



## INSPECTION REPORT

### **St Catherine's Catholic Primary School**

Davenwood, Stratton Saint Margaret, Swindon, SN2 7LL

Telephone: 01793 822699

E-mail address: [admin@stcatherines.swindon.sch.uk](mailto:admin@stcatherines.swindon.sch.uk)

DfE Number: 8663439

Headteacher: Mrs Clare-Marie Burchall  
Chair of Governors: Fr Michael McAndrew

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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: October 16<sup>th</sup>- 17<sup>th</sup> 2014  
Date of previous inspection: March 22<sup>nd</sup>- 23<sup>rd</sup> 2010

Reporting Inspector: Mrs Anne Barrett  
Additional Inspector: Mrs Celia Dolan

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## Description of School

St Catherine's is an average size primary school, unusual in the fact that it is one of two schools serving the same parish, St Mary's Swindon. Pupils come from a range of social and economic backgrounds. It has a wide catchment serving two postcodes, the local neighbourhood of SN2 and the new northern expansion of SN25 which is continuing to expand. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average as is the percentage of pupils supported by school action plus or with a statement for SEN. The school enjoys good relationships with the parish and strong support from parents. It converted to an academy in September 2012. In August 2012 the headteacher of 10 years retired and the headteacher of the sister parish school became the executive head of St Catherine's and St Mary's. This has led to a closer collaborative working partnership with St Mary's which became an academy in August 2011.

### Key for inspection grades

Grade 1: Outstanding; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Requires improvement in order to be good; Grade 4: Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

**Grade 2**

This is a good Catholic school because:

- The school is an inclusive community where all work effectively together to promote a culture of welcome and belonging and pupils benefit considerably from the Catholic life offered.
- This view is shared by parents who are highly supportive of the school's work and are delighted with the caring, Catholic family that it provides.
- Pupils are very proud of their school. They are confident and eager to tell visitors how much they enjoy their learning and how much they respect and like their teachers.
- Pupils' active participation and interest in prayer is a clear strength of the school because they are provided with rich opportunities to develop and experience prayer in its many forms.
- The vast majority of pupils are well behaved and motivated and are making good progress in RE
- The inspirational leadership of the executive headteacher in the promotion and monitoring of the Catholic Life of the school ensures that its Catholic mission is at the heart of all that it does.
- Governors and all leaders have a strong commitment to developing the Catholic Life of the school.
- Teachers are committed, enthusiastic and skilled, with the quality of teaching in RE being at least good in most years. The best teaching provides high levels of challenge and stimulating activities that allow pupils to apply what they know and can do to new learning.

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The school is not yet outstanding because:

- Pupils in reception and year 1 do not make good progress or reach the standards of which they are capable of in RE as they do in other years. There is not the same sense of enjoyment in the subject as demonstrated by other years, although it is evident in other areas such as prayer and worship.
- Teaching in reception and year 1 requires improvement
- Further development is needed to enable chaplaincy to become an established feature across the school
- The new revised RE scheme 'Come and See' needs to be fully embedded across the school

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

- The school has made good progress in addressing all the issues highlighted in the previous inspection.
- Parents, staff and pupils are highly supportive of the school
- The Governing Body works closely with the executive headteacher to ensure that the Catholicity of the school is an integral part of all aspects of its work
- In order to maintain the capacity to improve and develop, governors must put in place robust procedures to ensure that the successor to the current executive headteacher sustains and builds on the excellent progress to date.

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

- Improve the rates of progress for pupils in reception and year 1 by ensuring that teachers provide more appropriate and challenging activities for all groups
- Further strengthen the current programme of monitoring schemes of work in RE by including a more explicit focus on evaluating impact.
- Governors should work closely with the Diocese to ensure effective succession planning when the executive headteacher leaves at Easter 2015
- Strengthen the role of the link governor for RE by providing further opportunities for him to be actively involved in shaping and supporting the subject.

