



St Josephs

Bishops Stortford

Date of inspection: 23rd May 2014

A. Classroom Religious Education

What is the overall effectiveness of classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy?

Overall Grade I

The overall effectiveness of classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy is very good. The school has achieved putting religious education at the core of the curriculum and this has led pupils to make very good progress in their religious knowledge and understanding. The Curriculum Directory forms the basis of and underpins all that is provided across the phases of the school. Teachers cooperate generously to ensure that good practice and creativity is spread throughout their teaching, making very good provision for the pupils in religious education. Teaching is characterised with good pace, challenging questioning and provision for the diverse levels of ability. Planning is informed by regular teacher assessment and adapted according to the varied needs of the pupils. The learning ethos of the school is spread across many areas of its life and pupils experience an environment rich in opportunity for understanding that gospel values permeate all areas of life. Leadership of the subject is outstanding, with the current diocesan composite programme firmly in place and well supported.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What is the overall effectiveness of the Catholic life of the school in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing?

Overall Grade I*

The Catholic life of the school is outstandingly effective in developing the pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing. The Catholic ethos of the school is woven into every aspect of school life. Pupils are encouraged to formulate their beliefs and articulate their views appropriate to their stage of development. The opportunities for prayer are varied, allowing pupils both to participate in well planned whole school assemblies as well as have moments of quiet prayer in the classroom setting, in front of the colourful prayer tables found in each classroom. Pupils experience and live Catholic values through regular Masses and acts of worship, as well as through their charity and service to each other and to the wider community. The significance and experience of contributing to the Common Good is embedded in the community life that the pupils are drawn into in their school family. The Governors are active and involved in both challenging and supporting the Catholic life of the school. The parents are actively drawn into making their contribution and participation in the school's prayer and outreach. The school promotes and maintains good partnership with its feeder parishes. It engages constructively with the diocesan services and advisory staff, providing a model for its engagement in developing its Catholic life.

Introduction

The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection. The inspectors spent one day in school, visited ten lessons and two assemblies, and carried out four interviews with school staff, pupils and governors. Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, discussion with local clergy, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

The Inspection of St Joseph's, Bishops Stortford was carried out under the requirements of the Canon 806 and Education Act 2005, and in accordance with the Framework for Section 48 Inspections approved by the Archbishop of Westminster. The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop. The inspection reviews and evaluates how effective the school is in providing Catholic education. This process begins with the school's own self-evaluation.

Inspection Team

Dcn Anthony Clark
Mrs Catherine Nathan

Lead Inspector
Associate Inspector

Description of School

The school is a one and a half form entry in the LA of Hertfordshire and the locality of Bishops Stortford. The school serves the parishes of St Joseph's in Bishops Stortford, Holy Cross in Much Hadham and Most Holy Redeemer in Sawbridgeworth. The proportion of pupils who are Catholics is 93.7%. The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 5.1%, from other faith backgrounds 0.3% and from no faith background 0.9%. The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 64.7%.

There are 346 pupils on roll, with 1 pupil with a statement of Special Educational Need. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is well below average. The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is average. There is a well below average rate of families claiming free school meals. Sixteen pupils receive the Pupil Premium.

Telephone: 01279 652576
e-mail address: admin@stjosephs207.herts.sch.uk

DFE Number: 9193318
URN Number: 117425

Headteacher: Mr Peter Coldwell
Chair of Governors: Mrs Suzanne Fitzgerald

Date of previous inspection: 15th September 2008

Key for inspection grades:

<i>Grade 1*</i>	<i>Outstanding</i>
<i>Grade 1</i>	<i>Very Good</i>
<i>Grade 2</i>	<i>Good</i>
<i>Grade 3</i>	<i>Requires improvement</i>
<i>Grade 4</i>	<i>Causing Concern</i>

A. Classroom Religious Education

How religiously literate are pupils in the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith and how well do they know, understand and appreciate the importance of religious faith and practice in everyday life?

What has improved in classroom religious education since the last inspection?

The school was recommended to continue to develop assessment procedures using the new national levels of attainment, and to develop religious education marking procedures so that pupils are aware how they could improve. The school has fully achieved these measures. In addition, the school has embedded the new planning model recommended by the diocese.

How well does the content of classroom religious education meet the requirements of the Curriculum Directory?

Grade I*

In order to meet the revised levels of attainment, the school replaced the 'Here I Am' scheme of work with the composite model developed by Margaret Carswell. In this way it ensures the taught curriculum meets the requirement of the Curriculum Directory. This decision to make the change came after a trial period which proved how successfully the new composite model aided the development of the religious literacy of the pupils. The induction of the staff into the new scheme ensured that they became thoroughly acquainted with the Curriculum Directory. Explicit links to the key objectives are highlighted within all planning. Staff strive to ensure that the lessons support cross curricular links, especially in the areas of art and drama. Pupils are introduced to knowing about other faiths, including visiting place of worship. Recently an Imam and a Rabbi visited the school. Mention must be made of the beautiful hangings made of material illustrating the typical themes of both Christianity and other faiths. In KS2 pupils are streamed according to need and talent to enable the most appropriate teaching pace and strategies be employed.

