

St Mary Magdalen Catholic Junior School

Linacre Lane, Willesden, NW2 5BB



Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 14 June 2018

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is good

- The content of the curriculum meets the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory.
- The religious education leader ensures that all staff are empowered to effectively deliver the units of learning.
- Lessons are well planned and encourage creativity.
- Pupils are fully engaged and highly motivated, show exemplary behaviour and demonstrate highly positive attitudes to their learning.
- There are excellent resources, including Bibles for all pupils to access.
- Teachers ground their lessons in modern-day experiences and ensure most pupils are challenged and supported through their next steps in learning.
- Dedicated leadership from the headteacher and leader of religious education together with rigorous monitoring, ensures that self evaluation is accurate and informs future priorities.
- The link governor has a clear understanding and an up to date knowledge of how most pupils are being supported and challenged effectively

Classroom religious education is not yet outstanding because

- There are inconsistencies in the strategy for promoting independent learning.
- Marking and feedback is not always effective, in all classes.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities do not always have appropriately tailored tasks in religious education.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- The school fully meets the 10% requirement, as laid down by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.
- The leadership of the school has a clear and dynamic vision for the excellent provision across all aspects of the Catholic life of the school.
- The accurate and reflective self-evaluation owned and shared by all key leaders, demonstrating the rigour of their process, including its clearly informative impact statements.
- The sacramental and prayer life are at the heart of the school, including opportunities for pupils to actively plan and lead class acts of worship, which at times are most poignant.
- The personal and whole school prayer life of the school community is embedded, in particular seen in the ways in which the pupils are confident and mature in their reflections and links to everyday events.
- There is mature, active and generous response by the pupils to their call to social justice and human flourishing.
- The pro-active and committed governing body, who, in partnership with the parish and the parents, embody a truly triple partnership, developed and enhanced over many years.
- The governing body has a commitment to partnership with the Diocese of Westminster and its officers and advisors, including its commitment to its ecclesial mission in the Church.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

Assessment for learning in religious education (RE) has had a complete overhaul since the previous inspection. The strategies, systems and procedures for assessment now in place are comparable with the processes for English and maths. Moderation takes place between year groups, within the deanery and the diocesan networks. Year group leaders plan for learning and assessment opportunities, to measure progress in religious education over time. The regular input from both the parish priest and the seminarian, with additional planned professional development held recently for all, led by diocesan advisors, has supported the growing confidence and subject knowledge of the staff across the school. All of these actions taken over recent years have impacted successfully on the fruitful progress in knowledge and understanding of the pupils.

The content of classroom religious education is good

The school ensures it fully meets the requirement set down by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. This includes the content of religious education, meeting the expectations of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory, (RECD). All year groups are released to plan together, to develop more consistent approaches to the teaching of the planned areas of learning in religious education. The school welcomes the challenges related to the programme of learning it has developed, which is now embedded across the school. The profile for religious education has been raised to the point where staff now have increased confidence and are measuring progress over time. This is supported by analysis using the tracking system for religious education, as for other core subjects. The teaching of other faiths has been delivered through a combination of workshops for each class and visitors leading whole school assemblies, covering Judaism, Hinduism and Islam, over time. The planning and organisation of the religious education curriculum programme includes opportunities for staff to develop their skills, knowledge, understanding and confidence, supported by the parish priest and diocesan advisors. Teachers have become more aware of the Agreed Understandings, resulting in more accurate assessment, whilst challenging more able pupils, at age appropriate levels.

Pupil achievement in religious education is good

There is evidence that pupils make good progress overall in religious education. The higher status given to the teaching and learning in religious education, over recent times, has resulted in pupils achieving well, in some cases higher than for other core subjects. The effective use of technical theological vocabulary demonstrates the growing understanding of the pupils of the theology underpinning the concepts being explored. The Levels of Attainment in the Agreed Understandings are used effectively as a tool, to challenge and move pupils on in their learning, at their appropriate ability levels. The opportunity for pupils to choose which tasks to complete has provided ownership to their learning, although in some cases the choices are not always consistently applied, nor challenging enough for the more able. This also applies to pupils identified with specific educational needs and/or abilities, who would benefit from more tailored tasks which challenge them at their different ability levels. There is evidence that, in some year groups, where the teaching encourages deeper thinking and reasoning, pupils are more fully engaged in the exploring the questions being asked. This enables teachers to correct any misconceptions, thus providing more challenge in the learning. The school has recognised their next stage is to ensure this is consistently applied across all classes. The school's recent adoption of a new form of differentiation, 'the chillies method,' has been implemented across the year groups. However, there are some examples of where this practice is not yet fully embedded, nor consistently applied. The school recognises the need to refine this further, so that all students make outstanding progress.

