



## **INSPECTION REPORT**

### **St. Bernard's RC Primary School**

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URN: 109246

Headteacher: Mrs Meg Wilson

Chair of Governors: Mr Stephen Draper

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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: 18-19<sup>th</sup> January 2018  
Date of previous inspection: 10<sup>th</sup> December 2012

Reporting Inspector: Mr Joseph Skivington  
Additional Inspector: Mrs Carol Baron

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## Description of the school

St. Bernard's is a smaller than average-sized primary school, with a current roll of 202. Of these children, 78% are Catholic. It serves the parish of St. Bernard, Shirehampton, in Bristol. The majority of children are White British, with 36% from ethnic minorities, but almost all from Christian backgrounds. The proportions of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs are significantly below the national average. Pupils who have English as an Additional Language (EAL), make up 23% of the roll. Pupils join the school with a baseline level of prior knowledge and experience of religious practice below expectations. The school has seen significant turnover of staff since the last inspection and currently has three newly qualified teachers (NQT).

## Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school (summary statement)

Grade 2

This is a good school because:

- The governing body and all leaders are totally committed to the promotion and nurturing of the school's Catholic life and collective worship, and have sustained good provision and outcomes by successfully implementing improvements since the last inspection.
- It is a fully inclusive school where pupils, their parents and carers, from all faiths and none, are made welcome, and where every individual is treated with respect and shown genuine interest and support.
- The behaviour of pupils and their care for others is excellent. They are role models for each other and this contributes enormously to the spirituality and ethos of the school. Their behaviour for learning is positive, they enjoy their RE lessons, and they make good progress from their starting points because of good and better teaching.

### The capacity of the school community to improve and develop is good

- The senior leadership team has sustained the previous good practice noted in the last inspection. The governors are an effective, challenging body, and know the school well, so are able to provide support and challenge. Through consultation with parents, staff, and pupils the school has a realistic view of what has to be done to improve even further, and crucially follows this through.
- The embedded procedures for monitoring provision and outcomes enable strengths and weaknesses to be highlighted, and action taken to improve practice and outcomes. The areas for development highlighted in the last inspection have been addressed and improved despite the intervening changes of staff. There is an embedded formative marking policy, and teachers' pupil assessment skills are developing thanks to intensive support, which is resulting in the increasingly relevant, individual learning objectives. The quality of teaching is not yet outstanding but much teaching is good, and existing best practice is being shared with other teachers.
- The capacity to sustain and build on the present good provision and outcomes for Catholic Life and religious education is secure, because there are clear responsibilities and expectations of the whole staff and governing body. Parish links are strong and the school shows an active

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awareness of the bishop's vision for the diocese, 'A Future full of Hope', and is taking full advantage of diocesan training and guidance.

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

- Disseminate and employ learning strategies which help pupils best, through more probing, challenging questioning, and differentiated learning tasks, to develop their competence as independent learners who actively seek to improve their knowledge, understanding, and skills.
- Enhance the impact of next step marking by correcting misunderstandings, improving the challenge in teacher's formative comments, and a higher expectation of quality response from the pupils.

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

**Grade 2**

### **a) The extent to which pupils understand, contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school**

- Pupils have a good understanding of what it means to be in a Catholic school and how it differs from other schools. They can articulate, for instance, the impact that the prayer life of the school has on their actions and their relationship with others, specifically why they behave towards others, 'because that's what Jesus teaches us'. This is also amply demonstrated in their interpretations of the school's mission statement, which are displayed in the entrance foyer and around the school, and include references to equality with a link to UNICEF and British values.
- Pupils contribute not only by their excellent behaviour both in lessons and around the school, but also through pupil conferencing. This provides essential feedback, which is built into the school improvement plans. Pupils increasingly take on a range of responsibilities, which shows they are alert to the needs of others, and enables them to become excellent carers and role models for the younger children. Their charity outreach is both local and global, such as the local residential home, Shoes for Africa, Miles for Refugees, Macmillan Nurses, Mission Together, and food and clothes banks.
- The chaplaincy team plays a vital role in sustaining and enriching the Catholic life of the school and have written the school prayer. They organise after school chaplaincy clubs, and run very successful lunch time groups in their own dedicated prayer area; for example, exploring the lives and impact of 'legends' - famous people who are worthy role models. There is also an attractive outside prayer area, which they tend and which is well used. They model child-led reflections in classes throughout the school, as well as preparing and leading the weekly Key Stage 2 assembly. They publish a regular chaplaincy newsletter as well as being well represented at the parish Masses and liturgies as servers or readers.
- The RE and chaplaincy team's current action plan includes the evaluation of Catholic life, the development of Mission Together and the launch of the new 'A Future Full of Hope. The Leaders in Faith programme is also being considered. All this good work can be widened to involve even

