



## **INSPECTION REPORT**

St Benedict's Catholic Primary

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*DfE Number: 9333358*

Head teacher: Mrs Cindy Stocking

Chair of Governors: Mr Jon Stratford

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**Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Clifton  
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005**

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Date of inspection: 10 -11<sup>th</sup> December 2015  
Date of previous inspection: 29<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> March 2011

Lead Inspector: Mrs A Barrett  
Additional Inspector: Mr F Toner

## **Description of School**

St Benedict's Catholic Primary is a smaller than average school with 177 on roll, of whom 40% are baptised Catholic. The school has served the Catholic population around Stratton-on-the-Fosse for over 175 years and continues to benefit from strong links with Downside Abbey. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below the national average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding (those eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care) is lower than average. The proportion of pupils who have a first language other than English is below the national average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above the national average.

## **Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school**

**Grade 2**

This is a good Catholic school because:

- governors and leaders are highly committed to maintaining and promoting the Catholic life of the school through 'strong, shared, moral leadership';
- governors and leaders have been highly effective in creating and sustaining an inclusive and open culture where all are valued;
- the school benefits from strong support from its parents who place a high value on its Catholic life and teaching of religious education (RE);
- pupils are proud of their inclusive Catholic family and their behaviour is exemplary;
- the head teacher (who is also RE coordinator) is committed to improving teaching and achievement in RE and to providing excellent support for staff;
- the quality of teaching in RE is good, resulting in good progress in lessons and achievement over time;
- teachers are enthusiastic and effective in promoting purposeful learning, engagement in and enjoyment of RE and are committed to improving their subject knowledge and practice.

The school is not yet outstanding because:

- there is a need to establish formal procedures to monitor and evaluate the Catholic life of the school and RE, to enable governors to become even more effective in providing strategic leadership and direction in these areas;
- pupils' attainment and progress could be further improved by providing pupils with regular planned opportunities to write in greater depth in order to enable them to gain and express a deeper knowledge and understanding of religious issues;
- there are insufficient opportunities for a greater number of pupils to regularly prepare and lead prayer and worship with confidence and enthusiasm from their earliest years, in a variety of gatherings.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop:

- the head teacher and governors are unreserved in their commitment to maintain and strive for improvement in the school's Catholic life and RE, in the context of a much more demanding inspection framework;
- the school has made good progress in addressing all the issues highlighted in the previous inspection and continues to address these;
- parents, staff and pupils are highly supportive of the school.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Establish formal procedures to monitor and evaluate the Catholic life of the school and RE to enable governors to become even more effective in providing strategic leadership and direction in these areas.
- Raise standards further in RE by providing pupils with regular planned opportunities to write in greater depth in order to enable them to gain and express a deeper knowledge and understanding of religious issues.
- Provide more opportunities for a greater number of pupils to regularly prepare and lead prayer and worship and encourage more to participate in the Leaders of Faith Chaplaincy group.
- Ensure that, in line with Bishops' Conference recommendations, at least one inset day per year is devoted explicitly to the Catholic nature of the school and that all staff attend this.

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## How good are outcomes for pupils, taking account of variations between different groups?

Grade 2

Pupils benefit significantly from the Catholic life of the school and make an important contribution to its ethos. They are proud of their inclusive Catholic family and enriched by the strong links with Downside Abbey. Pupils demonstrate, through their excellent behaviour and attitudes, high levels of respect for one another. Older pupils provide excellent role models for the younger ones and act as befrienders and prayer partners for them. Pupils respond enthusiastically to the opportunities provided for them to be involved in planning for class and whole school Masses. In particular, the recently established chaplaincy team of ten which is led by the link governor for chaplaincy, has been effective in planning and evaluating their prayer life, has played an important part in renovating the KS1 area dedicated to Mary, has led assemblies and helped with preparations for Mass and organised fundraising activities. These pupils are currently engaged in planning a reflection area for the KS2 playground. This bodes well for the future, with these pupils playing an important part in helping to develop pupil voice through their involvement in these initiatives, as well as providing feedback on their learning in RE. These pupils benefit greatly from this. The school should continue to explore ways of encouraging a wider range of children to participate in this excellent initiative alongside other opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities for shaping the Catholic life of the school.

Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of being aware of, and responding to, the needs of others, as demonstrated by their regular visits to local homes for the aged at Christmas and ongoing fundraising for local and Catholic charities. They have also raised money for international causes as part of the school's work on raising their global awareness through learning about other countries and exploring links with schools abroad. Plans are in hand to provide more opportunities for children to live their faith in the wider community.

Overall, taking account of their different starting points, the proportion of pupils making expected progress is good. Pupils enjoy their learning in RE and are growing in confidence in their ability to use religious language in a meaningful way. They work well in lessons, applying themselves to the tasks and work at a good pace. They seek to produce their best work and show interest and enthusiasm about their learning. They are becoming increasingly religiously literate and reflective in their oral responses. Across the school there is an increasing sense of purpose about learning in religious education with pupils responding well to the praise and rewards they receive for good effort.

Behaviour for learning in religious education (RE) is exemplary because of the excellent level of care, guidance and support given to pupils, modelled by the head teacher and well supported by all members of staff.

Prayer is central to the life of the school and underpins and supports its strong Catholic ethos. Pupils' response to, and participation in, the school's prayer life is good. All pupils know the traditional prayers of the church; they show respect when prayer is taking place and believe it is important to pray during the day. Discussions with pupils indicate that they have a good understanding of the importance of individual and collective prayer and are keen to fully participate in whole school and class assemblies, Mass, scripture or prayer services. The older pupils also help model the skills needed for younger pupils.

Overall, pupils prepare and lead worship with increasing confidence and independence as they move through the school and use a variety of approaches including scripture, music and religious artefacts especially in class worship. However, the school is aware that there are not yet sufficient opportunities for greater numbers of pupils to plan and prepare worship and is working to ensure that all pupils become more involved and skilled in this.

## **How effective are leaders and governors in developing the Catholic Life of the school?**

### **Grade 2**

Leaders and governors are highly committed to maintaining and promoting the Catholic life of the school through 'strong, shared, moral leadership'. They share a strong vision, which is welcoming and inclusive, based on Gospel values and on a clear understanding of the role of the school in the mission of the church. This ethos and the promotion of Catholic values is shared with staff, pupils, and parents and enhanced, in particular, by strong links with the Downside community and partnership with other Catholic schools in the South Clifton Catholic Federation (SCCF). The Mission Statement is well embedded and regularly discussed with both staff and pupils, with the latter creating their own class code based on it.

Governors, with the leadership provided by the head teacher, have been highly effective in creating an inclusive and open culture where all are valued. In particular, the head teacher has been very successful in engaging with parents and carers who value its strong Catholic ethos and are extremely supportive of it. This, combined with a newly formed staff team who are fully committed to the school's mission, bodes well for the future.

Leaders and governors are aware of the school's major strengths and areas for development in respect to its Catholic character. However, the provision and outcomes for the school's Catholic life need to be formally monitored and evaluated in order to build on good practice and plan for future improvements. Governors and leaders discharge their statutory and canonical duties but should ensure that, in line with Bishops' Conference recommendations, at least one inset day per year is devoted explicitly to the Catholic nature of the school and that all staff attend this.

Governors maintain oversight of religious education through the recently appointed link governor, in collaboration with the head teacher who is also the RE coordinator. The head teacher has been proactive in helping to make the school a more effective, self-evaluating community. This includes engaging in a range of monitoring activities with the link governor such as classroom observations, learning walks and scrutiny of pupils' work. Although the outcomes of these are recorded and shared with relevant staff, governors need to ensure that formal procedures are established so that the outcomes of this monitoring, and progress in implementing the RE Development Plan, is regularly reported to them. This will enable governors to become even more effective in providing strategic leadership and direction in relation to the provision for Catholic life and RE and measuring the impact of actions.

