

# Saint Bernadette Catholic Primary School

Walsingham Way, London Colney, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL2 1NL

## Inspection dates

9–10 October 2018

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- This school has improved significantly under its new senior leadership. The drive and enthusiasm of the team inspires teachers and pupils to be the best that they can be.
- A focus on the well-being of staff and the promotion of sharing best practice means that staff enjoy teaching at the school. Their consistent delivery in the teaching of mathematics, reading and writing skills is driving standards higher.
- Strong teaching in key stage 1 promotes mathematics, reading and writing skills well. Younger pupils have a love of reading and problem-solving.
- Most key stage 2 pupils are making much better progress than previously. Teachers make lessons interesting and ensure that their pupils are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need for the next steps of their education.
- Provision to support pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is effective. These pupils make good progress and are fully included within the school.
- The pupil premium funding is used effectively to support disadvantaged pupils. They make good progress. However, like their most-able peers, most-able disadvantaged pupils are not achieving as well as they should. This is particularly the case in writing.
- The development of pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural understanding is strong. Pupils are polite and thoughtful. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good.
- Pupils' capacity to discover and learn independently is in the early stages of development.
- Parents hold the school in high regard. They are appreciative of the good relationships members of staff foster and the close attention to pupils' well-being.
- Children get off to a very good start in the early years. High-quality teaching ensures that children make good progress so they are prepared for Year 1. However, the outdoor area does not challenge the most able children in their early reading, writing and mathematics.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, and complemented by trips and visiting speakers or workshops. Pupils develop secure knowledge, skills and understanding across subjects. Most-able pupils are not regularly producing high-quality work in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Leadership is much improved across the school. However, new leaders to post have not yet fully grown into their roles.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the teaching of most-able pupils, including those who are also disadvantaged, so that they achieve higher standards across all subjects, by:
  - ensuring that writing is confident, of high quality and accurate
  - developing pupils' capacity to discover and learn independently
  - helping pupils develop high-quality work in subjects other than English and mathematics
  - improving provision in the outdoor area in early years to promote most-able children's development in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Further develop the role of new leaders to maximise their influence and impact on improving outcomes for pupils.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Since her appointment, the headteacher has demonstrated an unswerving determination to provide the best possible education for all pupils. In spite of the many challenges associated with staff turbulence in recent years, leaders are determined to continue with recent improvements. Staffing is now more stable, so the new leadership team's work to improve teaching is increasingly effective.
- The headteacher and senior leaders are developing and ensuring an open, collaborative and reflective culture for continuous improvement across the school. Morale is high and relationships are strong. One new member of staff said that the school was like a 'family'. This is evident in the way that all staff work as a team and do their best to support all pupils.
- Staff are highly appreciative of the work undertaken to reduce their workload. The focus is upon ensuring maximum pupil and teacher contact time and this is improving outcomes. For example, disadvantaged pupils benefit substantially from regular talks with their teachers regarding gaps in their learning. This informs small-group tuition with specialist teachers so that most disadvantaged pupils catch up quickly.
- The funding for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is also spent well. Pupils' specific academic and personal needs are met and they make good progress. For example, leaders work closely with other professionals, such as speech and language therapists, to support these pupils.
- The school provides pupils with a suitably broad and balanced curriculum. The new leadership team has focused successfully on improving provision in mathematics and English. The introduction of a curriculum that develops depth of understanding is ensuring that pupils are taught to master skills over time. Pupils study a wide range of topics in the other subjects and this is complemented by external visits and visiting specialists. For example, pupils benefit from music and French tuition. However, leaders recognise that there are not enough opportunities for most-able pupils to produce high-quality work in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- The primary school physical education (PE) and sports funding is used effectively to ensure that pupils have access to a wide range of sports and competitions. Valuable liaison with the sports games organiser for St Albans means that pupils participate in many local sporting events and competitions. The pupils thoroughly enjoy PE week, where they get to try sports they may not ordinarily come across, such as climbing, archery and golf.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school and prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. For example, the voting of councillors for school council follows Britain's democratic processes. Pupils undertake numerous philanthropic activities, such as visiting Willow Court, the local nursing home, to chat with its residents. Pupils also complete activities with the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development to develop their understanding of the plight of refugees.
- Leaders and governors have received strong support and rigorous challenge from their local authority school improvement partner. Visit notes over the past year demonstrate