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more pupils participating in and contributing actively to the Catholic life of the school, with every individual playing their part.

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

- Pupils enter the school at varied levels of attainment and understanding of religious knowledge and practice. Taking account of their starting points, pupils make steady progress through the early years so that by the end of Key Stage 1 they have achieved in line with expectation. The quality and quantity of work, and the pace of progress over time, is good, with some inconsistency linked to (now resolved) staffing issues in Year 2.
- Progress at Key Stage 2 matches the quality of work seen in the earlier years, so that the outcomes in both attainment and achievement are good, with some better than expected. Pupils are able to reflect on the meaning of the Gospel accounts and make links between scripture and their life experiences. In conversation they were impressively secure and fluent in interpreting the meaning of the parables, miracles, and teachings of Jesus.
- Disadvantaged pupils, and those with special educational needs, or EAL pupils, make similar progress to the other pupils because of effective, planned interventions, some differentiated tasks and the support of learning assistants. These pupils' oral contributions in lessons are thoughtful and show good understanding but these gains need to be captured and referenced to ensure accurate assessment.
- The level indicators at the front of class books are helpfully shaded to inform the pupil what they have achieved. More pupils could achieve even further with more challenging learning objectives. The school is well aware of this and is focused on the crucial need to deepen the teachers' own understanding of the topics, so that they, in turn, can challenge and lead the pupils in their learning.
- Pupils are proud of their achievements and demonstrate a positive interest in learning new things and ideas. There are signs that strategies to encourage independent learning and research skills are being employed, but this is work in progress and as yet not consistent across the school. They enjoy their RE lessons and work well in groups or pairs with enthusiasm and engagement. They can reflect critically on our faith story, but also on the faith story of others, especially through topics on the major religions, but also during the annual dedicated World Faith Week.

**c) How well pupils lead, respond to and participate in the Prayer Life of the School**

- All pupils irrespective of faith background participate fully, and feel included, in the prayer life of the school. They showed reverence, attentiveness, and willingness to play their part in the Key Stage assemblies, and a whole school Celebration Assembly, with prayer and singing, led by the chaplaincy team. This includes the children in early years who showed an awareness of the special time for prayer.
- The chaplaincy team takes the lead in promoting prayer life, and they are excellent role models as well as animators. They organise the Monday Gospel assembly and plan and prepare class and whole school assemblies.
- Whole school and class Masses are celebrated regularly, both in school and in the adjoining parish church, ensuring all pupils are included. Class Masses, where parents join their children are very special celebrations and have a great impact on all present. The parish priest is a supportive and inspiring presence in the school.

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- Pupils are helped to develop their knowledge of the sacramental life of the Church, especially the sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion, and Reconciliation. While most pupils can name the sacraments, not all can articulate what a sacrament is or means.
  - The pupils value the many prayer opportunities which punctuate the school day. They compose their own prayers and reflections, which are sometimes displayed on the pupil-monitored prayer tables. These tables, however, could be more distinctive and colourful, acting as a record of the spiritual and prayer journey and reflections of that particular year group.
  - The school's prayer life contributes significantly to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils. There is nevertheless more scope for all pupils to develop the skills of initiating, planning and the presenting their liturgies and assemblies. This is a clear objective already in the school development plan and progressing well.

