



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 118868

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
Springhead Road
Northfleet, Kent
DA11 9QZ

Inspection date: 17 November 2014

Chair of Governors: Mr Andrew Brett
Headteacher: Mrs Tina Shirley
Inspectors: Mrs Joan Lenahan
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EDUCATION COMMISSION

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SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

St Joseph's School is voluntary aided. It is situated in the Gravesend Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is maintained by West Kent Local Authority. The principal parish which the school serves is Our Lady of Assumption, Northfleet. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 89%. 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 takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. Due to demand for places, the school has one 'bulge' class. The number of pupils currently on roll is 243. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is below average. Around 11% of pupils receive extra support in class and 2 pupils have statements of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minorities is higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is above average.

Date of previous inspection:

21 September 2009

Overall Grade:

1

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school in providing Catholic Education

GRADE
1

The overall effectiveness of St Joseph's school in developing pupils' experience and understanding of the Catholic way of life is outstanding. Strong leadership at all levels contributes significantly to the success of the school and this is manifested in the energetic determination to meet the needs of all the pupils in a safe, purposeful, well-resourced and orderly environment. Governors and leaders put effective effort into ensuring that the school's Catholic mission is at the heart of the curriculum. Opportunities for pupils' spiritual and moral development are excellent and are fostered from the earliest years. The school is fully inclusive. Provision for pupils' cultural and social development is outstanding.

Pupils exude a joy of learning, whilst also displaying a great sense of pride in their school and cite that their school is "a fun place to be", "brilliant", "loving" and "special". The behaviour of the pupils is exemplary.

The partnership with parents and the local parish is very strong and a communal, family atmosphere pervades.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive and appreciative of the care, nurture, guidance, skilled teaching and support their children receive. A parent encapsulated the views of many by writing: "Our child is thriving at St Joseph's and we are more than impressed with the teaching staff and strong sense of community with its Catholic ethos pitched at the heart of the curriculum." Teaching is never less than good with some outstanding practice.

The Headteacher and Religious Education Co-ordinator are inspirational role models and form a highly effective leadership team. Staff form a cohesive and supportive team and are actively involved in promoting the school's mission. Standards achieved in Religious Education are very good, overall, with pupils attaining high standards at the end of Key Stage 2. Issues raised in the previous inspection (September 2009), relating to marking of pupils' work and reviewing the SRE policy, have been addressed. The school's self-analysis is accurate in evaluating its strengths and areas for ongoing development and reflects the school's commitment towards continuous improvement.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Consider expanding the programme to teach pupils about more of the major world faiths.

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

Pupils take full advantage of the wide range of opportunities the school provides for their personal support and development. They understand the school's mission and ethos and show enthusiasm and genuine interest when discussing how they are encouraged to 'Reach for the Stars'. The school views the cultural diversity of its families as a blessing that enhances the school community. Celebrations of this cultural richness is an inherent aspect of life at St Joseph's with events such as the 'Food and Fellowship' evening and workshops in music, dance and art. The pupils benefit as a result as they feel valued and flourish as individuals, secure in the knowledge that they are appreciated and respected. Pupils benefit from the school's strong commitment to work for the common good. They learn to be appreciative members of the parish in a wide variety of manners, such as, giving witness to Mission as altar servers, participating in offertory processions and readings in parish Mass. Pupils are proud to act as ambassadors for their school by partaking in events such as the Peace Service in St George's Church, Carol Singing at Bluewater and attending the Cabrini Mass at Aylesford. Pupils are involved in supporting a wide range of charities locally, nationally and globally such as St Vincent de Paul, Demelza House and have a strong affiliation with CAFOD who regularly visit the school. A laudable aspect of the schools work for charities is the fact that pupils take responsibility for nominating worthy causes, for example, the Year 6 Lenten Appeal. The pupils benefit from engaging in these endeavours as they are alert to the needs of the less privileged and seek justice both within and beyond the school community. Members of the School Council illustrate that, at their own levels, pupils understand working for the common good and their ideas, amongst others, have contributed to the enhancement of Our Lady's outdoor garden for reflective prayer. Older pupils also undertake roles as buddies to support younger pupils at break times, and with liturgies. Through all these efforts, pupils deepen their understanding of their duties and responsibilities to the needs of others and their commitment to the Catholic life of the school is outstanding.

