



Herts for Learning

Review report

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Unique reference number	100441
Local authority	Islington
Review number	JL180426
Review date	26 th April 2018
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Type of school	Voluntary aided
School category	Primary
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	463
Headteacher	Clare McFlynn
Chair of the governing body	Paul Lasok
Date of last Ofsted inspection	31 st March 2009
Telephone number	020 7272 1270
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Review of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

This review took place on 26th April 2018 at the request of the executive headteacher. The review team comprised three Herts for Learning advisers – Jeremy Loukes, Judith Sumner and Marita Hopkinson (the school's Hertfordshire Improvement Partner). The school was last inspected in March 2009. Each area of the school's work was graded as outstanding. The purpose of the review was to identify the right priorities for the school's development in order for it to retain an outstanding judgement at its next inspection. Leaders are aware that the school is exempt from routine inspection but are, rightly, determined to ensure that provision remains of the highest quality and that it has a strong impact on pupils' outcomes.

Dear Miss McFlynn,

You and your team have gained the trust of the school community. Parents who have had long associations with the school describe significant improvements which have taken place under your leadership. Parents spoken to on the playground at the start of the day were very complimentary. Similarly, governors value the determined approach you and your team have taken to driving improvement since your appointment. You have helped parents to understand the importance of their children making strong progress. This was exemplified by a parent's comment which outlined how her child's suitably structured Nursery education has prepared them well for the Reception Year.

One of your priorities has been to ensure that pupils make progress throughout the school rather than the emphasis being on attaining well by the end of Year 6. Published data about pupils' outcomes in each key stage indicates that you have been successful in achieving this. You have also enabled significant improvement in pupils' attitudes to their learning. Whereas you describe teaching as being formerly didactic in approach, you have introduced and developed a more collaborative approach which engages pupils in their learning. This has also resulted in pupils taking greater responsibility for their behaviour. Respect underpins the relationships between members of the school community. It was evident on the day of the review that pupils' relationships with each other and with adults, were of the highest quality. This has a very positive impact on the quality of teaching and on the value pupils place on their learning.

Governors are well informed about the school's work. They adopt a highly professional approach to their roles. Members of the governing body have expertise in a wide range of fields including accountancy, health and business. You and your team work closely with the governing body, sharing relevant information transparently. This leads to governors asking pertinent and well-focussed questions to challenge leaders. Frank and honest debate underpins governors' work. Changes to the organisation of the governing body have resulted in governors having a broader understating of the topics under discussion. They describe the harmonious nature of the school community and the importance this plays in the drive for improvement.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They value the numerous opportunities they have to take on roles of responsibility such as that of 'eco-warrior' and 'pupil chaplain'. One pupil summarised their views of the school by explaining, 'This school brings out the best in us.' A short visit to a rehearsal of the school orchestra indicates that despite being an extra-curricular activity, expectations of what pupils can achieve, are very high. The orchestra comprised a range of instruments, some less typically associated with orchestral music. This approach to inclusion is typical of what seen during the review.

Safeguarding

Discussions with staff on the day of the review indicate that they are clear about how to respond should they have concerns about the well-being of a pupil. Safeguarding leaders are proactive in checking that training for staff has been effective. Review of documentation indicates that concerns are recorded clearly with resulting actions noted and followed up.

One parent explained that she was confident that her child is well looked after, saying that she knew her child was 'safe and happy in school'. Pupils spoken to during the course of the day invariably confirmed that they feel safe. A Year 3 pupil summarised the views of their

peers by saying that, 'above all in this school, we want everybody (including animals) to be safe'.

Pupils left the building promptly and in an orderly manner during the unplanned fire evacuation during the visit. This is indicative of the well-established systems you have set out. Green flags raised at the front of each line of pupils signify that all are present.

You and your colleagues take the issue of personal safety seriously. You are well informed about local issues and take these into account when refining policies and procedures. As a result of your knowledge of local crime and in liaison with the police, you have issued advice about the use of mobile phones near to the school. You have adapted your approach to pupils using phones on the school site at the start and end of the school day in order to ensure pupils' safety. This is indicative of your willingness to listen to concerns, capitalise on information from external agencies, and adapt practice accordingly.

The presence of worry boxes provides a route through which pupils in key stage 2 are able to share their concerns. In key stage 1, teddy bears marked with the relevant pupil's name, when placed on teachers' desks prompt a discussion to alleviate any concerns the pupil may have. Teachers weave aspects of safeguarding into the curriculum. This provides pupils with relevant and tailored information to help keep them safe both in and beyond school.

Pre-appointment checks are carried out as required and recorded centrally. During the review, further guidance was sought from the local authority about the intention of particular column headings on the single central record (SCR) template. Staff who oversee the SCR now have greater clarity about how it meets the requirements set out in the DfE's statutory guidance, *Keeping Children Safe in Education (September 2016)*.