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

**Grade 2**

### **a) How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils**

- Leaders and governors effectively promote, nurture, and sustain the Catholic ethos of the school as their primary concern and care, and it is the main focus of their strategic planning. They meet all statutory, canonical, and diocesan requirements fully and strive to bring to reality the call to be a People of Hope.
- The governing body is a knowledgeable and hands-on influence in the life of the school. They are well informed and active in all aspects of school life. There is some evidence of challenge and accountability in the governors' minutes, and the reports on governors' school visits. These could be better highlighted and referenced. The governors have benefited from diocesan training and are up to date with the Bishop's Pastoral Plan for the diocese.
- There is a commitment from every member of the staff to work together to achieve the best for the pupils, as well as promoting Catholic values across all the subjects. Staff morale and their investment in the school is good and they are role models for their charges. The pupils themselves were involved in a re-visit and reflection on the mission of the school and have expressed it in child friendly language displayed around the classrooms and corridors.
- There are well-embedded processes in place to monitor and evaluate provision and outcomes for the Catholic life of the school. These are detailed so that the school leadership can more accurately assess and record the impact of its actions, and can quickly re shape its improvement planning where necessary, acting on the feedback from pupils and parents. Not all the impact statements, however, are clear and sometimes read like success criteria.
- The governors' monitoring schedule is closely linked to the school development plan priorities. There is ample evidence of governors' visits to the school and of reviews and evaluative reports, especially the support given by the RE link governor. Parents are kept informed of school events through regular newsletters and email. They attend Masses and assemblies whenever they can.

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- The spiritual life of the staff is well nurtured and celebrated, through regular Inset on Catholic life and spirituality, such as the October meeting on Prayer, Saints, and Feasts. The school works collaboratively with other schools in the Newman partnership and benefits from inspirational INSET days which help bind staff, Catholic and non-Catholic, together in commitment and unity of purpose, sharing the same goals and values of the school's mission.
- b) How well leaders and governors monitor and evaluate the curriculum for Religious Education and relationship education, and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils**
- Leaders and governors use data and monitoring information well to ensure careful oversight of the RE curriculum and learning outcomes. The governors receive regular reports from the head teacher and the newly appointed RE coordinator, but are also kept closely informed through feedback from governor visits to the school. Governors challenge, question, and hold senior leaders and staff to account. They are giving excellent support to the RE leader and to all the teachers, and this is having a positive impact on teaching and learning.
  - Lesson observations and book scrutinies are used to monitor progress, and these feed into INSET and support for teachers. Staff feedback on this support is very positive. Parents are full of praise for the teaching their children receive. Subject development plans are drawn up based on the monitoring data gathered and used as detailed working documents.
  - The provision for staff induction, in-service training, and diocesan training is particularly supportive for the teaching of RE. The school is acutely aware of the inexperience of the newly qualified teachers and particularly their, sometimes, weaker subject knowledge. It is addressing this area with significant extra support, such as modelling and peer observations, alongside inspiring training provided by the diocese within the Newman Partnership. This has resulted in teachers slowly becoming more confident in assessment and in setting learning objectives. There is similar work being done in building levelling skills, which is supported by joint moderation with other schools in the Newman Partnership. The RE lead is also supported by the other RE coordinators in the partnership.

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

**Grade 2**

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

- The quality of teaching is good overall, with some weaker but also some potentially outstanding aspects observed during the inspection. The good teaching is effective in promoting purposeful learning, the engagement of the pupils, their enjoyment, and their overall good and better results. The pupils' very positive attitudes to learning have a strong impact on their progress and achievement. Learning assistants are involved in planning lessons with the teacher, so that interventions have a positive effect. Where there are weaknesses in planning for learning, or subject knowledge, teachers receive swift and effective support through specific training and peer observations.
- Teachers have a good rapport with their pupils and in the best practice have high expectations of pupils' presentation of work and intellectual effort. As a result, the pupils rise to the challenge

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and are able to contribute their own arguments and opinions. Where teaching has less impact on progress, the challenge is not there because teachers do not ask probing questions to challenge or check understanding or miss opportunities to initiate discussion or invite challenging questions. This is due in some part to an understandable lack of confidence which is, however, rapidly improving with time and training.

