



## **SECTION 48 INSPECTION REPORT**

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the  
Archbishop of Southwark and Inspection of  
Denominational Education under Section 48  
of the Education Act 2005

**URN 101455**

**St Stephen's Catholic Primary School  
Ruskin Avenue  
Welling, Kent  
DA16 3QG**

**Inspection date: 19<sup>th</sup> May 2016**

Chair of Governors: Mrs E Brett  
Headteacher: Mrs Mary Masterson  
Inspectors: Mrs Joan Lenahan  
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# **SECTION 48**

# Introduction

## Description of the school

St Stephen's Catholic Primary School is voluntary aided. It is situated in the Bexley Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is maintained by Bexley LA. The principal parish the school serves is St Stephen's, Welling. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is approximately 70%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in Key Stage 1, and 10% in Key Stage 2.

The school is larger than average and takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 421. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is below average. Around 12.6% of pupils receive extra support in class, which is just below the national average and 1.4% have statements of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils where English is an Additional Language is below average. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds with the next largest group being Black or British Black African. The proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium funding is low.

Date of previous inspection: 8<sup>th</sup> June 2011

Overall Grade: 2

### Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

St Stephen's is an outstanding school. The Catholic ethos and mission are explicit and lived out by pupils, parents, staff and governors. A culture of openness and trust prevails and forms the basis for the positive relationships that are evident throughout the school. The Parish Priest and Governors value and applaud the dedication of leaders and staff, many of whom also play an active role in the parish.

Pupils exude a joy of learning. Outcomes for pupils leaving the school are outstanding as pupil attainment on entry into the Foundation Stage is below average.

The spiritual and all round development of the pupils and the staff is given high priority.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. A parent wrote, "St Stephen's brings the Catholic faith to my child. The teaching staff should be praised for the enthusiasm and ability to help mould our children into responsible caring people." The school's provision for promoting Catholic education is exemplary. Procedures and policies are highly effective in promoting the development of the wholeness of its pupils spiritually, morally, socially, physically and culturally.

Pupils are proud of their school and take seriously their responsibilities as buddies, ambassadors, Apostles of Mercy and members of the School Council.

The Catholic character of St Stephen's is visible, tangible, welcoming and friendly. Displays are outstanding as they are interactive, cross-curricular and demonstrate the pupils' engagement with, and understanding of, the topics studied. Examples being: 'The Whole World in our Hands,' 'The Holocaust Memorial,' the Year of Mercy 'Welcoming Door' and a display outlining the church's hierarchy.

## **What steps need to be taken to improve further?**

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Consider rewording the mission statement so that it is more child-friendly, particularly for the younger pupils
- Enhance prayer life provision by adopting a more structured approach to praying the Rosary
- Seek out ways to get a balance between theme based Masses and praying the Mass as a liturgical Eucharistic celebration

## **The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school**

St Stephen's is an outstanding Catholic school which exemplifies a thriving sense of community based on tradition, ethos and strong mission. As a result, pupils benefit from its rich cultural heritage. The strong links, which the school forges with the parish, give the pupils a full understanding of belonging to a living faith community.

Pupils fully embrace the school's mission. They exude an understanding of the Gospel values of love, understanding, respect and forgiveness.

The school provides a wide range of opportunities and experiences to promote the pupils' spiritual development, for example, a Year 3 Easter celebration, days of reflection and visits to St George's Cathedral as well as participating in musical and cultural events.

The parish priest, working closely with staff, provides very good support for the pupils' spiritual development through liturgical celebrations.

The school's partnership with the local Catholic secondary and primary schools is laudable as they liaise to share expertise, facilities, and also come together to pray, thereby giving the pupils a great sense of belonging to a wider community.

Through the School Council, Apostles of Mercy and buddy system, pupils are empowered to take on responsibilities and leadership. They are proud of their roles and appreciate that they have a voice when decisions are being formulated. Pupils interviewed remarked that "the school helps us to understand that we should never give up" and "teaches us that we need to show mercy to everyone."

## **How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education**

Pupils achieve exceptionally high standards in Religious Education. Progress is excellent in both key stages, as shown by the comprehensive assessment and tracking systems. These effectively inform teaching and learning, ensuring appropriate challenge.

