Inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Thame

Brook Lane, Thame, Oxfordshire OX9 2AB

Inspection dates:	21 and 22 January 2025
The quality of education	**Good**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Good**
Personal development	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Good**
Early years provision	**Good**
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Elizabeth Sienkiewicz. The school is part of The Pope Francis Catholic Multi Academy Company, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Fraser Long, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Paul Concannon.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils treat each other with kindness. This helps them feel happy and safe. Good manners underpin everything. From the minute they join the school, children learn how to share equipment and how to wait patiently for their turn. Staff have high expectations for pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As a result, everyone is encouraged to do their best. Achievement throughout the school is improving.

Pupils behave consistently well and have positive attitudes to study. Lessons buzz with discussions about learning. In English, pupils learn vital debating skills through text and character analysis, and in mathematics, pupils discuss the best method for solving complex calculations. Corridors are calm. Breaktimes and lunchtimes are a blaze of activity.

The wider personal development of pupils is a strength. Pupils benefit from a wide range of leadership opportunities, such as Student Council members, Prayer Leaders and Sports, House and Eco Captains. These opportunities teach them vital leadership skills, such as time management and responsibility. Older pupils relish the opportunity to organise their own Play Leader rota for children in Reception. A group of Year 6 pupils formed 'The Bookworms'. They organise activities for the whole school and raise funds for good causes.

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

The school joined a new multi-academy trust and has undergone many changes since the last inspection. Some staff, parents and carers found this an unsettling period. However, this has now been resolved. The school benefits from strong support from the trust. Leaders at all levels provide the school with stability and expertise. Throughout the changes, the school has remained resolute in its high ambition for pupils.

The curriculum has been reviewed extensively. The school has identified critical knowledge and skills that pupils need to know. Staff present information clearly. In some subjects, such as mathematics and English, teachers check carefully that pupils know and remember crucial information before they move on. However, in some of the other subjects, the approaches for checking that pupils' learning has been securely retained are not yet firmly embedded. Where this is the case, sometimes pupils may develop gaps in their knowledge or have misconceptions that remain unaddressed.

Children thrive in the vibrant early years provision. Early reading is taught well. As soon as they join, children learn to read. This unlocks other crucial areas of learning. Children read books that are matched to the sounds that they know. This ensures that knowledge builds carefully step by step. Children learn to read with fluency and comprehension. Those who fall behind receive specialist support to catch up quickly. Older pupils read widely. The library contains a range of engaging texts. The school has firm plans in place to make this a more purposeful and vibrant space.

The support for pupils with SEND is strong. Pupils' needs are identified accurately. Staff use this information to provide highly skilled support in lessons. This benefits all pupils and especially those with SEND. The school identifies pupils' needs accurately, including pupils with SEND. These pupils benefit from the high-quality support that meets their individual needs very effectively.

Behaviour is strong throughout the school. Attitudes to learning are extremely positive. There has been improvement in the attendance of pupils overall. However, a small number of pupils still miss too much school, particularly disadvantaged pupils. The school is doing all it can to work collaboratively with parents to address this.

A thoughtfully designed personal, social and health education curriculum supplements the age-appropriate relationships education programme that pupils receive. Pupils learn vital knowledge and skills, such as how to keep themselves safe, including online. Fundamental British values are promoted comprehensively. Older pupils relish debating relevant current topics and contributing to the local community. Trips and visitors bring the curriculum to life. Pupils benefit from a myriad of opportunities designed to develop talents and interests, such as singing in the popular school choir, street dance, sports clubs and learning a musical instrument.

The school is mindful of the improvements it is bringing about and the impact of this on staff. The interim education board (IEB) has improved oversight of the school during this period of change. It provides appropriate support and robust challenge to the school. Planned changes to reinstate a local governing body will begin imminently. New policies and changes are implemented in a timely way. This enables staff to remain focused on improving pupils' outcomes and experiences. As a result, staff feel valued and are extremely loyal to the school. Many staff and parents describe the school as having a 'family feel'. One parent, whose comments were typical of many, said, 'My children are incredibly happy at the school and relish going in each day. All the staff are friendly and supportive and really get to know the children well.'

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's work to refine approaches to assessment in the wider curriculum is not firmly embedded. This makes it difficult for the school to know if pupils have learned and remembered critical knowledge and skills in these subjects. The school should ensure that approaches for checking pupils' knowledge and skills are firmly embedded.
- Not all pupils attend school regularly enough, particularly disadvantaged pupils. This means they miss vital work and may fall behind their peers. The school must continue

to engage with parents to ensure that attendance improves, and persistent absence decreases, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

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.

Further information

You can search for published performance information about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the definition of children in need of help and protection; pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's pupil premium funding (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	139529
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10359412
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	193
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Concannon
CEO of the trust	Fraser Long
Headteacher	Elizabeth Sienkiewicz
Website	www.st-josephs.oxon.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	19 and 20 November 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school joined the Pope Franci Catholic Multi Academy Company in January 2021.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been some changes to the leadership of the school. The headteacher took up their post in January 2024.
- The school uses three unregistered providers of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth-form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior staff, including the special educational needs coordinator.
- The lead inspector met the chair of the trust and the chair of the IEB. She also met the CEO and the primary lead for school improvement. She held a telephone meeting with a representative of the local authority and the diocese.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons in other subjects, spoke with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils and observed their behaviour at breaktime and lunchtime.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspectors took account of a range of other information, including the school's development plan, school policies and minutes from meetings of the IEB.
- Inspectors met with groups of staff and considered the opinions expressed through the online staff survey. Inspectors also took account of the views of parents expressed through the online survey for parents and carers, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Linda Culling, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Kimberley Kemp	Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: http://eepurl.com/iTrDn.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2025