insightful evaluations of the progress that the school has been making and identify clear steps needed to take for further improvement. This, in addition to partnership working with other schools, has helped to improve the quality of leadership, teaching, learning, assessment and the curriculum.

- Leaders frequently observe lessons and look at pupils' books. Following their scrutiny of performance information, they discuss with teachers each pupil and their needs to help them to progress further. Leaders' self-evaluation is accurate and this informs the school development plan. Objectives and outcomes are specific and are measured by timely milestones. This helps leaders and governors to check on progress towards achieving the goals.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the work of the school and their children's progress. The views of many parents can be summed up by one who said, 'My children thrive at this school due to the dedication, care and commitment towards each and every child.' Many are appreciative of the use of the new online app to celebrate their children's success.

### **Governance of the school**

- Governors have a strong commitment to the school and a clear determination to ensure that it continues to improve. They challenge the headteacher and hold senior leaders to account, expecting a secure evidence base to support assertions about how well the school is doing.
- Governors have supported school leaders in developing and refining the curriculum as well as in establishing greater consistency in the quality of teaching. For example, they brokered external support.
- Governors pay frequent visits to the school and, consequently, know the school very well. They also have strong links with parents and help the school to maintain very positive relationships through regularly gathering parental opinion.
- Governors oversee the finances of the school diligently. The pupil premium grant is spent wisely. Governors read educational research to ascertain the best way to spend money to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. With their informed knowledge, they challenge senior leaders well.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has created a safe culture to take care of its pupils. All staff understand their obligations for safeguarding and this is emphasised throughout the school's work as well as in lessons.
- Leaders and staff take appropriate action to identify pupils who may be vulnerable or at risk of neglect or abuse. Any concerns are dealt with in a timely manner and the school works well with external agencies, when necessary, to ensure that pupils are protected. Governors keep an appropriate overview of the school's safeguarding arrangements by making regular checks on the school's policies and procedures.
- The highly effective personal development programme helps pupils to understand risks, how to form healthy relationships and how to keep safe, including safe use of the internet.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since senior leaders introduced a new curriculum where the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics skills is consistent. This is reflected in standards which have risen at the end of key stage 2.
- The teaching of mathematics has improved as pupils are asked to reason and justify their use of method. Often, pupils calculate the same sums using a variety of methods to ascertain which is the most effective. Pupils are well-versed in the use of methodology. Pupils tend to also talk through problems with a partner first and this helps pupils consolidate knowledge and fully understand the concepts they are learning.
- When pupils finish their work they are encouraged to take a green card which contains a further challenge. Sometimes, these are too easy for the most able pupils.
- The focus on 'draft, edit and refine' has improved the standards of extended pieces of writing. Pupils are happy to rework material to make it better. However, pupils, including most-able pupils, experience less success when they are asked to write instantaneously. This is when more errors occur and pupils use more basic vocabulary.
- The teaching of reading, including phonics, is effective. Younger pupils are able to confidently work out unfamiliar words. They talk enthusiastically about their reading and several in Year 2 are 'free readers', being able to choose what they wish to read without the support of a reading scheme. Teachers do not shy away from giving pupils lengthy difficult texts to read. For example, Year 2 pupils read a lengthy article on Florence Nightingale and spoke convincingly about the salient points. The same text was given to pupils who speak English as an additional language. They were supported well to access the challenging text.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities learn well and show positive attitudes in lessons. Teachers plan activities that support their learning, for example including resources and prompts. Particularly striking is how well other pupils include pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities when they are taking part in group activities. For example, encouraging them to take the lead in group presentations and ensuring all have a role to play.
- Teaching assistants are highly skilled and make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning as part of the teaching team. They provide good support, whether working with individuals or groups of pupils. Their work with pupils who start school speaking little or no English is particularly effective.
- Teachers have increasingly high expectations of their pupils. However, not all teachers give enough attention to the development of the greater depth skills in writing, such as writing assuredly, fluently and using the full range of punctuation for effect. Teachers also lack confidence when assessing higher-quality work.