In the lessons observed during the inspection, pupils rose to the challenges of making links with previous learning using appropriate religious vocabulary and were able to reflect on their own and others needs in light of Gospel teaching. Enthusiasm and interest for the subject was evident throughout. Examples seen included Year 6 pupils engaged in journalistic role-play and Bible research to explore how inspirational people, such as Mother Teresa and Pope Francis, use their talents for the benefit of humanity. Whilst in Year 2 a sense of awe, wonder and belief was seen where a dove shaped helium filled balloon was used effectively to teach the pupils about the 'Gifts of the Holy Spirit.'

Pupils with particular learning needs are well supported to enable them access to the curriculum and achieve their full potential.

Pupils reported that, “teachers make lessons fun” and that learning in Religious Education includes “lots of different activities, such as art, drama, role play and music,” which adds to the enjoyment.

### **How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship**

The whole school act of Collective Worship observed during the inspection reflected on the ‘Gift of Peace’ and was led by Year 3 pupils. Those participating captured the full attention of all in attendance. Pupils spoke confidently with conviction, used role-play to illustrate the consequences of conflict and linked their message to Gospel teaching. The use of imagery, hymn singing, piano music and time for reflection made the assembly a powerful prayer experience.

Acts of Collective Worship in classes are a regular feature. During a Year 4 morning assembly, pupils showed a sense of pride in preparing their ‘prayer altar’ and a willingness to express personal intercessions. They also responded well to thoughtful questions about how St. Stephen used his vocation to become an inspirational person.

Pupils appreciate that their parents are invited to attend their acts of Collective Worship.

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## **How well leaders, governors and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils**

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school in promoting its Catholic life is outstanding. There has been outstanding development in aspects of the school's Catholic life since the last inspection. The leadership is fully committed to the Church's mission in education. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and based on rigorous monitoring procedures at all levels, the outcomes of which form the basis for school improvement plans. All staff members have performance related targets linked to the school's Catholic life and Religious Education, which are reviewed annually.

Governors are well organised. They are regular visitors to the school, supporting events, liturgies and outings whilst also driving the school's commitment to the education of its pupils.

The spiritual development of staff and pupils has high priority. Leaders ascertained that teachers and teaching assistants would benefit from on-going training for their personal faith development. The parish priest supports and guides staff through the 'Evangelium' programme. This on-going support is empowering teachers to ask questions, and engage in personal learning, whilst also fostering a culture of openness. A further benefit from the adult learning programme is that teachers are more confident when delivering the Religious Education syllabus.

Leaders ensure that the pupils have a firm understanding of the school's mission statement. Every year pupils are given the opportunity to discuss the meaning of the statements in an age appropriate manner. As a consequence, pupils fully understand how each sentence of the mission relates to their lives both in and out of school. However, the way the statement is presented and displayed could be redesigned, as it is not accessible for the younger pupils in its current format.

The leadership of the Headteacher is inspirational. She is an excellent role model. The hallmark of her leadership style is that she empowers staff to develop to their full potential.

Leaders and managers value the support they receive from the parish priest, who is also vice-chair of the governing body. This partnership ensures that staff and pupils benefit on a spiritual level in school as well as having opportunities to be active participants in parish liturgies and celebrations.

Parents laud the commitment of leaders, managers and governors and appreciate the love, support and guidance their children receive. They cite that, "the head is personable and knows every child" and that "teachers are approachable and caring."

Community cohesion is outstanding. The commitment and contribution to the common good and service to others is embedded in the school's Catholic life in a child-centred manner. Pupils are involved in supporting a wide range of charities. One such venture involved the pupils growing vegetables and donating the products at harvest time to a local home for the elderly. The global dimension of community is also given credence through fundraising activities for a school in Kenya and raising the pupils' awareness of injustices in the wider world.

**How well leaders, governors and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education and plan and implement for improvement to outcomes for pupils**

The overall effectiveness of classroom Religious Education in developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of the faith is outstanding. Leaders, governors and managers ensure that the school's Catholic mission is at the heart of the curriculum.

