

DIOCESE OF PORTSMOUTH VALIDATION REPORT



St. Finian's Catholic Primary School, Thatcham

The Ridge, Cold Ash, Thatcham RG18 9HU

URN: 110037

Date of previous validation March 2012

Date of this validation 27 March and 3 April 2017

Overall effectiveness

Previous validation: Good

This validation: Good

The school community:	Outstanding	Attainment and progress in RE:	Good
The wider community:	Outstanding	Quality of teaching in RE:	Good
Spiritual development:	Outstanding	Leadership and management of RE:	Good
Moral development:	Outstanding	Leadership and management:	Good

This is a good school with outstanding features

- St Finian's is an outstanding example of a Catholic school community, where the mission statement and Christian ethos have a very positive impact. Excellent relationships between adults and pupils lead to a loving and trusting environment, where *"with Christ at the centre,"* all are encouraged to *"journey together to achieve their full potential and live life to the full."*
- The knowledge and commitment of the headteacher and deputy Headteacher (who is also RE leader) is a key strength of the school. They are passionate about supporting all staff to further improve outcomes for all.
- St. Finian's is a school that knows itself well. Strengths are recognised and celebrated by the leadership team and governors and any areas for development that are identified are quickly addressed.
- The beautiful school building and the links to St Gabriel's convent provide many opportunities to celebrate the faith life of the community.
- The children behave well and demonstrate great care for each other. They value the fact that *"everyone listens to you and includes your ideas."*
- Parents are supportive of the school. A majority was positive about all aspects of school life.
- Standards in RE are good and school leaders are clear about the way forward.
- Spiritual and moral development are outstanding. The very positive impact of worship and reflection on scripture can be seen in the words and actions of the school community.
- The pastoral area coordinating pastor and RE governor offer excellent support.
- Teachers work hard to ensure that RE has a high profile in the school and are ably assisted by enthusiastic support staff.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

In order to continue to move forward, the school should consider the following:

- Provide training for all new staff and ensure they are confident in understanding the use of National RE Levels of Attainment driver words as steps in the learning process.
- Ensure there is a consistency in planning throughout the school. Planned activities must promote effective, consistent and sustained differentiation for all pupils, through the use of the driver words and challenging questions.
- Continue to improve the quality of the evidence so that it reflects key RE learning and ensure next steps are identified through focussed questioning and marking.

Full Report

The school as a Catholic community

The school community:

outstanding

The wider community:

outstanding

- The school's mission statement and Christian ethos permeate all aspects of school life. This is reflected in the secure and positive relationships that have led to a fully inclusive environment.
- Visitors to the school experience a very warm welcome.
- St Finian's is a mutually supportive partner of local and diocesan Catholic schools.
- The beautiful school environment is well maintained and designed to enable positive interactions which promote effective learning, spiritual wellbeing and inspiration.
- There are opportunities for the involvement of all members of the community in every aspect of school life (website, prayer bags, information evenings, open Fridays, curriculum leaflets, Marvellous Me).
- Parents are supportive of the school. A majority were positive about all aspects of school life.
- All members of the school community demonstrate their commitment to the principles of stewardship through support of many local, national and international initiatives including, collecting for the Food Bank, supporting CAFOD and schools in Bamenda.
- St. Finian's have developed an Evangelization Strategy, based on initiatives led by Pope Francis and the Bishop, which aims to spread the joy of Christ by strengthening the spiritual life of the school within the home and wider community.
- Ethnic and cultural diversity is celebrated through links with other faith communities. A multi faith week builds on good relationships with local faith leaders who visit the school.

Curriculum religious education

Attainment and progress:

good

Quality of teaching:

good

Leadership and management of RE:

good

- The passion, knowledge and commitment of the deputy headteacher is a key driver in supporting all staff to become more confident in teaching RE. She and the headteacher have a clear understanding and strategy for the way forward.
- The six new teachers to the school and existing staff are fully committed to developing their subject knowledge. They are working very hard to deliver lessons with learning objectives that are RE focussed and ensure continued progression for all pupils but this is not yet consistent throughout the school and needs to be addressed.
- The evidence in the pupils' books, the quality of teaching seen on the day and discussions with pupils all combine to show that attainment and progress in RE are good.
- Pupils in the school value RE and recognise it can help them in their daily lives. In the lessons observed as part of the validation, evidence was seen of pupils reflecting on what the Garden of Gethsemane is like through the use of the lovely outdoor space and references to scripture. In the best lessons, learning was supported and challenged by the use of key questions, modelling of expectations and links to prior learning. Pupils demonstrated a positive attitude to learning and behaviour was good.