Pupil achievement (as well as attainment and progress) in religious education

Grade I

Pupil achievement, attainment and progress in religious education are very good. There is much evidence that the school has developed secure internal monitoring and evaluation systems as well as at deanery level. This ensures that religious education is measured against the appropriate benchmarks and attainment is recorded and progress tracked in line with other core subjects. The planning, use of assessment and National Levels of Attainment all assist teachers in making accurate judgements on pupil progress and attainment. Pupils have a very good understanding of the levels of attainment and are keen to discuss how they could use them along with feedback marking to make further progress. In the lessons observed, pupils were interested in their learning and actively engaged in lessons. Pupils spoken to were able to explain how the feedback marking and comments, as well as opportunities for self-assessment, helped them to improve and make further progress. The school makes very good provision for all groups of learners and they enjoy the variety of activities in lessons and most make very good progress. The school sets high expectations for the most able and pupils are taught in ability groups with appropriate challenge.

New staff are well supported by the headteacher and the religious education subject leader. All staff have the development of religious education as part of their continuing professional development opportunities, to enable them to develop and grow in their own knowledge and understanding of religious education and in their teaching of it. Pupils' books and written work are very well presented and give evidence of very good knowledge and understanding in religious education. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils reach or exceed diocesan expectations.

The quality of teaching

Grade I

The quality of teaching overall is very good with some outstanding lessons seen during the inspection. Monitoring of teaching shows high teacher expectation and pupils enjoy their learning. Planning across year groups is consistent and caters for all groups of learners and pupils make very good progress in religious education. Teaching includes a range of strategies and there are opportunities for assessment to improve pupils' learning on a regular basis. Pupils do understand how to improve their work and are able to explain their feedback in the marking. Teachers consistently check pupils' understanding in lessons to monitor progress. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and they plan creative lessons which consistently deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding and build on prior learning.

In lessons observed there was much focus on Pope Francis and the pupils were able to discuss his humility and "a sense of service" and clearly link this to scripture and current day examples. Homework is well matched to pupils' needs and also helps to develop their knowledge and understanding of religious concepts and meaning. Homework is supported through "Wednesday Word" and pupils are given weekly talking homework which is linked to the weekly Gospels to share with the family. The quality of teaching was measured through lesson observations, conversations with pupils in class and small group interviews with pupils, staff and governors, work scrutiny and documentation provided by the school. Teaching was never less than very good and outstanding practice was seen where questioning and activities and opportunities for pupils to share and express their learning were more challenging and encouraged independent learning. Excellent behaviour, very good teaching, planning and assessment ensure that pupils make very good progress over time.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade I*

The leadership and management of religious education is outstandingly effective. The coordinator, a member of the senior management team, has a clear vision for the development of the curriculum and has been the focus for the trialling and adopting the composite model programme recommended by the diocese. Given the turnover of staff this has meant mounting substantial programmes of introductory and ongoing professional development, resulting in a staff confident about delivering the curriculum in line with the RE Curriculum Directory. In the light of the necessary structure of teaching for a one and half entry school, that is, three classes for two years in years one and two, three and four and five and six, the vital importance of close and integrated coordination in the delivery of the religious education programme is recognised. In any grouping the three teachers work well together in joint planning and sharing their schemes of work and extended resources. The headteacher ensures that the structure of staff meetings and in-service gives sufficient time and resources for the proper implementation of religious education being at the core of the school's curriculum. The governing body, both through the curriculum link governor and the religious education link governor, ensure proper oversight and challenge to the delivery of religious education. The contribution of both these governors is well informed and devoted, thus ensuring the centrality of the subject.

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

- Maintain and develop the continuous professional development of teachers, both experienced and new, in the developing composite model for the religious education curriculum.
- Maintain and increase the percentage of pupils achieving the levels of attainment aspired to at the end of KS1 and KS2.
- Develop further links with the local Catholic secondary school to promote effective continuity in religious education between primary and secondary school.

B. The Catholic life of the school

How well do pupils experience the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing through all areas of school life?

What has improved since the last inspection?

The previous inspection made no specific recommendations for the Catholic life of the school. The school has developed in both whole school and class acts of worship more time for pupil reflection, thus enabling pupils to be more confident in leading prayer.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum – time, staffing, accommodation, resources, budget

Grade 1*

The headteacher, staff and governors by their focus and engagement, ensure that religious education is central to the life of the school. The budget for religious education is on a par or above that of other core subjects. Religious education receives the 10% of curriculum time required by the Archbishop throughout the phases of the school. Resources are updated on a regular basis, whether it is new materials for the new curriculum or artefacts for the creative display areas around the school and for the prayer tables in every classroom. The religious education link governor has contributed generously various resources to support teaching eg Catholic banners and artefacts. The professional development of teachers in an ongoing and measured structure is a key strength of the school. The headteacher and subject leader in religious education ensure that time and resources are given to in-service and resource provision, to ensure that every teacher is engaged in the delivery of very good provision and teaching of religious education. This was evidenced in the consistent high quality of teaching. Three teachers have the CCRS certificate and a fourth is in the process of studying for it. Both the headteacher and the deputy have attended diocesan inspector training and this has contributed to the religious education curriculum being central to the life of the school.

