

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Alexandra Devany
Headteacher
Mount St Joseph
Greenland Road
Farnworth
Bolton
Lancashire
BL4 0HU

Dear Mrs Devany

Short inspection of Mount St Joseph

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 2018 with Deborah Bailey, Ofsted Inspector, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, senior leaders, governors, staff and pupils have worked together to achieve 'a community of learners, believers and friends'. During the inspection, pupils were excellent ambassadors for the school. Many of them took every opportunity to convey to me and my inspector colleague a high degree of loyalty to their school. They spoke enthusiastically of their pride in belonging to a multi-cultural and diverse community. Leaders, including governors, have ensured that the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils permeates all aspects of school life. This includes opportunities and encouragement to take on responsibility and to help others. Year 7 pupils who need to catch up in reading identified help from mentors from Year 10 as the most important factor in their improvement. One comment typified pupils' insightful and positive attitudes to taking on responsibility, 'Being a prefect gives another dimension to our education.'

You have maintained a high level of pastoral care. Staff know pupils and their families very well and provide a nurturing environment for those who are vulnerable. Your school has a calm yet purposeful atmosphere. Mutual respect between staff and pupils is very evident in classrooms and at social times. Pupils told inspectors that 'behaviour is good' and said, 'The best thing about this school is the teachers.'

You encourage all staff to learn from colleagues in your school and other local schools. Participating in subject networks that the local authority facilitates has

enabled teachers and subject leaders to bring back new ideas and disseminate best practice. These networks have been particularly effective in developing schemes of work and systems for assessing pupils and tracking their progress. Subject leaders are confident that assessments are accurate because they take part in moderation activities with other Bolton schools. You benefit from having six specialist leaders in education on your staff. This enhances your school's outward-looking and reflective ethos and contributes significantly to the continuing good quality of teaching.

At the time of the last inspection, you were asked to increase the achievement of the most able pupils, diminish the differences in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and others, and improve teaching so that it is at least consistently good. You have addressed these areas with some success. However, you acknowledge that the progress of disadvantaged pupils remains a priority for improvement.

You created a lead-teacher role to coordinate the Inspiring Futures programme for the most able pupils. Staff now begin this work in your feeder primary schools and there are master classes in Year 5. Every week, the lead teacher provides staff with teaching ideas designed to support higher-ability pupils across all subjects and year groups. These and other strategies have resulted in considerable improvement in the achievement of most-able pupils. In 2017, for these pupils the overall rate of progress across eight subjects was broadly the same as that made by pupils across the country who achieved similar results at the end of Year 6. In subjects other than mathematics and English, these pupils made more progress than their peers nationally. Our visits to classrooms, scrutiny of pupils' work and information from teachers' assessments showed clearly that this year most-able pupils are progressing even more rapidly.

In 2017, in English and mathematics, disadvantaged pupils made more progress than in previous years. However, despite a range of initiatives, disadvantaged pupils still underperform in relation to their peers nationally. This is largely because they do not attend school as regularly as their non-disadvantaged classmates.

You have been successful in maintaining and improving the school's good quality of teaching. During the inspection, teachers and teaching assistants spoke highly of the positive impact of continuing professional development on their classroom practice. Teachers new to the school have very positive role models to emulate, and senior and middle leaders support them well in meeting the school's expectations of teaching.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff understand that safeguarding pupils is the responsibility of the school community as a whole. Consequently, everyone is vigilant. All staff have undertaken regular training and know how to recognise the signs of neglect, abuse, extremism and exploitation. Discussions with pupils and staff, as well as scrutiny of school records, showed that staff act quickly when adults or pupils inform them of concerns. The school does not hesitate to use external expertise if staff need it.

Leaders keep well-organised records and are quick to follow up the actions of school and external staff.

All required policies and procedures are up to date so that pupils remain safe and feel safe. The checks that schools must make on the suitability of staff to work with children are all in place.

Inspection findings

- I was interested to know why, in mathematics, for the last two years, pupils have not achieved the GCSE results of which they were capable. Instability in the staffing and leadership of mathematics contributed significantly to the slow pace of progress for a large number of pupils. The department is now settled. You have recruited a new subject leader who has worked well with the two newly appointed lead teachers to increase expectations of what pupils can and should achieve. As in English, in mathematics you have increased staffing to create smaller teaching groups. I observed teachers making the most of these smaller groups by giving individual pupils targeted support to enhance their understanding, particularly in relation to problem solving and reasoning. In key stage 4, the impact of changes is clearly evident. Pupils are already achieving more than their peers were this time last year. The changes are even more obvious in key stage 3 where teachers now build very effectively on the higher expectations of mathematics in primary schools.
- I wanted to know why pupils do so well in humanities and the reasons behind the improvement in English achievement in 2017. Within these and other departments, there are many long-standing members of staff who now have progressed to leadership and still model effective subject teaching. Teachers in these and other subjects, now including mathematics, ensure that pupils become very familiar with the language of examination questions. In the past, this has been a significant barrier for some pupils. The most successful subject departments in the school, including English and humanities, use assessment information carefully to make sure that the work that teachers set does not repeat what pupils already know and understand well. The electronic planning system allows teachers to share the best practice in planning for pupils' learning. While pupils' progress overall is good in some subjects, considering their starting points, least-able pupils do not make as much progress as their classmates.
- I also wanted to know whether there has been any improvement in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils in relation to that of their peers. In 2017, this group made a little more progress in most subjects, including English and mathematics, than in previous years. Your staff designed the ASPIRE programme to support disadvantaged pupils both academically and pastorally. You have allocated considerable funding to increasing the staffing and leadership of strategies to help disadvantaged pupils to overcome their difficulties. Despite these efforts, disadvantaged pupils currently in the school do not reach their full potential academically. Your pupil premium plans lack precision in identifying barriers to learning and precise criteria by which the success of actions can be measured. As a result, leaders have repeated some unsuccessful strategies from

year to year, particularly in relation to the attendance of this group.

- Another of my lines of enquiry was the decline in attendance. I wanted to know whether leaders have reversed this. You and your school's governors responded swiftly to the deterioration in attendance. You have allocated more administrative and mentoring staff to contacting and working with pupils and families. You have not shied away from using warning letters and penalty notices, particularly for unauthorised and much-extended holidays. Your own attendance information shows that individual mentoring has had a positive impact on specific pupils that staff have targeted. You are now planning to use this tried-and-tested strategy more widely. This year, there has been a small improvement in the attendance of most groups, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. You understand, however, that improving attendance is a key priority for the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress of disadvantaged pupils improves to at least match that of their peers
- teachers support the least able pupils in making at least good progress
- attendance improves and persistent absence decreases, especially for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Liz Kelly
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held a meeting with you and your senior management team. I had a discussion with the vice-chair of the governing body. With some of your senior leaders, my inspector colleague and I visited lessons to observe teaching and look at pupils' work. We discussed safeguarding, behaviour and attendance with you and senior leaders. We met two randomly selected groups of pupils. I took into account 18 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, 'Parent View', 38 responses to the staff survey and 50 responses to the questionnaire for pupils. I examined a range of documentation, including your self-evaluation and development plans.