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

#### **Grade 2**

Pupils are extremely proud of being part of St Catherine's and feel safe and happy. The school is an inclusive community where all work effectively together to promote a culture of welcome and belonging and pupils benefit considerably from the Catholic life offered. Pupils refer with

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confidence to their mission statement that 'Jesus is at the centre of everything we do', acknowledging Him as their role model. They have a well developed understanding of their patron saint and enthusiastically put into practice her epithet to be 'the person God wants you to be and you will set the world on fire'. There is clear linkage here with the diocesan theme of Creating a Culture of Vocation, with the school actively helping pupils to discover that they are loved by God and in turn they are called to love. All pupils are strongly encouraged to discover their own gifts and talents and to use these to help others to build God's kingdom. Most pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of the links between faith and life through their active involvement with a range of charities. For example, a group of pupils spoke enthusiastically about raising money for a local charity who feed the homeless and poor of Swindon over the Christmas period, because 'that is what Jesus would do as he told the rich young man to sell what he had and give to the poor but he just couldn't do that as he had too many possessions'. All pupils are encouraged to help others less fortunate than themselves through their involvement in a variety of charities such as CAFOD Harvest Fast Day, Diabetes UK, raising money and collecting and distributing food to elderly neighbours, Swindon Food Bank and The Women's Refuge. As a result, they are developing their understanding of the idea of service and respond readily to the needs of others and of those in the wider community. In addition, pupils are encouraged to develop their Christian leadership skills by being given responsibilities through initiatives such as the buddy system, junior play leaders, house captains and the prefect system, which have a clear focus on helping others. Anti-bullying ambassadors and a member of the young carer group spoke about the importance of their role in helping children who 'feel lost' and 'just need someone to talk to if they are feeling alone'.

The school is proactive in promoting a culture of respect and an appreciation of the faith of others which is different from their own. One pupil from the Anglican tradition spoke about how much she enjoyed being at St Catherine's and how 'the pupils respect my faith and interests'

In years 2 to 6, pupils were well behaved and motivated about their work and are making good progress in relation to their starting points. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about their enjoyment of RE. 'RE is fun and we learn such a lot about our faith and how to be a better person'. In particular they value the variety of learning styles and approaches adopted by their teachers which allows them to work independently, in pairs, groups and as a whole class. They appreciate the comments that their teachers make in their exercise books and are clear about what they have to do in order to improve. A number of pupils commented on the improvements in RE since the arrival of the executive headteacher. 'We have more RE than we used to....we look a bit deeper into the Bible stories and make links between the stories and our lives'. Pupils have a real sense of pride in their written work as demonstrated by the quality and presentation in their exercise books. However, in reception and year 1, pupils do not make good progress or reach the standards of which they are capable. There is not the same sense of enjoyment in the subject as demonstrated by other years, although it is evident in other areas such as prayer and worship.

Pupils' active participation and interest in prayer is a clear strength of the school. Prayer is clearly central to its life, with pupils being provided with rich opportunities to develop and experience prayer in its many forms. Pupils are taught the traditional prayers of the church as well as being encouraged to make up their own and pray spontaneously. Daily meditation is a strong feature of the school and takes place each day after lunch time. This is effective in developing contemplative prayer and is highly regarded by both pupils and staff. One year four pupil commented that 'meditation is a nice time to be quiet with yourself and get closer to God'. Pupils demonstrate respect for each other and are confident, reverential and at ease

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when praying, both in class and with the whole school community. Singing hymns is a joyful and prayerful experience and an integral feature of school life. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of scripture in their prayer life, which is evident from their clear articulation of the meaning of the scriptural reading of the week. It is read aloud each day, revisited in assemblies and prominently displayed in classrooms and key points across the school. During the inspection, two whole school assemblies were observed, with pupils taking a full part in planning and leading the worship through singing, acting, reading from scripture, responding to questions and bidding prayers. This is a regular feature of school life, with all classes taking a turn to plan and lead. These assemblies were effective in supporting and developing pupils' private and public prayer. The prayer room (The Sanctuary) has recently become active after a period of not being used and is now well attended by younger pupils during break and lunch times. During the inspection, pupils were observed prayerfully engaged in praying the rosary and learning about the resurrection of Jesus. Strategies should be put in place to encourage older pupils to make use of The Sanctuary on a more regular basis and as a focal point for chaplaincy work.