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

Grade 1*

Prayer and worship are central to the life of the school and is judged outstanding. They are a key part of every school celebration in assemblies. Daily class prayer times and opportunities for class worship are given a high profile and are well resourced. Daily acts of worship complement the whole school Good News and Key Stage Gospel liturgy assemblies held weekly. The school serves 3 parishes and pupils attend Mass at St Joseph's parish locally, with the aim of making closer links with the church. The Parish Priest celebrates Mass in school on Holy Days of Obligation and special celebrations. Assemblies are planned by teachers and include active pupil participation. Pupils are given frequent opportunities for spiritual development through reflection opportunities, class worship, sharing and discussion. The school celebrates all key events of the liturgical year and the Sacraments. The pupils are actively involved in the preparation and leadership of these liturgical events. Each classroom has a prayer table which is well displayed and in a prominent place in the room with opportunities for pupils to express their individual prayers and intentions. Pupils are reverent in their private prayer and reflections.

During the inspection there was an Awards Assembly led by the headteacher based on the school's Mission Statement and some parents were present. This reinforced the Mission Statement as a "living message" to the pupils and the school community. The governing body and especially the link religious education governor, are very involved and well informed about the religious life of the school and support the school very well. The religious education subject leader monitors and evaluates the prayer life of the school as part of the self-evaluation process.

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

Grade I*

The school employs its mission statement as the main vehicle for educating the pupils to the personal and social consequences of living out their baptismal promises and contributing to the Common Good. The mission statement is 'To live, love and learn in a caring Christian community'. The half termly Mission Statement Awards, which happily took place on the actual day of the inspection, provided clear evidence of how the living out of the mission statement is paramount to the school and carefully celebrated and reinforced. In this way the school has effectively established an environment where pupils flourish as they contribute, through their gifts and talents, to a community which is at the service of others. The school sees itself as integral in the community of Bishops Stortford, both ecclesial and social, and engages when it can, with surrounding institutions and charity drives. The school councillors, a pupil body, are not only consulted but actively involved in deciding how the funds raised should be spent. The pupils could speak articulately on what they were collecting for and the rationale behind it. They were aware of how they were the recipients of such great gifts from God and that sharing with others was very important. On occasion the pupils go off site to be involved, for example to the remembrance day service and to the local nursing home. The sense of responsibility for the well being of others and doing what one can both in the school and in the world beyond was evident in both pupil behaviour and in their verbal responses.

Enabling the authentic partnership between parents, school and parish as an integral part of the Diocese, particularly through its relationship with the Diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf;

Grade I*

The school is active and outgoing in its efforts to establish and develop partnership with parents, the parish and with the wider diocese. It has an excellent relationship with parents and engages with them in a number of ways, including sharing and sending home the Wednesday Word, the termly catholic paper Reach and also through its up to date and attractive school website. The school operates an open door policy and parents are encouraged to help out in the school in a number of ways. The Catholic theatre group Ten Ten recently presented a workshop for parents which parents found beneficial. They invited the parish priest of a neighbouring parish to talk about Prayer in the home and in the school, and this will be taken forward in meetings with an interested parents group. The school has good links with the local parish. The new parish priest is only in his second year in the parish and close working relationships have been established. The class masses have been transferred from the school to the parish, a short walk away, and the pupils are both seeing and being seen in a parish community. The school has scheduled corner in the parish newsletter and school events and celebrations are published in it. Plans are underway to make more use of the parish centre, and there are arrangements in hand for the pupils to attend retreat days there, led by pupils from St Mary's, the neighbouring Catholic secondary school.

The staff, governors and headteacher attend diocesan in-service training days and conferences. The headteacher attends the local Lea Valley headteachers' meetings as well as the county equivalent meetings. The religious education subject leader attends the termly deanery meetings, keeping fully abreast with the curriculum developments.

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

Grade 1*

The leadership and management is outstandingly effective in promoting the Catholic life of the school. Across the staff and governors of the school there is a clear vision of the Catholic nature of education and a commitment to promote the Catholic life of the school. The governors through their diverse levels of expertise and good organisation make a significant contribution to the Catholic dimension of the school. They have a good understanding of their strategic role and are active in both their challenge and support as link governors for subjects and areas of school life. The staff are effectively encouraged by the leadership and management of the school to participate fully in its Catholic life. The Mission statement is found to be known and effective in all aspects of the life of the school, eg staff and support staff attend Masses, lead trips to places of worship, deepen partnerships with parents and observe feast days. New staff receive excellent induction into the life of the school and in particular into its Catholic life. Teachers from other Christian denominations receive support to know about and how to contribute to the Catholic ethos they are working in.

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

- Provide parents support on how to pray with their children, eg the prayer workshop planned for the coming months
- Continue to build deeper links with the feeder parishes
- Promote and build on partnership with local parish and local secondary school towards running retreat days at the parish centre