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

Standards achieved in Religious Education are high. Attainment levels in both key stages one and two are in line with levels of attainment in literacy. In lessons observed during the inspection and in discussions with the pupils across all age ranges, pupils display enthusiasm for the subject. Their keenness and commitment to succeed is exemplary as they realise that Religious Education lessons are special. Pupils are to be commended for the thoughtful and respectful manner in which they engage in reflections at the beginning and end of lessons. This was witnessed in Year 5 when pupils sang 'Adoramus Domine', which brought a spiritual dimension to their lesson. Throughout the school, pupils listen attentively, approach tasks with enthusiasm and thrive on being challenged. The ability of pupils to use appropriate religious vocabulary is very good as they are confident when recalling previous learning or when undertaking role play activities, as seen when Year 2 pupils enacted a scene from the Annunciation. Pupils' books are well-presented and well-cared for, showing that pupils take pride in their learning. In general, pupil's self-evaluations at the end of topics reveal that they have understood the learning objectives and know how to apply their learning to the practice of the faith.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

Pupils participate in the prayer and liturgical life of the school with enthusiasm and articulate an interest in and enjoyment of the opportunities they are offered. An excellent assembly, with a clear spiritual message exploring the theme of 'God's Gifts', was witnessed during the inspection when the pupil body responded with a sense of awe, reverence and respect. Exceptional singing, accompanied by signing and actions enhanced the prayerful and reverential atmosphere. A further praiseworthy element was the high involvement of the pupils in exploring the theme and the manner in which they used art, liturgical dance, creative artefacts such as the Year 5 'The Commandments Tree' and the Year 4 pupils composition of 'Make me a Channel of your Love' to get across their message. Pupils are confident and comfortable in prayerful situations and view communal prayer as an integral aspect of school life. The opportunities the school offers for Collective Worship make a significant contribution to the pupils' spiritual and moral development.

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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 excellent.

The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding as she is committed to the Church's mission in education, leads the school with vision and purpose, giving clear direction for its Catholic life.

The Governing Body meets its statutory duties. There is a strong skills-set on the Board of Governors and members use their individual strengths to best effect and are actively involved in shaping the school's development. Governors celebrate the school's strength and achievements and give generously of their time to support the Catholic life of the school, for example, attending Mass and assemblies, accompanying pupils on residential trips and retreats and being involved in the annual St Joseph's Day celebration. The role of the Religious Education co-ordinator is given a high profile in line with leaders of the core curriculum areas.

The school has excellent links with its local parish and with the diocese in many important ways. It supports teachers in gaining a Catholic teacher's qualification in Religious Studies. Senior leaders and governors regularly take part in professional training. The Religious Education coordinator willingly shares her expertise within the local Catholic school cluster group and fosters links across the Diocese. Beneficial links for pupils are in place with St John's Comprehensive School and these are poised to develop even further.

Self-evaluation by leaders, managers and governors is informed, rigorous and systematic with realistic goals set to implement targeted improvement. The staff induction programme places a strong emphasis on teaching in a Catholic school. Due diligence is paid to ongoing staff development and as a result they form a highly skilled, confident workforce in supporting the school's mission.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and many praised the quality of leadership, staff commitment and Catholic ethos.

The Catholic character of St Joseph's is visible and tangible with a wide range of outstanding creative displays on corridors and in classroom which depict the liturgical season and topics studied by the pupils.

Generous allocation of funding ensures high quality resources are available for learning. Leaders provide a range of opportunities and experiences to promote pupils' spiritual development, for example, the dedicated 'Prayer Garden with Our Lady's Grotto', day retreats, themed weeks and participation in musical and cultural events.

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 provision for Religious Education is effectively monitored by leaders in a variety of ways: formal lesson observations are undertaken, recorded and issues arising addressed; regular book scrutiny; formal and informal discussions with pupils. Key members of the Governing Body are frequent visitors to the school, well briefed on provision for Religious Education and are knowledgeable on the school's strengths and areas for development.

Leaders and managers place great emphasis on seeking the views of pupils, parents and staff through regular questionnaires, discussions and suggestion boxes. Ideas raised from such surveys are subsequently given due consideration when formulating development plans.

Pupils' performance in Religious Education is assessed with the same rigour as that applied to other core subjects, the result of which means that the standards pupils achieve is consistent with performance in literacy.

The Religious Education Co-ordinator and Headteacher bring a high level of expertise and inspiration to leading the subject and have a clear picture of standards and areas for development. The rigorous and effective approach to monitor, track pupils' performance and evaluate all aspects of Religious Education is exemplary.