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Staff promote well the school's strong spiritual ethos and its sense of community, where pupils value their education and school.
- Parents agree that the teachers and pupils show warmth and kindness. Many parents commented via the Ofsted survey, Parent View, on the strong values that pupils develop. For example, several parents were effusive about the buddy system, where Year 6 pupils look after the children in Nursery and Reception.
- Staff and pupils also commented on how well they look after one another. When asked whether there was any bullying, one boy replied 'definitely not' and that, being at Saint Bernadette, all pupils were expected to be kind to one another. The school's records show that bullying is rare. When it does occur, it is dealt with effectively.
- Vulnerable pupils are looked after well. Staff utilise a range of support services, such as trauma counselling, to ensure that pupils have the support they need to help them deal with the issues they are facing.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe, including when studying or playing games online. Pupils are very clear that they must never give out any personal details. They also know not to engage in online chat with anybody.
- Pupils' independent learning skills are developing, as is their resilience to failure. More often than not, key stage 2 pupils will only read from the school's reading scheme rather than choosing to read more widely for their own interests.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils listen carefully to their teachers and are quick to lend a hand. Pupils work and play together well. They have lots of fun interacting with their friends and enjoy using the playground gym and climbing equipment. They wait patiently for their turn.
- The school is calm and orderly during lessons and at break and lunchtimes. Most pupils' attitudes to their learning are positive. This contributes to a purposeful learning environment in lessons. Incidents of conflict are rare because of teaching staff's high expectations of behaviour.
- Pupils are proud of their school and are eager to show the work they have produced. They explain enthusiastically their projects and their learning. They are welcoming to visitors, courteous and well-mannered, and confident to engage in conversation.
- The effective strategies introduced by leaders to support individual pupils identified as having poor attendance have had a positive impact on reducing absenteeism. Current attendance is above the national average.

## Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Leaders have successfully addressed previous underachievement and have ensured that the large majority of pupils make good progress during their time at school.
- In 2018, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was above the national average in both key stages 1 and 2. This was also the case for the higher standard in reading and mathematics, and greater depth for writing. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Improvements have been made to the teaching of mathematics. There has been a whole-school focus on developing pupils' reasoning skills. There are signs in pupils' books that teachers are providing more opportunities for pupils to use and apply their mathematical knowledge to solve problems, and this is helping to raise standards in many classes.
- Pupils of all ages and abilities read effectively. When they come across unfamiliar words, younger pupils use their secure knowledge of letter sounds to help them. They persevere when the text is challenging. Pupils read regularly both at home and in school. Older, most-able pupils tend to choose to read books that entertain them rather than being 'challenging reads'. They also choose to read mainly fiction rather than independently reading to further their learning because a topic interests them.
- Pupils are taught the skills to write creatively and expressively. For example, one Year 6 pupil wrote, 'Birds soared across the jet black sky making a whoosh, as if they were thieves of the night.' However, most-able pupils are less adept at such writing without the drafting process to support them.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are supported well and make good progress from their starting points. Skilled teaching assistants promote their independence by not giving more help than they need.
- The school's detailed assessment system shows that a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils also have additional potential barriers to learning, including having SEN and/or disabilities. Disadvantaged pupils who also have SEN and/or disabilities make strong progress because provision for SEN across the school is good. However, the most able disadvantaged pupils do not make the same strong progress because the provision is insufficiently challenging.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make good gains in the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics. They are supported well when tackling difficult vocabulary.

