Friday 1st April 2022

Dear all,

As you know, we were inspected by OFSTED in February. The report is now ready to share with you and is attached to this email.

We are thrilled that we are judged to be a 'good' school.

The inspector was very impressed by our lovely school and we are very proud of the children, staff and governors for their hard work and to the parents for their support and positive words.

You will see that we only have one area to work on and that is handwriting in Reception and KS1. As a result of the Pandemic, Reception and KS1 children need more input with letter formation and writing at length.  I am sure you will be as pleased as we are that the impact of COVID was limited to handwriting and that in all other areas we have successfully overcome the barriers.

In 2016 we were judged to be a 'good' school. In 2019, the OFSTED framework changed and the criteria for schools changed. The focus is now much more on the curriculum and the broad experiences of children. There were also changes to the way schools were graded. Under the new system, a school judged to be good at the last inspection, is inspected under a section 8 inspection.

There were 4 possible outcomes from this inspection. OFSTED could have:

1) identified serious and concerning issues and converted the inspection to a section 5 inspection and then to Special measures

2) stated that we were a good school but were declining and say they’d be back in 18 months to ensure we had improved

3) stated we were ‘good’ and improving and they would then have returned within 18 months to re-inspect.

4) continued to judge the school as ‘good’

We are thrilled that we remain a ‘good’ school. As you will see from the report, we were very close to being judged as ‘good and improving’ and the inspector said that we were only held back because presentation was not ‘exemplary’.

Since September 2019, our curriculum has been transformed. The children now access all the subjects and they are taught in a systematic way.

*‘Leaders have thought carefully about what they want pupils to learn. They have created an ambitious curriculum which starts in the early years. The curriculum is organised so that new learning builds on what pupils already know. Leaders link pupils’ learning to the local area as much as possible so that it is relevant and enjoyable.’*

It must be highlighted that Catherine McBride (Deputy) has taken a lead role in developing the curriculum and has ensured that it is ambitious and that the children will enjoy it. We thank her for the many hours she has poured into creating it –from scratch- and I am glad that her work, and that of all staff who have led their subject areas, has been acknowledged.

I am particularly pleased that Reading has been listed as a strength. It has improved dramatically since the SATS results of 2019 when the Y6 class were below the National Average. It was a focus for us as we started on our leadership journey, as you will have seen in the School Improvement Plan. We arranged training for all the staff, invited specialists in to give advice, brought in a new phonics scheme and spent thousands of pounds on new books. The improvement has been driven by all staff who have instilled a love of reading into the pupils and created interesting reading areas and Marie Grace who has led the introduction of a phonics scheme and Alex Bradley who has continued to ensure consistency at KS2. We must thank all staff for their focus on this area for improvement. It is clear from the moment you walk in the building that we are a reading school and this will continue to improve.

**So, what next?**

It is unusual to have only one area for improvement which shows how close we were to the ‘good and improving’ judgement:

*‘Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are some aspects of the early years curriculum that have not been covered in sufficient depth. As a result, some younger pupils in key stage 1 have not gained the key knowledge and skills that they need to flourish. Leaders should ensure that pupils have the opportunity to make up for the gaps in their development so that they can make the most of the key stage 1 curriculum.’*

As you will see from the body of the report, the only issue the inspector highlighted was that some children find handwriting tricky and this is holding them back from writing at length. We had already identified this area of development and knew that it was the hardest element for staff to impact when children were remote learning. We introduced a new handwriting scheme at the end of January, had a School Improvement Partner visit with a focus on writing and had some staff training on writing in February. We will continue to work on this so that, by the end of KS1, they are able to form letters correctly and therefore write more confidently.

I must also give thanks to Tamsin Vernon (assistant Head and SENDCo) for her dedication to ensuring that all pupils with special or additional needs are well supported and thriving. The inspector said that our SEND practice is ‘innovative’ and that is thanks to Tamsin’s vision. The report says:

‘*All pupils access the full and rich curriculum. The needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are accurately identified. Learning is successfully adapted for these pupils, including those with more complex needs.’*

The school would not be a good school if we did not have the dedication of our teachers, Teaching Assistants, Lunchtime Organisers, Catering staff, cleaners, site manager and office staff. We are so proud of each member of the team- they give over and above every single day and all the children in the school benefit from this dedication. We cannot thank them enough for all they do.

Behind the scenes the governors are working away and give of their time on a voluntary basis. They know the school well and do not hesitate to challenge and question to drive the school forward which was noted by the inspector ‘*Governors know the school very well. They offer effective challenge and support to school leaders.’*  A special mention must go to Lucy Maudsley, Chair of Governors, who has spent many hours of her time supporting the school and being a listening ear to me. We thank her for all that she has done to improve the school for all children.

I also must thank the parents who are so supportive of all we do. They trust that we have the best interests of their children at heart and work with us to support children with their homework and in teaching the morals which help to make St Benedict’s so special.

And of course, I must mention the children. They are a very special bunch. It is clear each day that we have kind, dedicated children who try hard. We are very pleased that the inspector noted this and that the golden rule shone through *‘Pupils treat one another with respect’*  and ‘*They are keen to live up to the high expectations that leaders have for their learning and behaviour. Pupils behave well and try their best in lessons’.*

I am so pleased that this report highlights many of the positives of our little school. We have time now to continue to grow and develop and we are full of confidence for the journey.

If you have any questions about this report, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind Regards  
  
Hannah McGuire  
Headteacher  
St Benedict's Catholic Primary School