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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Clare Bennett
Headteacher
St Maxentius CofE Primary School
New Heys Way
Bradshaw
Bolton
Lancashire
BL2 4AE

Dear Mrs Bennett

Short inspection of St Maxentius CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 2017, 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have a detailed understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses because of your thorough monitoring and self-evaluation.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. Those who spoke with me say that they feel safe and that teachers are helpful. Older pupils told me that the level of challenge in their work and the quality of guidance has increased, particularly in reading and mathematics. They say that your recently introduced daily carousel of reading activities really helps them to improve their vocabulary.

Most parents support the school and recognise the positive impact that teachers have on their children's achievement and welfare. A small number of parents, however, are unhappy about the turnover of staff in recent years. Much of this turnover has been beyond your control. Staff have left for good reasons. You and your governors have not shied away from sometimes difficult decisions that have ensured that staffing is now stable and that pupils receive good-quality teaching.

Leaders demonstrate a good capacity to continue to improve and have taken appropriate actions to address the areas for development identified at the last inspection. These areas for development included enhancing the quality of teaching and the quality of feedback and guidance received by pupils.

Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching has improved. The well-considered and appropriate amendments to policies and procedures that you have made ensure that pupils now receive consistent high-quality guidance about how they can improve their work. Teachers and teaching assistants are better trained and, as a result, more knowledgeable about the strategies that they can use to ensure that pupils master their subjects. Teachers regularly share good practice with each other. They habitually scrutinise the work in pupils' books and together identify what is working well and how they could further improve their practice. You frequently check the impact of your actions on pupils' learning, and closely monitor the impact of your sharply targeted deployment of teaching assistants. As a result, pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are making better progress than in 2016.

The progress that pupils made in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2016 was disappointing. The work now seen in pupils' books and your detailed tracking of school-based assessments show that your actions have successfully brought about significant improvement in mathematics in all year groups. This improvement was recently confirmed in the outcomes of the 2017 end of key stage 2 assessments. However, you are not complacent and you aspire to improve further the key stage 2 outcomes of pupils who attained the expected standards at the end of key stage 1. This is particularly the case in mathematics and reading, where few pupils who attained the expected standard at the end of key stage 1 later gained greater depth in the key stage 2 statutory assessments.

Safeguarding is effective.

- Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and are followed meticulously. Statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with children. Leaders have taken appropriate actions to ensure that the school is a safe and secure place in which children can learn, including appropriate actions to manage access to the school during the running of after-school clubs.
- Appropriate and frequent training ensures that staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding, including that relating to online safety. Staff are vigilant about the potential risks that pupils may face. Records are fit for purpose and meticulously kept. Leaders share information with parents and appropriate authorities effectively to ensure pupils' safety.
- Governors have ensured that appropriate monitoring and filtering arrangements are in place for the school's internet connection.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school because of their frequent and detailed monitoring and self-evaluation. Sharply focused evaluation of half-termly assessments ensures that you have a detailed understanding of pupils' attainment and progress from their starting points. You visit classrooms regularly to evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and give accurate feedback on your findings to help staff improve their practice. You make good use of

your evaluations to hold teachers closely to account for the impact of their actions.

- **Governors share your high expectations and ambitions.** They have the relevant professional skills and insight that they use effectively to monitor closely the work of the school. Governors know their school well because of the quality of information that they receive from you and other subject leaders. They visit the school frequently to check the accuracy of the information they receive. New governors feel well supported because of high-quality training and induction procedures. However, governors have not ensured that the school's website meets requirements relating to information about the school's curriculum. Governors and leaders recognise that further work is needed to enhance communications to allay the fears of a very small minority of parents regarding the impact of recent changes in staffing.
- **Published attendance data shows that overall pupils' attendance is consistently above the national average.** However, close examination of the information highlights that in 2016 disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities attended much less frequently than others. These groups with the lowest attendance rates also have the highest rates of persistent absence. Your detailed analysis shows that very few pupils are absent without good reason, often linked to medical needs, illness or due to the impact of their experiences of traumatic events. Your monitoring also highlights that a small minority of pupils have more limited access to education because their parents choose to take them on term-time holidays. You follow up all absences immediately and, where necessary, make good use of the school's social worker to support families and promote attendance. You inform appropriate authorities quickly where you have concerns. You celebrate class attendance rates weekly and ensure that parents are well informed by publishing them on the school's social media page.
- **Teachers have secure subject knowledge and high expectations of pupils.** They plan appropriate learning activities and closely match the levels of challenge to pupils' abilities. Teachers use questioning effectively to probe pupils' understanding and develop their confidence to explain the reasons behind their answers. It is common in this school for teachers to help deepen pupils' understanding by asking them to explain how they have arrived at an answer verbally or in writing. Teachers choose activities carefully to make learning fun and make effective use of real-life experiences to give pupils opportunities to apply their skills. For example, in a recent 'creative maths week', key stage 2 pupils explored number patterns through investigations of the Fibonacci sequence in pine cones and ferns. Teachers consistently follow the school's feedback and guidance policy. This ensures that pupils are given clear advice on how to improve their work and provided with frequent and appropriate opportunities to act upon it.
- **Leaders are aware that some pupils have limited vocabulary and that this has a negative impact on their reading and writing skills.** As a result, leaders have implemented actions to promote pupils' development of a richer vocabulary and hone pupils' reading skills. These include a daily carousel of activities that focus on comprehension and vocabulary; the development of personal and class glossaries that identify and define interesting and unfamiliar words; more-frequent and sharply focused reading sessions with trained adults; and the study of class novels to promote a love of reading. Work in pupils' books shows the consistent implementation of these

new strategies. However, it is too soon yet to evaluate their full impact.

- The outcomes of 2017 statutory assessments show considerable improvement in key stage 2 mathematics from that seen in 2016. In 2016, pupils made progress well below the national average and the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard was below the national average. In the more recent data, the progress made by pupils in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was in line with the national average and as a result, an above-average proportion of pupils attained the expected standard. The more recent published data for national assessments in 2017 shows that the progress made in key stage 2 in reading fell slightly below the national average. However, careful analysis of the information identifies that the outcomes of a very small minority of pupils with specific needs had a significant impact on overall figures. Pupils in 2017 typically made progress that was in line with national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the proportion of pupils who attained expected standards in key stage 1 and, when older, gained the highest standards in reading and mathematics was more limited. Work in pupils' books and school-based tracking data shows that the improvements in pupils' outcomes in reading and mathematics are being sustained in other year groups.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they consider how they can refine their communication strategies to improve relationships with some parents and ensure that the school's website is kept up to date with the required information
- leaders and teachers build upon the effective strategies used in mathematics and reading to ensure that greater proportions of pupils who attained expected standards at the end of key stage 1 make the progress required to attain at greater depth.

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

Yours sincerely

John Nixon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your assistant headteacher, your office administrator and subject leaders in the school. I held a meeting with governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, and had a telephone conversation with the local authority adviser who works with your school. I spoke with pupils during lessons and around the school, and listened to pupils read. I took account of the information contained within the responses to the online questionnaires for parents, Parent View, and those for staff and pupils. I took account of a number of written communications from parents.

I visited classrooms with you to observe pupils' learning, looked at their work in books and their records of achievement. I reviewed information about pupils' progress, attainment and attendance. I scrutinised the school's self-evaluation documentation, action plans and other policies. I looked at safeguarding, including evaluating the impact of the school's procedures and policies to keep children safe, including while they are online. I also scrutinised your recruitment checks and record-keeping.