Review findings

- Given pupils' strong outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics, a line of enquiry during the review was to consider how well pupils achieve in other subjects. Pupils spoke to reviewers enthusiastically about their learning. It is clear that they enjoy coming to school and that they value learning. Pupils throughout the school collaborate highly effectively. It is common for pupils to evaluate each other's work. During our short visits to lessons we observed pupils referring to what they had learnt previously – skilfully and successfully challenging each other to improve their work. Pupils speak confidently about their learning in subjects across the curriculum. They recall memorable lessons and topics, for example, 'earth day' during which they learned about what happens to discarded plastic and the impact it has on the environment, and sea life in particular. Pupils were able to explain concepts in some depth, for example what led to Anglo Saxons leaving their homes and settling elsewhere.
- Linked to this, another line of enquiry was to consider the effectiveness of the design of the curriculum. Teachers plan interesting and worthwhile tasks to support pupils' learning across the curriculum. For example, on the day of the review, pupils in Year 1 took part in a themed day on the topic of 'the Victorians'. Pupils dressed in period clothing and undertook activities to develop their understanding of, and empathy with, children at the time. Review of pupils' books indicates that science is taught well with appropriate priority given to first hand experimentation.
- Middle and senior leaders understand the pressures on the school's timetable, particularly in the light of the requirement to include a significant proportion of religious education. This results in subjects other than English and mathematics being allocated less time. This increases the importance of the curriculum being efficiently and carefully designed to

provide the most effective framework to support pupils' progression in each subject. You intend to review the curriculum in order to address this imbalance and to make the most of links between subjects. Nonetheless, there are many strengths in the current rationale for curriculum design. These include the study of current affairs. This ensures that pupils are well informed and have the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of local, national and global issues. You and your team, rightly, at an age appropriate level, address more controversial topics including knife crime and the war in Syria. This results in pupils gaining balanced views of topics which prepares them very well for life in modern Britain.

Discussion with middle leaders confirms that there is not yet a sufficiently clear system to allow teachers to assess and track individual pupils' progress across the curriculum. This increases the likelihood of pupils repeating learning they have previously tackled, or in pupils not having a secure knowledge on which to base new learning.

- As the last Ofsted inspection was approximately 9 years ago, the review team was interested in exploring how effectively leaders have led, and continue to lead, improvement at the school. Discussions with you, other leaders, governors, teachers, pupils and parents highlight the enthusiasm and determination of leaders to sustain the outstanding nature of the school. Together with the head of school, you have established a motivated team of staff. The particularly high quality learning environment makes a strong contribution to pupils' successful learning. The school building is exceptionally well cared for. It is maintained well by site staff and respected by pupils throughout the school. You have made the most of the spaces available around the building to promote learning. Numerous external areas on-site have been developed with particular foci in mind. This includes enclosures for chickens and rabbits.
- You and your team take a detailed approach to your work. You are not afraid to be innovative and to make decisions with pupils' interest to the fore. For example, the 'brain boxes' initially installed to support disadvantaged pupils, are used to reduce pupils' reluctance to talk about their learning. You have, rightly, prioritised the broadening of pupils' vocabulary. Words of the day and week introduce new words to pupils which allow them to access learning across the curriculum. Pupils are increasingly familiar with the concept of learning and can articulate the benefits of the 'learning powers' promoted in school.
- In the most recently published data, five pupils did not reach the expected standard in phonics proficiency by the end of Year 2. The vast majority of these pupils have now reached the expected standard. High quality phonics teaching was observed during visits to lessons. Sounds are modelled correctly by adults and applied effectively by children when tackling new words. Effective training enables teaching to be consistent throughout the early years provision. The benefits of this highly effective training extend to the consistent teaching of a good pencil grip and to the insistence that letters are formed correctly.
- The final line of enquiry related to the teaching of writing. This was because progress in this subject has not been as strong as that in mathematics or reading. Children have numerous and regular opportunities to write from the time they begin in the early years. Focused teaching supports mark making from an early stage. One pupil in the Reception Year was proud to share his writing – 'I have made a pterodactyl'. Pupils respond positively to opportunities to write, for example by responding to the invitation to 'doodle your thoughts' on a large piece of sugar paper displayed in a corridor. Pupils in the Reception Year are challenged to improve their writing as part of your drive to increase the proportion of children who exceed the writing early learning goal. During a visit to a Year 6 lesson we observed pupils evaluating each other's writing very effectively. For example, one pupil advised their friend to replace 'don't' with 'do not' due to the gravity of the subject matter. In the majority of cases, teachers make good judgements about the extent of their

recommendations for improvements. However, in some cases, teaching is not sufficiently insistent that pupils apply what has previously been learnt, both accurately and consistently.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is a robust and systematic approach to managing assessment in subjects throughout the curriculum
- skills of middle leaders are developed in order to promote development of teaching and learning across the curriculum
- links between subjects are clearly defined so that teaching makes the most of pupils' prior learning, and that skills learnt in one subject benefit pupils' learning in other areas
- teaching consistently expects pupils to routinely apply what has been learned previously, both accurately and consistently.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Loukes

Deputy Team Leader, Primary Achievement, Herts for Learning

Information about the review

- During the review, meetings were held with you, the head of school and groups of middle leaders. I also met with nine governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- You, the head of school and the special needs coordinator accompanied the reviewers on short visits to each classroom to observe teaching and learning.
- The reviewers spoke with pupils during visits to classes, and held meetings with two groups of pupils in order to discuss their experience of school.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised including improvement plans, leaders' records of monitoring and documents about your evaluation of the school's effectiveness. Documentation relating to safeguarding, including the records of staff recruitment checks, staff training, referrals to other agencies and staff records of concern were reviewed.
- The reviewers considered the responses to recent staff and parent questionnaires.