## Early years provision

Good

- Provision for children in early years is effective. Most children join Nursery with skills that are typical for their age. As they progress through early years, they make good progress. This includes children who are disadvantaged as well as those who have SEN and/or disabilities. By the time they leave Reception, many children achieve a good level of development, with some exceeding this measure. Therefore, children are well

prepared for their learning in Year 1.

- The staff in early years are new to the school. They have settled in well as they visited the school several times in the summer term. They know procedures and have high expectations.
- Teachers assess how well children are developing astutely and skilfully identify new learning experiences for them, so that they progress further in their learning. For example, they encourage children to use different utensils to paint with, which helps develop muscle control and grip. Children are given individual tasks which help to reinforce learning or to challenge further. For example, a young girl was given a further task to make the 's' sound as she copied the letter in glitter.
- Pupils enjoy experimenting with musical instruments. In Nursery, children were encouraged to name and play a variety of instruments. Reception children enjoyed a highly effective music lesson where they played the claves in time and with gusto. They emulated the sound of the thunder and the sound of the rain. They also learned a new song well that they all sang loudly and in time.
- The Nursery and Reception classes provide a safe and secure environment for learning. Children get on well with each other and respond positively to adults. Even at this early stage in the term, Nursery children line up, say thank you to their teachers for their lessons and hold the door open for one another. Teachers develop good social skills through encouraging activities such as role-play and singing instructions so that even tidying up is fun to do. Children learn to cooperate, take turns, share resources and behave well.
- While the indoor learning environment is bright, stimulating and provides activities that capture children's interests and moves their learning forward, the outdoor provision is less well-equipped. In particular, it does not challenge most-able children enough in developing their early reading, writing and mathematics.
- Parents are encouraged to contribute information about children's learning via an online platform. They speak positively about this and say the information they receive about their children's progress is helpful.
- Staff keep children safe and care for them well in the early years. All of the statutory welfare requirements are met and the school's safeguarding practices and procedures are strictly followed.



## School details

Unique reference number	117489
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10041798

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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	225
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Catherine Turton-Ryz
Headteacher	Sandra Lavelle-Murphy
Telephone number	01727 822489
Website	<a href="http://www.stbernadette.herts.sch.uk">www.stbernadette.herts.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:head@stbernadette.herts.sch.uk">head@stbernadette.herts.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	22–23 October 2013

## Information about this school

- Saint Bernadette Catholic Primary School is smaller than the average primary school. It has a Nursery for three-year-olds which runs a session in the morning. Almost all of the children enter the school when they get to Reception age.
- An inspection of the religious education (section 48) at the school took place on 22 February 2017.
- There has been a high staff turnover. Over half of the teaching staff have worked at the school for less than a year. The new headteacher was appointed in May 2017. The new senior leadership team has been in place for less than a year.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is lower than the national average. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and in receipt of pupil premium funding is below the national average.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons across a range of subjects in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2. Some observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- During visits to lessons, inspectors spoke with pupils and looked at their work to find out more about how well they are learning.
- The lead inspector met with governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- The lead inspector discussed the school's effectiveness with a representative from the local authority.
- Discussions were also held with the headteacher, senior leaders, the business manager, subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, staff with responsibility for the early years, staff with responsibility for safeguarding and new members of staff.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. Inspectors met formally with two groups of pupils and spoke informally to pupils in the playground.
- Inspectors read with nine pupils from a range of year groups in Year 2 through to Year 6.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation. This included policies, leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness, the school's improvement plans, safeguarding records and information about pupils' attendance, attainment and progress.
- Inspectors considered 94 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. Inspectors also spoke to parents when they dropped their children off at school at the start of the day.

## Inspection team

Liz Smith, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

David Piercy

Ofsted Inspector

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