



## DENOMINATIONAL EDUCATION AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP INSPECTION REPORT

incorporating Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the  
Archbishop of Southwark

URN 141629

Stella Maris Catholic Primary School  
Parkfield Road  
Folkestone  
Kent CT10 5BY

Inspection date: 19 May 2015

Chair of Governors:	Mr Joseph Ciantar
Headteacher:	Mr Tony Holdsworth
Inspectors:	Dr Janet Croggon Mr Stephen Beck

### EDUCATION COMMISSION

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# Introduction

## Description of the school

Stella Maris Catholic Primary School is an academy within the Kent Catholic Schools Partnership. It is situated in the Dover Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark, The principal parishes which the school serves are Our Lady Help of Christians and St Joseph, Folkestone (West). The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 55%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in Key Stages 1 and 2.

The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 187. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is well below the national average. The pupils eligible for free school meals is above average and those who are pupil premium are 41% of the school population.

Around 53% of pupils receive extra support in class. The majority of pupils are from White British and Eastern European backgrounds. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is 23%, which is above the national average.

Date of previous inspection:

26/06/2012

Overall Grade:

3

### Key for inspection grades

Grade 1 Outstanding  
Grade 2 Good

Grade 3 Requires improvement  
Grade 4 Inadequate

# Overall effectiveness of the school in providing Catholic Education

GRADE  
2

Stella Maris is a joyful learning community in which all the pupils in the school make good and improving academic progress. From their earliest years, the pupils receive a solid foundation in the Catholic faith and are taught to love their neighbour. The school's commitment to the disadvantaged serves to motivate both staff and pupils and is a touchstone for their moral development. The Catholic ethos underpins all school policies and the curriculum.

Improvement since the last Section 48 report is significant. Ofsted rated Stella Maris as 'good' in December 2013 citing solid teaching and strong leadership as key strengths. This success is also evident in the outcomes achieved in the Religious Education classes since the appointment of Religious Education Coordinators in 2012. Staff members widely acknowledge their impact on raising standards in Religious Education and throughout the school. Pupil behaviour is excellent and they pray in many different prayer styles.

The Headteacher's recruitment and retention of high quality staff is outstanding. His collegiate approach to leadership enables staff to flourish thus raising the standard of education within the school. Stella Maris' continuing professional development exchange with the Parikrma Centre for Learning, Nandidi Layout, Bangalore, serves to inspire the entire school community to greater generosity aiding the pupils' spiritual and moral development. The school self-evaluation is accurate and the development plan is effective in applying direction for further improvements.

Governors participate fully in the life of the school and are very well known by staff, pupils and parents. They are vigilant in their monitoring of school standards and pupil achievement. Minutes of their meetings, visits, and governor led assemblies all attest to the Governing Body's commitment to safeguarding the Catholic ethos of the school. The school/parish links are outstanding. The parish priests are a vital part of the Stella Maris community from celebrating school Masses and sacramental preparation to serving as Vice Chair of Governors and leading assemblies.

Parents are very supportive of the school as reported in their overwhelmingly positive response to the Section 48 questionnaire and the published school survey of March 2015. A parent comments, "Stella Maris provides my children with a caring and nurturing environment-one that mirrors the morals and consistency of home." Another parent wrote, "We cannot praise the ethics and approach of the school enough. Fantastic!" This parental appreciation is also reflected in the school's vibrant Parents' Association who sponsor two fairs and various other activities throughout the year. Parents participate in prayers breakfasts and class Masses. The provision for pastoral care at Stella Maris is outstanding especially its work with the most vulnerable families.

The Religious Education Coordinators in Stella Maris initiated both the moderation of pupils' work and the Celebration of Education, with Mass at the deanery level. Stella Maris has the capacity to continue to develop and become a leading member of the Kent Catholic School Partnership and Dover Deanery.

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

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Ensure that the implicit Catholic ethos of the school is made more explicit by awarding it high visibility in all publications such as newsletters, website and school prospectus.
- Continue to build on the good marking practice in Religious Education making it consistent in all classes. Improve dialogue marking.
- To review the policy and provision for Relationships and Sex Education in consultation with governors, staff and parents.

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

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school is good. The pupils of Stella Maris live their mission statement daily as they strive to bring God's kingdom to earth through love of their neighbour. They actively participate in the Catholic life of the school through assuming responsibilities within the daily lessons and within the local and international community. The school's link to the Parikrma Centre, Bangalore, enables pupils to share with those of different religions and races. They understand that spiritual values are important to many people and that religious worship varies. Pupil leadership is evidenced in their response to Nepal's earthquake victims. Three Key Stage 2 pupils proposed, organised and led a fundraising event that motivated the whole school community to donate very generously.