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

Teachers plan and deliver lessons that enthuse pupils. Overall, teaching is never less than good with many outstanding features, as a result pupils' attainment at the end of both key stages is above average. Where outstanding practice was observed in a Year 1 lesson, pupils were completely engrossed, tasks were well organised, questioning skills to promote thinking were highly effective and pupils collaborated in an exemplary manner when they worked with 'talking partners'. Where lessons fell short of this high standard lack of pace and over ambitious learning intentions impeded pupil's progress. Teachers display very good subject knowledge and their confidence when teaching inspires pupils and builds on their understanding.

Teachers have high expectations of their pupils' capabilities and plan lessons with differentiated tasks that meet their varying needs. Teaching assistants are very well briefed and make a significant impact in supporting pupils with specific learning needs. The application of the school's developmental marking policy is not yet fully embedded in practice and the good practice seen in a few classes needs to be implemented throughout. Seamless links between the Catholic Life of the school, the purpose of Religious Education and the practice of the faith are a key feature of lessons. An example of such links was seen in a Year 5 lesson on the commandments: 'Understanding the heart of God's Law'; where able pupils were challenged to create a child-friendly poster on how to live in accordance with the commandments.

Spiritual and moral provision is a key component of all lessons with the use of high quality 'prayer tables' to provide foci for pupils to reflect on their learning.

Teachers are proficient in using interactive technology to engage pupils' interest. For example, pupils in Year 2 were totally engaged when they matched pictures and texts to show their understanding of the Holy Trinity.

Pupils' excellent behaviour and harmonious relationships in lessons make a significant contribution to learning.

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

The provision for Religious Education on the timetable meets the Bishops' requirements. The school's approach to deliver 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' programme is exemplary as it is innovative in the way in which it is presented in a creative way to engage the learners. Cross-curricular links amongst which are literacy, IT, music, drama, using the local parish as a resource, retreats, visits to places of worship and visitors to the school are incorporated to great effect. An innovation that is praiseworthy is the creative use of poetry throughout the school. Pupils' creativity is challenged as a result as they can express their ideas and understanding of their topics, an example being the Year 3 acrostic poems about the life of Our Lady.

The Religious Education co-ordinator actively promotes high standards in delivering the curriculum through good subject knowledge and exemplary classroom practice.

Pupils are offered opportunities to comment on their curriculum through interviews,

questionnaires and end of topic evaluations. The result of one such survey led to pupils requesting to learn more about vocation and the school responded by inviting clergy and religious personnel into the school to talk about their calling.

Pupils take advantage of and benefit from rich opportunities for spiritual and moral development that are provided by visitors to the school and visits to places of religious interest, for example Key Stage 2 day retreat at Aylesford on World Citizenship.

The curriculum is enriched by incorporating a range of experiences for the pupils to learn about other cultures such as awareness of Black History.

Curriculum provision to teach the pupils about the major world faiths is good as pupils have the opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge from practitioners of Judaism and Sikhism. Embracing some of the other major faiths would further enhance provision. Parents are invited into school assemblies and encouraged to join their children at Mass. The parish based First Eucharist programmes are very well supported by the school. Each family receives a copy of the Wednesday Word which involves them in their children's learning and serves to stimulate family discussion about sharing Sunday's Gospel message.

The Sex and Relationships policy has been reviewed and updated since the last inspection with the 'Journey in Love' programme, which is an integral aspect of curriculum.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

Collective Worship is central to the life of the school and a key aspect of every school celebration. Active participation by pupils is a key element of provision. Pupils are offered opportunities to experience a wide range of different prayer styles. These include learning formal prayers, Mass responses and opportunities for reflection and meditation. Pupils are encouraged to compose personal prayers and use them within worship, an example being in the Year 2 class 'Family Prayer Book' whilst also serving as a link between pupils and parents. Residential and Day Retreats for Year 3 and Year 4 pupils serve to enhance their spiritual and moral development. The pattern of the liturgical year is used very effectively to involve the pupils in Advent and Lent, services of reconciliation, The Way of the Cross, and celebration of Holy Days, Feast Days of the Saints and a day of devotion for their patron saint. Pupils have the opportunity to pray the Rosary in October and rejoice in crowning Our Lady in May. Pupils' liturgical formation is well planned and its impact monitored. School and class Mass are held regularly with pupils involved in their preparation. Parents are invited to participate in acts of worship. The quality of Collective Worship is greatly enhanced by the regular support, guidance and leadership of the parish priest and his input is highly valued by leaders, staff, pupils and parents.