Collective worship is held daily as part of a whole school or class activity. In addition, RE lessons always include an element of worship in order to highlight that what is learned within the lesson is of great importance in their own faith development. This is effective in enabling pupils to understand that worship is an integral part of life and can take place anywhere.

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

### **Grade 2**

Leaders and governors have a strong commitment to developing the Catholic Life of the school and act as role models for others. All strategic decisions taken by governors clearly reflect the diocesan guidelines 'People of Hope' with a clear focus on deepening prayer, enabling communion and strengthening mission. All Bishops' Conference requirements are met.

The school improvement plan, which sets out its strategic direction, is explicit in its commitment to 'Spiritual Direction' with a clear statement of intent that 'Creating a Culture of Vocation' should underpin every aspect of school life. The school's self-evaluation is clear and accurate.

The inspirational leadership of the executive headteacher in the promotion and monitoring of the Catholic Life of the school ensures that its Catholic mission is at the heart of all that it does and is a priority along with pupils' spiritual and moral development. She is well supported by her leadership team and together they give clear religious direction to the whole school through their proactive involvement in assemblies, hymn practices and leading staff prayer. Parents and pupils hold the Catholic life of the school in high regard. The vision of the leadership team is effectively articulated to all staff and pupils through these assemblies, and to their families through school Masses and assemblies, which they are invited to attend. There is a clear expectation of all teachers, through performance management, that they support the Catholic ethos by explicitly contributing to the spiritual, moral and social development of pupils through participation in RE training, delivery of RE lessons and the preparation of Masses and assemblies.

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The parish priest is a prominent and active member of the school community who offers support to RE lessons through leading sessions on such topics as baptism and vocations. This is effective in ensuring that there is a close link between parish and school which in turn helps develop pupils' understanding of the wider church.

The executive headteacher, in her role as RE co-ordinator, regularly attends diocesan meetings and ensures that all staff share a common vision through her clear promotion of RE and effective dissemination of good practice. This, along with the new RE scheme 'Come and See', has made a significant contribution to improving standards in RE since the last inspection.

The executive headteacher regularly reports to governors on different aspects of the Catholic Life of the school. These reports are informed by regular learning walks with governors, which include work scrutinies, and curriculum committee meetings which focus on RE and reports from the school improvement partner (who is a Catholic) on the quality of provision in the school. This range of monitoring and reporting strategies is effective in enabling leaders and governors to gain an accurate understanding of strengths and areas for development. This is then articulated in specific targets for spiritual development as a whole school area as well as specific targets for RE. This could be further strengthened by providing planned opportunities for the link governor for RE to become more actively involved in monitoring the subject through learning walks and other monitoring activities.

The highly effective role the executive headteacher plays as RE co-ordinator, combined with the unequivocal leadership she provides in promoting pupils' spiritual and moral development, is to be commended.

However, governors should work closely with the diocese to ensure that her successor continues to sustain and improve on the excellent progress to date.

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

### **Grade 2**

Teaching is good in years 2 to 6, with examples of outstanding practice in year 5 and 6. Consequently, pupils make good progress and demonstrate in both lessons and discussions with inspectors, a real sense of enjoyment and commitment to RE. They are proud of their work as shown in the care taken with presentation and the quality of work in books and classroom displays. Where teaching was good, pupils were fully engaged in tasks, principally because of the range and challenge provided through these. In a year 2 lesson on Shabbat, very effective use was made of recapping and reviewing learning through role play, which included children making challah bread for a Shabbat meal.

Assessment is frequent and accurate and is used to set challenging work that builds on prior religious knowledge, understanding and skills. Marking Ladders in R.E. are firmly based on the strand and levels of attainment as set out in the Catholic Directory.