The pupils of Stella Maris are reflective and offer to lead prayers. Pupils begin their day by praying the school prayer and continue throughout the day for example grace before and after meals and the Angelus at midday. In a lesson observed in Year 5, the pupils discussed different types of prayer and gave examples of them from their daily lives. Pupils demonstrate good understanding of the Catholic faith and the liturgical year. They enthusiastically participate in Mass both in school, in their parish community, deanery and the diocesan level. Pupils express their own views and beliefs with an age appropriate confidence as observed in lessons in Early Years and both key stages.

Religious icons are respected as observed in pupils' veneration of Mary during the month of May. The pupils choose songs and prayers for assemblies and design and help build their prayer corners. Most impressive was the pupils' planning and participation in a prayer ceremony for the dedication of the Summer House in memory of a Year 3 pupil who died during the summer break. Members of the school community gathered to pray for the pupil while naming a reflective and special place in her memory.

Pupils are immersed in the school values of "Love, Respect, Caring, Sharing and Trust" and are frequently challenged on how they will build God's kingdom. They understand right from wrong and that all actions have consequences. Each week school sends home the Wednesday Word programme that encourages parents and carers to discuss a biblical passage with their child at home. Forgiveness is central to the respect they show others.

The school is located in a purpose built 1930's building with various additions. It is surrounded by parkland that is creatively used for outside learning spaces and reflection areas. Pupil generated work is displayed throughout the school and is the source of great pride. The reception area is distinctly Catholic and welcoming.

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

Pupils enjoy their Religious Education classes and actively participate in their learning. In the lessons observed, pupils' behaviour for learning was excellent. Most groups of pupils made good progress and some make outstanding progress. Achievement in Key Stage 2 is mostly above average. In 2013/14 74% of Year 6 Pupils gained Level 4 which was higher than English within the school. Standards are above average in each attainment target. Pupils with specific learning needs make good progress in lessons working with teaching

assistants who are integral to the learning of the lesson. In the six lessons observed and after a review of the tracking data, little variation was found between groups of learners.

Pupils benefit from the moderation of their work at both deanery and tri-deanery level ensuring teacher accuracy. Examples of Stella Maris' pupil work were shared at these meetings and were recognised as best practice. Pupil writing is good and demonstrates development over the key stage. Pupils are often given clear feedback on how to improve their work. Dialogue feedback must continue to develop at all levels. Targets for improvement are shared with pupils, updated and discussed regularly including next steps. The school's record of assessing standards of attainment, accuracy and quality is verified through tri-deanery moderation.

World faith study days provide the opportunities for pupils to discover the spiritual beliefs of other religions. They engage in extension activities that broaden their understanding of others' personal beliefs. These experiences coupled with their regular Religious Education classes aid pupils to reflect spiritually and think ethically and theologically. Building on the best practice gleaned from the exchange with Bangalore staff, the school introduced the use of a reflection mat to open class prayer. This practice was observed with great effect in both the Reception class and Year 5. In total, six lessons were observed ranging from early years to Key Stage 2. The lessons were well planned, creative and all pupils made progress because they were keen to achieve their very best. In the Year 4 class, pupils reflected on the Ascension of Jesus by asking higher order questions. "What would have happened if Jesus didn't return to heaven?" pondered one boy. Thinking hats were used to name the ways they would continue to build God's kingdom in the world. Year 3 pupils' reflection on Mother Teresa's life resulted in prayer ribbons that were added to the school wall.

There is very good development of religious vocabulary as seen in the all school assembly and lessons observed. Key words for religious literacy were displayed and used by pupils. Good questioning by the teachers aids pupils in discovering connections between topics studied (Pentecost) and the demands of religious commitment in everyday life.

The school is part of the Kent Curriculum Project that challenges schools to create inspirational and exciting learning experiences. The school's link with Catholic schools in France and the Centre in Bangalore helps pupils to enjoy their Religious Education studies and understand the universal Church.

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

Stella Maris is a very reflective and spiritual school in which pupils pray throughout the day. They are keen to participate in a wide range of prayerful activities from the creation of their classroom's focal points to writing prayers and sharing them with others. They are knowledgeable of how Catholics pray and those of other faiths. In a whole school assembly presented by Year 4, pupils reflected on the story of Pentecost. Class members were actively involved in sharing examples of those who inspired them in their daily lives. Pupils shared how they would follow Jesus and offered prayers for those in need. At Collective Worship, teachers relate the importance of the Christian message to the five school values. All pupils are secure in their daily prayer routines from offering the school prayer to linking their actions to bringing God's kingdom to earth. Pupils demonstrate great reverence and respect when they gather and pray at the school's outside grotto or at the beginning of their Religious Education class. They willingly hold a respectful, prayerful silence and appreciate its importance.

The Headteacher celebrates a Passover Meal with Years 3 and 6 for which pupils are engaged in all the preparations. This enables them to understand Jesus' actions and teachings on Holy Thursday while showing respect to those with differing religious experiences. The pupils understand religious seasons and mark them through celebrations. Study during the time of the inspection centred on Pentecost and Mary as part of the liturgical year.

