

Headteacher Update

November 2022



St Joseph's....Change, Champions & Challenge

We are fast approaching the end of this term and it can be the busiest and hardest time of the year for many. In a moment of reflection I am very much aware of this in school and would like to share with you these reflections.

Change

We are now at the end of our first year as part of St Thomas Catholic Academies Trust and it has been a very busy term with lots of work going on behind the scenes to adopt the new processes of the Trust. It has kept all of the office staff and senior leaders incredibly busy.

The Trust is bringing new opportunities of sharing good practice and support for the school and this is very welcomed. The introduction of new systems for management and monitoring is challenging for both IT systems and staff. We have had to learn many new things in addition to managing the current systems.

Champions

The Trust carried out a review of the school recently – talking to children, observing lessons and talking to leaders. They were delighted with the visit to our school and I would like to share their findings with you.

A strong Catholic ethos is very evident in this beautiful school. The strong culture of welcome, physical environment and the quality of the relationships between children and staff, all bear witness to its identity and impact on the whole school community....

The Strengths of the School were highlighted:

Staff have good subject knowledge and questioning skills. They were observed expertly using their questioning techniques to draw out children's understanding and motivating them to engage in the child initiated activities that will take them to the next level of development. Questioning was also tailored to individual starting points so that all were supported to access the learning including children with SEND.

In Early Years, strong routines are already in place at this early stage in the school year establishing a good environment for learning. Children are happy, confident and resilient with an enthusiasm for learning. They know who to ask if they need help and showed a willingness to help their friends. Teachers plan effectively to ensure personal development skills are being well nurtured. Children are proud of what they can do and keen to share successes.

Children know they are loved and cared for and say, they feel safe at school. They know exactly how to get support and help if someone has been unkind and believe that all adults in school are happy to support them. They said that bullying was not a big issue for them and that if anyone was upsetting them it would not go unchecked.

All of the EYFS provision offers a good quality of education for children but the teaching and provision in pre-school is exceptional. Children here are making rapid progress because of a clear focus on the development of speaking and listening and extending the children's vocabulary.

High quality TA support was seen by all reviewers and is a real strength of the school. Children were helped to engage with the learning activities discreetly and effectively without creating dependency. TAs were well aware of the lesson planning so that teaching appears to be very much a collaboration.

The curriculum is broad and balanced giving children the opportunities to develop skills in all areas including Number and Number Patterns. It has clearly defined learning end goals, in addition to statutory requirements

The spiritual development of each child is clearly prioritised in every aspect of school life with a good range of opportunities to develop the whole person. The mission statement, "I am special in God's eyes", is a clear expression of the school's role in the mission of the church and one that is readily understood by children of this age range. It is prominently displayed around the school and enthusiastically supported by staff who are positive role models in the love and care they show for their children, especially the most vulnerable.

Areas of development

1. *Continue to introduce/ embed the new strategies planned in Maths and Phonics/ Reading lessons and ensure that the implementation in the classroom is supported by regular, good quality CPD and close monitoring*
2. *Revisit inset for the whole school to further embed:*
 - *effective approaches to behaviour management*
 - *teaching for Long Term Memory and*
 - *effective questioning strategies – avoiding 'hands up'*

The staff have already met to plan strategies for our areas of development and we have already implemented some of the recommendations.

Challenge

There are, and will be, challenging times ahead.

The world is struggling with wars, energy bills, hunger and industry unrest. COVID and the after effects of increased colds and viral infections are still very much in evidence amongst our local communities and effecting the health of the nation. You may have read in the media about potential strikes and you may have already been experiencing the effects of these with things such as train travel.

As much as we work very hard to protect our children from outside events, there will be things as a result that touch on their lives in some way or other.

We work very hard at school to ensure continuity of education and have many strategies for ensuring the best for children – whether this is in resources for them, staff to teach them and a warm, safe and welcoming building.

I am sure rising costs have not gone unnoticed and schools are not immune from this. This time last year our electricity bill was £400 and this year for the same period it is £1800. We have planned carefully for this and like many schools around the country are looking for creative ways to make the best use of our resources.

Illness rates across the school remain high with both staff and children's absence continuing to be a factor in our daily lives. Keeping classes open, ensuring staff are up to date with training, allowing leaders to fulfill their other roles and recruiting new staff to ensure succession planning are proving to be our biggest challenges. We are extremely fortunate to have additional staff who work regularly across the school who are able to help us with this challenge. This is a great strength in that it ensures continuity and familiarity for the children. Mrs Cordell, Mr Darvill and Mrs White as well as Miss Schneider are a few of the staff your child may meet or work with.

From time to time our highly skilled TA's who know the children and the learning very well will also support a class short term to ensure the needs of the children are met.

As seen from the Trust Review many of these challenges do not impact on the day to day lives and education of our children at school and this is thanks to the highly skilled and dedicated team staff at St Joseph's.

Together we will continue to strive for the best for our children whatever challenges there may be.

Mrs Taylor