Pupils' work is regularly marked and teachers are diligent in correcting errors and providing written feedback which invites pupils to respond in turn to the comments. Overall, there is an appropriate balance of marking for literacy and for religious understanding.

In the best lessons, pupils were encouraged to develop their knowledge and understanding through independent and group research, within a structured and supportive setting, with tasks carefully devised to ensure that all made appropriate progress. For example in a year 6 lesson

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on vocations, the teacher engendered a rich and poignant quality of learning, leading one pupil to explain that we 'don't have to understand everything because it is a mystery of God'. This lesson was characterised by a strong culture of high expectations, excellent teacher knowledge and sense of joy. Overall, technology is used effectively to enthuse and motivate pupils in an imaginative and creative way.

In Reception and Year 1 pupils do not make good progress so do not always reach the standards of which they are capable. In particular, the most able pupils are often set work which is too easy. Teachers do not plan work that consistently builds on what pupils already know, understand and can do. Pupils do not respond quickly enough to staff's instructions and requests, leading to the flow of the lessons being interrupted and low-level disruption occurring.

The RE curriculum meets all Bishops' Conference requirements. The school follows the 'Come and See' scheme of work which it has effectively adapted and developed to meet the needs of pupils by providing a firm foundation in Catholic doctrine through engaging and challenging activities. This is effective in encouraging pupils to think reflectively and to become literate in their faith. Where appropriate, RE is skilfully woven into other areas such as art, dance and forest school activities. This, and the clear linkage with assemblies, which are based around the current theme of study in RE, plays a significant part in providing opportunities for pupils' moral, spiritual and vocational development. All classes have a focal area where prayers and sacred text are displayed and the seasons of the Church's year celebrated. These areas, alongside class and whole school displays, reflect the school's commitment to developing 'respect for self, compassion for others and concern for the whole of creation'. This is evident through pupils' involvement in CAFOD Harvest Fast Day, Lent Fast Day and other appropriate days in the Liturgical calendar. The close links with the parish are evident in school Masses with parishioners on special feast days such as the Feast day of St Catherine of Siena on 29<sup>th</sup> April, at the start of the school year and at the First Communions. The school is inclusive, welcoming visitors of other faiths to lead in Assembly and to work with the pupils to promote a greater understanding of social cohesion.

Relationship and sex education is coherently planned and consistent with the teaching of the Church and diocesan guidelines and has effective links with science and personal, social and health education. The school uses a range of appropriate resources and strategies, building on pupils' prior knowledge and understanding. This includes the school nurse teaching year 6 pupils, visits from the Life Education Bus and an annual performance by the Ten Ten Theatre Group of three plays focused upon relationship education, based on Gospel values, followed by a parent information session at the end of the school day.

Prayer is central to the life of this school and an integral part of every celebration in its life. All aspects of prayer are promoted across the school, including the reading of the week being heard each day, standard prayer taught, pupils encouraged to pray spontaneously and take part in daily meditation.

The prayer room (The Sanctuary) has recently become available for prayer after a period of not being used. This needs to be developed further in order that it becomes a more established feature across the school and a basis for the development of chaplaincy work within the school. Many opportunities are provided for pupils to organise and participate actively in worship with the school continuing to provide more opportunities for them to take a leading role in leading prayer, undirected by a teacher.

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## Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were 62 parental questionnaires received. All were extremely positive about the school, highlighting the strong promotion of Christian values, caring Catholic community and approachable and friendly staff. Some typical quotes from the questionnaire when asked 'Why did you choose this school' are as follows:

'The mutual respect and high regard for others which is evident throughout the school amongst teachers, pupils and parents'

'The parent-teacher relationship and that Jesus is in everything they do'

'Caring nature of the children towards one another and the staff towards the children'

'The inclusiveness of all children into the family'

'A close community that has a history. It has so many children from varied backgrounds which goes to enrich the experiences of children and the parent community too'.