- Planning does not yet include reference to key driver words and challenge for the more able. The school needs to continue to support the development of all new teachers in delivering RE lessons that promote effective, consistent and sustained differentiation for all pupils, through the use of the driver words and challenging questions.
- RE displays are used as working walls that include key questions, vocabulary and pupil responses.
- The Big Question books in each class provide strong evidence of attainment in applying religious knowledge.

Spiritual and moral development

Spiritual development:

outstanding

Moral development:

outstanding

- The headteacher's deep personal faith helps to ensure that St. Finian's is a deeply spiritual school, with Christ at the centre of all aspects of school life. Children experience a wide range of outstanding worship opportunities. Worship links closely to the liturgical year which is demonstrated in displays, prayer areas and planning.
- The school building has enabled excellent provision inside and out for 'holy places' and fully supports the worship in the school, providing opportunities for children to experience the awe and wonder of God's creation and joy of living.
- The older pupils lead the weekly house assemblies based on a structure given to them by the RE leader. Older children act as buddies to the younger children during whole school worship.
- All members of the community are invited to join the school for liturgies and Masses. The pastoral area coordinating pastor and deacon provide excellent support.
- The children in the school behave well and welcome opportunities to promote teamwork through their roles as ambassadors, play leaders, buddies, house captains, school councillors, librarians and liturgy leaders. Staff provide excellent role models based on Gospel values.
- The celebration of achievement through mission leaves, termly achievement certificates, celebration assemblies and house points, positively promotes pupil self-esteem and confidence.
- Pupils are justly proud of their school. They describe the school as a place "*where every single person matters and where we journey together and include everyone.*"

Leadership and management:

Good

- The personal witness to the faith provided by the headteacher and the deputy headteacher at St. Finian's provides a strong vision and direction for the work of the school.
- The governing body are strong supporters of the school and also act as a critical friend.
- The headteacher, deputy headteacher and governors are managing carefully a significant change in staffing over the past year which has redirected leaders' priorities. Leaders recognise the importance of supporting new staff to maintain the quality of provision before they can move forward again more rapidly.
- Since the last validation, all areas for development were addressed. The Mission Statement has been reviewed and shared with new staff, there is a more robust system of self review for RE and the RE leader supports all staff with knowledge and confidence.

School details

Name of school:	St Finian's Catholic Primary
Age range of pupils:	4 - 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll:	189
Chair of Governors:	Denis Murtagh
Headteacher:	Liz Housden

St Finian's is a small one form entry primary school. The school serves the pastoral areas of Thatcham and Woolhampton and is supported by the parish priest from St Frances de Sales parish, Wash Common. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language is low. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is also below average. Since the last validation, the school has moved into new purpose-built accommodation.

Information about this validation

This report to the Bishop of the Diocese under Canon 806 of the Code of Canon Law is also the report to the governors of the school on religious education. For Catholic maintained schools, the report also fulfils the requirements of Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

Validation Team

Helena Pickering	Lead Validator
Paula Dix	Assistant Validator

Activities carried out as part of the validation

- Ethos Walk.
- Discussion on the school's self-evaluation sheets.
- Discussions with various members of the school community.
- Observations of Key Stages 1 and 2, whole school worship and a class worship.
- Observations of teaching and learning in RE, including joint observations with the headteacher and RE leader.
- Pupil work scrutiny.
- Feedback of key findings to the senior leadership team and representatives of the governing body.

Conclusion

The validators would like to thank the headteacher, deputy headteacher, staff, governors, parents and pupils of St Finian's School for their preparatory work for the validation, which forms part of the school's regular self-review cycle. They would also like to express their appreciation for the warmth of welcome they received and the support given during the validation process.