Provision at every level is monitored and evaluated with rigour. Targets are planned for and implemented. An example being the manner in which the Sex and Relationships' policy and procedures were put in place and its impact monitored during this academic year.

The subject leader is given due status as a core curriculum leader. She is committed to her role, and very well supported by leaders, parish priest and governors. Training needs of staff are identified and suitably addressed. For example, leaders introduced a coaching system throughout the school whereby teachers learn from one another about best practice, with an emphasis on questioning skills. Leaders state that the impact of this focus has served to create a culture of openness with staff and to raise the quality of teaching to its current high level.

The school has engaged in internal and external moderation exercises to ensure that assessment judgements are accurate.

Partnership with parents is very good as they are fully informed about the content of the Religious Education syllabus and their children's progress.

**The quality of teaching and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education**

Pupils' progress and attainment in Religious Education is outstanding. Teaching is never less than good and often outstanding. Robust internal monitoring and evaluation of individual performance is used effectively to track individual progress and attainment in both key stages is as good as other core subjects.

Lesson plans, pupils' workbooks and their work on displays show a range of creative approaches to learning, including good use of ICT, art, music, role-play and literacy skills to engage pupils in their learning.

Teachers set high expectations in learning. Pupils' work is presented well, showing differentiation of tasks and indicate that pupils take pride in their work. Staff are well trained in ascertaining levels of attainment for Religious Education and their judgements are regularly monitored. Marking of pupils work is interactive, includes targets, self-assessment and peer-assessment is good, this is an improvement since the last inspection.

**The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum promotes pupils' learning**

The content of classroom Religious Education meets the requirements of the Bishop's Conference, with 10% of curriculum time assigned to the subject. The school provides its pupils with a rich, relevant and creative curriculum based on 'The Way, the Truth and the Life' programme, which engages pupils well and allows them to achieve very good progress in their Religious Education.

High quality resources, including ICT, are used effectively to support the schemes of work. Teachers make very good use of cross-curricular links, such as art, music, literacy, and ICT.

Seamless connections with the Catholic life of the school was very much in evidence in lessons as teachers encompassed the Pope's designated 'Year of Mercy' by linking teaching to the corporal and spiritual work of mercy.

Links with parish liturgies, attendance at Mass at regular intervals and on-going input from the parish priest serves to enrich curriculum provision in both key stages.

The curriculum is also enriched by the Year 3 Easter celebration and Easter Garden as, in the words of a parent "a wonderful exhibition showing the children's understanding of the Passion and Resurrection.

The focus on helping pupils to understand aspects of global issues such as justice and social harmony is very well incorporated into the curriculum, as seen in the pupils displays relating to the 'Holocaust' and 'Looking after God's Creation.'

The programme to teach pupils about the Other Faiths in line with diocesan guidelines. Pupils are afforded the opportunity to gain first-hand experience from practitioners of the faith being studied.

### **The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school**

St Stephen's is an outstanding prayerful community. Pupils respond exceptionally well to the many varied opportunities the school provides for Collective Worship. The pattern of the liturgical year is used very effectively to involve pupils in Advent and Easter, including such as services of Reconciliation and The Way of the Cross. Praying the Rosary and learning about the decades is taught in some classes. A whole school approach to devotion to Our Lady would further enhance Collective Worship provision.

Parents are invited into assemblies and empowered to play an active part in evaluating provision. Exemplary practice of parent involvement is the invitation to 'post comments in a specially designated record book' after class assemblies. Following the Year 3 assembly, which drew attention to the plight of refugee children parents wrote "the assembly opened the mind and challenged us to act with love as God wants us to" and "thank you for helping our children to grow morally."

Pupils have opportunities to engage in the celebration of the Mass at whole school and class level. They are proficient at composing bidding prayers and undertaking readings from scripture. Pupils choose 'themes' which are linked to their curriculum for their class Masses. Their knowledge of the different components of the Mass is not secure and this needs to be addressed so that their engagement with the celebration is further enhanced.

The quality of Collective Worship at St Stephen's is greatly enriched by the provision of music. The excellent music teacher brings a wealth of benefits to the pupils' experience of prayer with joyous hymn singing being an integral part of celebrations.