The quality of teaching is good

The teaching of religious education is good overall. Pupils spoke positively about their learning in religious education lessons. This was supported by work analysis across all year groups that indicated great variety and creativity in planned tasks. It includes opportunities for extended writing, poetry, role play, use of a range of art media and prayer composition. A good example of this was in a Year 4 class, where close scriptural analysis of a gospel account allowed pupils to develop their religious literacy, including the theological links to their everyday lives. Pupils are fully engaged and show great respect with each other and for their teachers. Behaviour is exemplary, which indicates interest, focus and motivation for learning. Recent surveys of pupils' opinions include very positive views, such as, 'we put ourselves in the shoes of others, so we can learn about their lives..., we learn about a range of religions, so we get to understand about the community we live in ..., we are good at thinking about and recreating what life might have been like in Jesus' time, through role play and written work.' Effective questioning, in some books and lessons, through insightful discussions, encourages those pupils across all levels of ability to be challenged.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting religious education is good

The role of the leader for religious education has significantly increased through a range of diocesan training, guidance and support, resulting in the much higher status of religious education across the school. This has resulted in staff becoming more confident in their subject knowledge, thus empowering them to deliver lessons which deepen pupils' religious literacy. Her 'open door' policy empowers staff, particularly those new to teaching and to Catholic education, to seek guidance and support, as necessary. She leads by example and provides regular in-service, coaching and modelling of good practice across the phases. She is very highly valued by the parents and has brought a sense of consistency and security for the staff, including those new to Catholic education in their growing understanding of the theology underpinning the concepts being explored. She recognises the need for more consistency in matching tasks to the different ability levels of the pupils across the school.

What should the school do to develop further in classroom religious education?

- Embed the 'chillies' system of differentiation to empower pupils to choose effectively challenging tasks, appropriate to their levels of ability
- Continue hosting deanery and diocesan networks to share good practice and continue accurate moderation
- Continue support and professional development of staff, to deepen their knowledge of the theology underpinning the concepts being delivered
- Pupils with special educational needs and /or disabilities across the school should be provided with clearly levelled tasks in religious education, which is matched to their particular ability levels, as they would for other core subjects

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

The school has invested in providing a set of Bibles for each class, thus ensuring all pupils have ready access for research and linking scripture to their learning. The role of pupils leading worship is impacting on the growing ownership of pupils in the development of their prayer life and spirituality. Developing the awareness of and response to Catholic Social Teaching has been a key priority since the previous inspection. Pupils are very proud of their pro-active involvement in developing and maintaining the prayer garden.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

The school fully meets the 10% requirement laid down by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. The curriculum is well matched to the demands of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory, (RECD). The self-evaluation document and the action plan for both religious education and the Catholic life of the school are accurate, informing future priority actions. This includes the dedicated time offered for year group leaders in the planning of teaching in religious education, which is not provided for other core subjects. The dedicated newsletter, 'Gospel Gossip,' is a bright and interesting opportunity to share with parents the way the pupils are growing in the knowledge and understanding of concepts being explored, whilst making effective links through scripture to their everyday lives. This colourful and stimulating document, which is published termly and available to all on the school website, is worthy of note. It is an excellent tool for engaging parents in supporting the faith and spiritual development of their children.

The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community

is outstanding

The outstanding prayer life of the school is the hallmark of all that is excellent in St. Mary Magdalen's, with Christ at the centre. Pupils have ownership of planning and leading class worship. Class assemblies are often based on links to Catholic Social Teaching, using a range of resources, including those from Caritas, Ten-Ten and Cafod. Pupils are empowered to draw upon their own modern worship, for example, through an emotive 'You Tube' video, followed by their traditional Catholic prayers for the victims of Grenfell. The non-teaching support team guide these acts of worship, whilst empowering pupils to self-evaluate the promotion of their school as a caring community. Pupils are invited to nominate a child who has been particularly merciful towards them that week, each class teacher selects one of the nominations to be read out in the weekly Catholic Social Teaching assemblies, so children are able to witness real life examples of social justice in the school. Pupils described how they are a 'forgiving school...and they always want to be kind and forgiving to each other.' The parish priest is a focal point in supporting the sacramental and spiritual development of the pupils across the school, through regular opportunities for pupils to receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist and Reconciliation. There are many special celebrations, including the annual May Procession, 'walking with Mary' and the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, described by pupils, as 'the day Jesus visited our school.'

The contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice –

is outstanding

The school actively promotes Catholic Social Teaching and pupils actively recognise their call to justice and service to others. They recognise that they are called to respond to anyone suffering as, 'not everyone is as fortunate as us and our school has helped us to realise that.' The pupil 'Charity

Committee' identifies causes to be supported, and recognises that their central intention is, 'to be like Jesus.' The children and pupils recognise that the theology of solidarity and Catholic Social Teaching is the principal guide to their charitable giving. Pupils give generously and creatively to support a wide range of local, national and international charities, such as The Ashford Place for the homeless and Cafod. The poignancy of the silence remembering the Grenfell disaster was tangible, including the prayer to complete the silence. The 'mercy tokens' issued following their acts of kindness and compassion to each other, shared during the whole school assembly, provides a practical reminder of the importance of 'following in the footsteps of Jesus' as described by some pupils. The school has developed a partnership with Caritas to share their strategies for their commitment to Catholic Social Teaching with other schools.

The partnership with parents, school and parish, and collaboration as an integral part of the diocese through its relationship with the diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf

is outstanding

The excellent partnership of home, school and parish, is a hallmark of the commitment of all members of the school community to their mission statement of, 'Growing in God's Love.' The appreciation of the parents is evident in the extremely high percentage of responses to the questionnaires. Parents overwhelmingly value the contribution the school makes to the education, spirituality and faith life of their children. The weekly publication of the school newsletter and termly publication of 'Gospel Gossip,' supports both the spiritual and faith life of the school and parish community, within the liturgical cycle. The highly effective partnership with the parish includes the active participation in significant events and celebrations, including the parish mission, the 75th anniversary of the church's dedication. These ties with the parish include the active work of the school choir, who regularly enhance the parish liturgies and sacramental events. The school values its partnership with the wider family in the diocese, including attendance at the Good Shepherd Mass. The governing body and staff have benefited from the range of diocesan training and networks. All policies and procedures are fully in line with those set out by the Diocese of Westminster and the Catholic Education Service, (CES). The school has plans to support the 'Adoremus Congress,' being held in Liverpool in the Autumn Term, through the 'Our Eucharistic Journey,' programme and the intended attendance at the Congress by the senior leaders.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school

is outstanding

The headteacher, with her leadership team, are the driving force which have resulted in the school's outstanding systems, strategies and processes, which influence the pupils' discipleship for life in the school. She has created an excellent culture for empowering staff to have confidence in developing a high quality curriculum in religious education. The chair of governors has a clear and passionate vision for the school and is fully involved in all aspects of the school's self-evaluation. Governors work in close partnership with the school leadership in completing the accurate school's self-evaluation. They hold the headteacher and leadership team to account, with an emphasis on sustaining the Catholic ethos and mission of the school, with Christ at the centre.

What should the school do to develop further the Catholic life of the school?

- Continue parental involvement to key liturgical celebrations, such as the May Procession
- Further develop the Prayer Garden, for easy access to all in the community to have opportunities for stillness and reflection

Information about this school

- The school is a three form entry Catholic Junior school in the locality of Brent.
- The school serves the parishes of St Mary Magdalen, Willesden and The Transfiguration, Kensal Rise.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 92%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 6% and from other faiths is 0.3%. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 14, (70%).
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is 6.
- There are 19% of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom 11 have statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well above average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is well above average.
- There is an average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 71 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (20%).
- The school deprivation factor is 0.3 which is well above national figures.

Department for Education Number	3043505
Unique Reference Number	101542
Local Authority	Brent

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	7 -11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	350
The appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Frederik Reynaert
Headteacher	Miss Maria Nowicka
Telephone number	0208 459 3159
Website	www.marymag.brent.sch.uk
Email address	admin@marymag.brent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 March 2013
Grades from previous inspection:	
Classroom religious education	Very good
The Catholic life of the school	Very good

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out (i) under the requirements of the Canon 806 and (ii) in accordance with the Framework for Diocesan Inspections 2015 approved by the Archbishop of Westminster and (iii) under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

- The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection.
- During the inspection seven lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended one assembly and a three of acts of worship.
- Meetings were held with school staff, pupils and governors.
- Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

Inspection Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

Inspection Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

Mrs Tina Cleugh	Lead Inspector
Mrs Kathleen Sorrell	Associate Inspector
Miss Katherine O'Sullivan	Associate Inspector
Mr Chris Cleugh	Associate Inspector
Mr Patrick Harrison	Observer

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