In a class Mass attended pupils participated through the preparations of readings and prayers and sang joyfully. Teachers train pupils to lead and participate in all types of prayer. The pupils of Stella Maris pray reverently with their school community and appreciate what is taking place. They listen well and offer heartfelt responses to God.

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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**

Leaders and managers are good in promoting and evaluating the provision for the Catholic life of the school and in the way they plan and implement improvements to the outcomes of pupils. The Chair of Governors provides strong, experienced leadership. The governors serve as critical friends of the Headteacher and senior leaders of the school. They demonstrate their strong commitment to the Church's mission in education by monitoring the school's mission statement and evaluating its impact on the pupils' moral development. Governors' minutes reveal a consistent drive to tackle key areas for development raised by the previous Section 48 inspection in 2012. Their discussion of and participation in the school's Collective Worship demonstrates their commitment. A prayer breakfast was held on the day of the inspection that united staff, governors and representative parents.

Leaders and managers are good in their tracking and evaluation of the progress of pupils in Religious Education. A new tracking system highlights pupil progress more easily and provides data for targeting those who need greater support. The Headteacher and the Religious Education Coordinators regularly conduct monitoring activities such as classroom visits, lesson observations, learning walks and meetings with class teachers. This aids their analysis of how the actions of the Religious Education Action Plan have impacted on pupil progress.

Senior leaders and governors accurately diagnose the strengths of the school and the areas for development. There is a yearly Religious Education audit, which monitors that staff are trained, and resources are in place for the upcoming year. This includes provision for skilling them for leading and evaluating worship. The Headteacher ensures that new staff receive a very good induction to the Church's mission in education and continues their spiritual and professional development through various training opportunities. He line manages the Religious Education Coordinators and the Religious Education governor meets with them on a regular basis. The Religious Education self-evaluation document accurately sets priorities for development while highlighting the school's strengths and achievements.

The School Development Plan is solid and sets clear priorities and targets for all curriculum areas including Religious Education. The school engage parents through parents' evenings, newsletters, prayer breakfasts and invitations to class assemblies and Masses. Local parishes are involved through their parish priests. Parental surveys provide accurate feedback on Religious Education and the Catholic life of the school. The February newsletter published the results of a Catholic Ethos and Religious Education survey showing overwhelming support and appreciation for all that the school offers their children.

Stella Maris' pastoral care is excellent. This is a Catholic community that embraces all pupils, especially the most disadvantaged. The inclusive, supportive nature of the school coupled with a foundation in Catholic teaching ensures everyone is able to articulate the school's distinctive mission with understanding and appreciation.



## **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 Headteacher and Religious Education Co-ordinators facilitate strong leadership of the subject. The Religious Education Co-ordinators have outstanding vision for the development of staff and strategies to enhance the teaching of the subject. A colleague described their strong leadership stating they "grasped the nettles strongly and have a big impact on the school." Together with the senior managers, they monitor and evaluate the provision. A tracking system, created specifically for Religious Education, provides sound evidence of pupil progress. Staff meetings are timetabled to discuss assessment data, set targets and strategies for improvement.

The Religious Education action plan is active and reviewed by the Headteacher and governors. The plan of 2014/15 sets out an ambitious programme of planning, assessment and moderation. Targets achieved are dated and annotated. Observation weeks and regular book scrutiny is scheduled and the results are recorded. Designated Religious Education review days permit staff to moderate and target pupils for support ensuring there is no variation between groups. The Religious Education Co-ordinators participate in Diocesan training and work with the primary advisor.

The senior leaders monitor the professional and inspirational delivery of Religious Education. Training and information from the Archdiocese are accessed regularly and staff are encouraged to develop further skills. The school development plan includes specific targets for Religious Education and governors' minutes record the progress made on each strategy. Outcomes in this area are improving due to a consistent strategy and the monitoring of the Religious Education Coordinators.

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

The quality of teaching observed and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education is good with some outstanding features. These included strong classroom management, positive learning strategies and engaging starters. Lessons are well planned, differentiated and built on the pupils' previous knowledge. All staff have high expectations of learners and interact sensitively and skilfully in discussions with pupils. The pupils of Stella Maris enjoy their Religious Education classes and are motivated to enquire more deeply into their faith and that of others. During the inspection learning walks, they spoke with pride of their work that is displayed within their classrooms and corridors. They know the mission statement and the school's values and with staff guidance, self-evaluate their behaviour in light of these ideals.

Individual support is given to those pupils with the greatest educational needs. The school's 'check in' system actively involves the pupils in their readiness to learn and builds positive relationships within the classroom. Through half-termly assessments and discussion with their pupils, teachers update targets, indicate next steps and praise their achievements. The pupils of Stella Maris work independently or in teams to explore religious topics. Book scrutinies are carried out by the Religious Education Coordinators and feedback is given to all staff.

