

Inspection team

Linda Jacobs, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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