- The marking of pupils' work policy is adhered to, but there are some inconsistencies and gaps which reduce its effectiveness - such as statements from pupils which show misunderstanding, or which are patently wrong, and which are not picked up and corrected. Where the pupil response to challenging formative comments is thoughtful and accurate, progress over time is very evident and there is good evidence this is also an improving picture across the school.
- Teachers' skills and expertise in assessing pupils' attainment and progress are growing thanks to CPD, but also the joint moderation days within the Newman Partnership, so that they can arrive at reliable judgements on individual achievement and progress over time, and to ensure assessment has a real impact on learning.

#### **b) The extent to which the Curriculum promotes pupils' learning**

- The RE curriculum meets all Bishops Conference's requirements. It is broad and balanced so that pupils can explore and develop their own values and beliefs. The school is constantly re-appraising the RE syllabus to find more relevant approaches to the teaching of RE.
- Pupils discuss themes such as peace, fairness, compassion and injustice, which they then link to the objects of their charity fundraising, and outreach to others in society who are more needy. Learning from religion is a real strength of the school.
- Continuity and progression within and across the key stages ensures that pupils whatever their starting points are able to make the expected progress. There is a constant need to ensure depth is always encouraged through questioning and addressing misunderstanding. However, the older pupils in particular do display a secure grasp of the topics they have studied, and exhibit a remarkable maturity.
- The study of other world faiths through the annual World Faith Week and visits to other places of worship ensure ample time to explore and understand other major world religions and to promote tolerance, understanding, and respect for others' beliefs. There are also some excellent cross-curricular displays around the school.
- Provision for sex and relationship education, using the Journey in Love programme, is in place and approved by the governors adhering to diocesan guidelines. The wider curriculum successfully promotes spiritual, moral and vocational development, and is taught through the lens of the Faith. The First Holy Communion preparation is run by the parish in collaboration with the school.
- The school is planning further topics on Fair Trade, Slavery, and Equal Rights. The pupils also learn much from their links to the Inchinga School in South Africa.

#### **c) The quality of the Prayer life provided by the School**

- The quality of the prayer life of the school is good. It is fully inclusive and joyful. Prayer punctuates the school day and is part of every celebration. A well-planned timetable of Masses and assemblies follows the liturgical year, including traditional Catholic practices such as the Rosary, Advent and Lent celebrations, and the Stations of the Cross. The Pentecost Mass and the Ash Wednesday liturgy were inspiring.

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- The prayer areas inside and outside the school are well used and promote a good quality of spiritual experiences. The Year 4 pupils joined their counterparts in Our Lady of the Rosary and St. Teresa in a joint retreat in a local Baptist church.
  - Pupils' knowledge of the traditional Catholic prayers is progressive and age-related. There are prayers for every year group on the website. Mass responses are taught and the different parts of the Mass are explained and made relevant. For example, in the Class Masses pupils bring up objects that they treasure or symbols of their talents during the Offertory procession.
  - The parish priest makes an important and valued contribution to the spiritual life of the school, supporting its role in the wider mission of the parish and the universal Church. The parish church, close by the school, is an excellent resource and draws the school into the life of the parish. Teachers and pupils have created colourful and thought-provoking displays around the school, which remind the whole community of the liturgical cycle, and the topics the pupils are currently studying. A selection of parables and their meanings are displayed around the dining hall.
  - Parents and carers are invited to attend Mass and assemblies and many do. The school is keen to encourage more parents to become involved in the prayer life of the school. The school newsletter and website keep parents fully involved about what is going on in school. Every opportunity is taken to for joint worship with the other schools in the Newman partnership.

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## Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were 80 parental questionnaires returned. All were positive about the school and the quality of their children's education. Some typical responses included:

*'The school has a caring ethos and the children are happy. We are always made to feel welcome'.*

*'The school chooses to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and teach His love for us and others'.*

*'Although the school does not seek my opinions they listen when I have any concerns and are compassionate and considerate. I am not provided with clear RE information, but it is there if you look for it'.*

*'The children get a lot of spiritual, emotional and academic support'.*

*'It was important for us as parents for our children to attend our local Catholic school with the strong links to the church we attend. The school is like a family. Every child is valued'.*

*'The staff are always friendly and helpful, especially at the reception office'.*

*'All the children are kind and help each other'.*

*'Great P.T.A. and inclusive attitude'.*