Teachers are growing in confidence in implementing the new RE scheme, due to the ongoing support provided for them by the head teacher. In particular, she has been instrumental in significantly improving the quality and use of assessment data so that it is in line with other core subjects. This, alongside an appropriately adapted use of the 'God Matters' scheme, has provided a uniform procedure to track progress and measure attainment. The school is committed to improving this further by honing teachers' skills, through moderation and INSET, to ensure that their understanding of sub-levelling is accurate and assessment data is therefore

robust.

Governors are committed to supporting teachers' professional development in RE by encouraging staff to attend appropriate diocesan courses. Currently one teacher is in the process of completing the CCRS (Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies) and another the Aspiring Leaders course.

## **How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?**

### **Grade 2**

Teaching and learning in religious education is good with most pupils achieving well over time, considering their different starting points. Pupils enjoy the subject, take pride in their work and have extremely positive attitudes to learning. Working relationships between teachers and students are excellent. Lessons are well planned and resourced with teachers demonstrating an ongoing commitment to improving their subject knowledge and practice. Where teaching was at its best, expectations of pupils were high and set the right level of challenge. In addition, questioning was skilful and effectively used to challenge pupils to think 'outside the box', to empathise with different viewpoints and give informed reasons for their answers.

However, attainment and progress could be further improved by providing pupils with regular planned opportunities to write in greater depth in order to enable them to gain and express a deeper knowledge and understanding of religious issues. This should include a sharper focus on developing and applying a range of pupils' skills, including the ability to interpret sources and symbols and consider the impact of religious ideas on their daily lives. This, in turn, will develop their confidence as independent learners.

Teachers are growing in confidence in their use of assessment and target setting due to the school's ongoing focus on improving the impact of assessment strategies through regular training. This is based on sub-leveilling guidance from the diocese, and monitoring provided by the head teacher. The school has developed a rigorous tracking system which impacts positively on standards and progress, providing a firm basis for appropriate diagnosis of pupils' strengths and areas for further development. Assessment is used effectively throughout the school by teachers in setting targets for improvement but at times activities are not always sufficiently challenging to enable the more able pupils to attain the higher levels. Marking and feedback is good, however pupils are not always consistently given time to respond to questions in order to further enhance their learning. Teachers are developing an informed and accurate understanding of pupils' achievement in Religious Education. The school is committed to raising the quality of RE teaching to outstanding by encouraging more teachers to complete the CCRS (Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies) and attend the diocesan three day RE modular course.

The RE curriculum meets all Bishops' Conference requirements and is responsive to diocesan guidelines. The curriculum includes the study of other faiths and links with a multifaith school in Bristol. Opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and vocational development are effectively promoted across the school. The provision for relationship and sex education is coherently planned and is consistent with the teaching of the Church and diocesan guidelines.

Prayer is inclusive and central to the life of the school. The Church seasons and feasts are well celebrated through Mass, daily acts of whole school or class worship, and opportunities to pray at key points in the day. Reconciliation services are held during Lent and Advent and attended

and supported by priests from the Downside community. One of these priests is the school chaplain and is a frequent and supportive presence in the school. Daily Lenten reflections during Holy Week encourage children and staff to reflect on the key events. Opportunities are provided to pray the Stations of the Cross and Rosary in special liturgical celebrations and a lunchtime prayer club is provided during specific months (e.g. May) to enable children to reflect further on their faith and beliefs. This provision should be formally monitored and evaluated in order to lead to effective planning for improvement, especially in relation to opportunities for pupils to lead, organise and participate actively in worship

### **Summary of Parental Questionnaires**

There were 93 parental questionnaires received. All were extremely positive about the school. A very small number of parents requested being kept informed about their child's progress in RE.

Some typical responses included:

'Each child is seen as a true individual and not only taught to their potential but grows to learn the caring and thoughtful behaviour shown to them during their time at St. Benedict's'

'I am extremely impressed with the strong values, attitudes and the clear commitment that the staff constantly demonstrate.'

'The school is an extremely friendly school with a personal touch. My child and I feel very valued.'

'The sense of being part of a family. The feeling when you enter the school is one of belonging and safety.'