Continuing professional development ensures that teachers have good subject knowledge. There are four teachers who hold the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies (CCRS) and there is a high percentage of both full-time teachers and teaching assistants who are Catholic. The curriculum of 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' is delivered to a high standard. Pupils are keen to learn, concentrate well, enjoy their work and achieve very well. They are challenged consistently to relate the school mission statement to their daily lives as to how they bring God's kingdom to those around them. Good and imaginative use is made of resources to enhance their learning. The moderation of pupils' work leads to good feedback with steps to improve. The school must continue to develop this dialogue with a concentration on pupil response.

Lesson observations revealed a range of teaching styles that included innovative 'hooks' to motivate pupils and learning activities such as the use of talking partners and 'dice' which engages all pupils in applying the school values to the topic of study. Lesson planning included differentiation for the needs of SEN and EAL pupils. Greater emphasis should be placed on the higher ability pupils to provide appropriate challenge. Teaching assistants and other adults are effectively deployed. In a Year 4 lesson, the teaching assistant led the opening activity, engaging all the pupils in a search and higher order thinking.

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

The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum promotes pupils' learning is good. Stella Maris uses 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' that fulfils the requirements of the Curriculum Directory. Age appropriate and relevant teaching meets all pupils' needs while contributing to their spiritual and moral development. Learning walks and pupil interviews revealed the pupils' ability to speak confidently about their learning and why it is important to them.

The curriculum is enriched through investigations of saints, religious leaders and other religions. Imaginative and well-planned strategies encourage the pupils to understand and celebrate differences in local and world community. Activities such as a demonstration of the Indian sari, makes learning about Hinduism memorable. The school draws on the local community to enrich lessons. The curriculum is customised to meet the needs of groups and individuals, including personalised programmes for those who need them. The content of the lessons observed was appropriate for the age of the pupils. Work is differentiated enabling all pupils to access the curriculum. 10% of the teaching time is allocated to Religious Education that fulfils the requirements of the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales. The Headteacher is responsible for the 'Love and Relationship Education' throughout the school. This policy and programme of study should be reviewed and updated in conjunction with all the stakeholders.

Religious Education underpins learning at Stella Maris by forming pupils who are religiously literate, confident in their expressions of faith and open to the spiritual beliefs of others. The school's collaboration with the Diocese, deanery and other local schools constantly challenges the staff to re-evaluate the Religious Education curriculum to meet pupils' changing needs. There is strong evidence that the Headteacher and the senior leaders and managers are innovative in adapting the curriculum to promote pupils' learning on every level. Thus linking the school with Catholic schools in France and those in Bangalore provides various opportunities to participate in international education. At Stella Maris, Religious Education is challenging all pupils to be open to difference while understanding and respecting the traditions of the Church. Current assessment data supports strong pupil achievement and indicates that in Year 6, 78% will gain Level 4 or above. Achievement and effort are acknowledged and celebrated both in each classroom and at the whole school assembly.

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

Acts of Collective Worship underpin the daily life of Stella Maris. They are given a high profile and are well resourced. All staff are skilled at leading worship. Whole school assemblies celebrate the liturgical year with themes linked to the moral development of children. The Gospel, the school values and mission statement all encourage the pupils to reflect on how they bring God's kingdom to earth today. Staff and pupils pray together and there are prayer opportunities both formal and informal. Pupils prepare their class assembly which develops their current Religious Education topic of study.

Staff regularly review, evaluate and plan improvements to the school's provision for Collective Worship. Pupils are skilled at sharing and leading prayer. The themes chosen are consistent with the Catholic character of the school and responsive to the religious diversity among the pupils. Those of other faiths are encouraged to share and explain their beliefs and how and why they celebrate their festivals. For example, the study of Hinduism is scheduled to coincide with the celebration of Diwali to enable a cross-cultural faith experience. Photos within the pupils' exercise books record their participation in special acts of worship. The school benefits from the dedicated leadership and commitment of the two parish priests. They regularly lead prayer and develop themes of moral education at assemblies. Further, they discuss the readings at the class Mass with the pupils and assist the school in preparing Year 3 First Holy Communion.

Collective Worship at Stella Maris is well supported by parents, carers and friends. They are frequently invited for Prayer Breakfasts, Masses and special celebrations such as the re-dedication of the school grotto. In the acts of worship observed, pupils prayed with

reverence and respect while the staff modelled this prayerful behaviour. Each prayer service was age appropriate and pupils volunteered petitions and reflections as they do each day. The shared school prayer unites the Stella Maris praying community and encapsulates their school mission. The Catholic ethos of the school is prominent through the use of religious focal points which are child centred and created by them.

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