



INSPECTION REPORT

St. Dominic's Catholic Primary School

St. Mary's Hill Inchbrook Stroud GL5 5HP

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DfES Number: 916/3355

School URN: 137373

Headteacher: Mrs Margaret Smith

Chair of Governors: Mr Michael Walker

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

Date of inspection: 2-3rd May 2013
Date of previous inspection: 4-6th March 2008

Reporting Inspector: Joseph Skivington

Description of School

St. Dominic's is a smaller than average size primary school with 106 pupils on roll, 42% of whom are Catholic. In Year 1 the figure stands at 72% Catholic. The majority of children are drawn from a wide area, and from mainly White British background. Prior religious knowledge and experiences on entry are below average. There are close links with the parish and the church is close by the school. The school converted to academy status in 2011. The post of head teacher is currently being advertised.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1: Outstanding; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Satisfactory; Grade 4: Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St. Dominic's provides an outstanding Catholic education for all its pupils. It is a fully inclusive, distinctively Catholic community where all are welcome and accepted as individuals made in the image of God, and its ethos is characterised by openness to all, with strong and close links over many years to the parents, the parish, and the wider community. Pupils participate enthusiastically in and respond impressively to the excellent faith enriching provision for prayer life and liturgy. The adjoining parish church provides fruitful opportunities to be involved in parish life, and this demonstrates the sense of the mission of the school being part of the wider mission of the Church. Outcomes from the religious education programme are outstanding, the result of good and outstanding teaching. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as the others, because of effective interventions, proactive support in lessons, and tasks clearly suited to their learning needs. The religious education programme makes an excellent contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

Grade 1

The school's capacity to sustain the very high quality of care and education it provides is excellent, due in large part to outstanding leadership which has sustained and developed the previous outstanding performance noted at the last inspection. Self evaluation at all levels is grounded in accurate analysis and rigorous, detailed review. The senior leadership team inspires the whole school community towards an ambitious vision, planning effectively to ensure that the processes for managing the performance of staff and for their professional development are used well, for example, making particularly fruitful use of diocesan resources and training exercises. Following the last inspection, the school was asked to refine the procedures for assessment for learning in order to address areas of weakness uncovered by the tracking of pupils' progress. This aspect is now a real strength of the school and has impacted significantly on the individual progress and achievement of pupils.

What the school should do to improve further

- To encourage even greater pupil ownership of their collective worship, by developing all pupils' skills in planning and presenting their own liturgies

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- To refine the cross curricular aspect and impact of religious education through all subjects

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

Grade1

Pupils are wholeheartedly involved in the Catholic life of the school and make a positive contribution to it, not least by their excellent behaviour, which contributes to their own learning and the ethos of the school. Their grasp and understanding of the school's mission, which is prominently displayed in classrooms and revisited in assemblies, is very impressive because they can both talk about it with understanding, and can relate it to their daily lives in and outside of school. They feel their voice is heard through opportunities for feedback, for instance where they discuss the teaching they receive and what strategies help them to learn better, or their input and ideas in designing the St. Francis stained glass windows in the quiet, meditation room. They take responsibility for their own lives and the care of the younger children. They absorb easily the shared values lived out in the Catholic ethos of the school and have a sound awareness of spiritual and moral matters which they are able to articulate well. They demonstrate a remarkable conviction in their Faith and speak easily of their spirituality through their own prayers. They respond generously to the needs of others beyond the school, and this makes a valuable contribution to the welcoming openness and inclusivity of the school. Many are involved in fundraising for a variety of charities both home and overseas, as well as outreach to the local community and local charities. The Year 6 pupils enter wholeheartedly into the retreat days held with the other local Catholic primary schools, an opportunity now open to the Year 5 pupils.

Their response to, and participation in, the prayer life of the school is outstanding. They use well the opportunity to learn the skills of planning and preparing assemblies and Masses, becoming more involved as they go through the school, and now many, though not all, moving beyond just being participants or onlookers. This was demonstrated in a Year5/ 6 pupil initiated and directed meditation session. Pupils play an active part in liturgies and assemblies, especially on Wednesday afternoons, where they experience variety and different forms of worship. They sing joyously, and compose very beautiful and heartfelt prayers. Their demeanour and reverence at prayer, even the youngest ones, suggest a seriousness and growing faith, as well as a sense of the sacred.

Achievement and progress in religious education is outstanding throughout the school. .Because of the small number of pupils on roll, there are only four classes of mixed years, but this does not present a barrier to progress, as tracking builds a very accurate picture of each child's progress over time, enabling teachers to differentiate by task and pitch lesson objectives more securely to the learning needs of every individual pupil. Prior attainment on entry is below average, but by the end of Key Stage 2 all pupils are meeting expectations in RE, and many exceeding expectation. Learning outcomes for all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs are also excellent. Pupils can discuss the topics they cover easily and translate the truths they learn into their own lives. They have a sound grasp of the main tenets of the Faith, for instance, the significance of the Last Supper, or the divinity of Jesus, as well as understanding the message of Jesus through His miracles and parables. There has been a great emphasis and focus on learning from religion, and this is very evident in the reflective writing of the pupils and their ability to make connections and see the relevance of what they are learning in their own lives. In lessons pupils work hard and enjoy the subject, especially when they are

challenged and engaged by effective teaching strategies and precisely targetted lesson and learning objectives. In the best lessons pupils can take ownership of their own learning with well planned, challenging but minimal intervention by the teacher. In these the more able are stretched and approach their full potential.

How effective are leaders and managers in developing the Catholic Life of the school?

Grade 1

Outstanding leadership and management promote the Catholic life of the school very effectively, with appraisal, and focussed planning for future improvement. A real strength of leadership has been to embed securely the processes of self evaluation, especially of Catholic life, which are detailed, accurate and reliable. Every activity, such as a liturgical event, an Inset day, a visit or visitor, the record of collective worship, in fact every aspect involving the Catholic ethos of the school is carefully reviewed and ways found to make it even better the next time. The school is constantly looking for ways to maximise impact, using the diocesan resources offered, such as governor training, Theology for Teaching courses, as well as spiritual Inset days for staff, finding out best practice elsewhere, such as using the Portsmouth diocese pupil questionnaire to encourage pupil voice, and re visiting the school mission as a whole school community. Prayer life and liturgies are monitored and reviewed very effectively, with close liaison between governors and senior leadership. The school development plan objectives are linked closely to performance management. The effectiveness of leadership and management is seen in the high morale of the staff, the pupil's excellent care for one another, and the very good relationships between staff and pupils.

The governing body is made up of supportive and proactive members who are committed to sustaining the school's ethos and standards, and are keen to visit the school, particularly the pastoral governor, and get to know it well. They have become more rigorous and proactive since the conversion to academy status. They had input into the self evaluation document, and played a role in selecting the RSE resource, as well as reviewing the relationship programme Journey in Love. The head teacher in her role as RE coordinator liaises well with the link governor and reports formally to the governing body. The parish priest is a frequent and welcome visitor. The governing body is closely aware of the work that the school is doing so that it can provide real challenge and critical support, demonstrated by their alacrity in taking advantage of diocesan training and advice. All statutory and canonical responsibilities are met.

There is a clear policy promoted by governors and senior staff to promote community cohesion with the result that the school has an openness to all, all are included in its life, and its generous outreach to the local and the global community is much appreciated. The school collaborates well with other schools and participates in community undertakings, including local charities. The curriculum provides an exploration of other faiths, and good use is made of resources. Those of other denominations or faiths feel that they are able to express their own beliefs comfortably, and all feel included and welcomed into every aspect of school life. Acts of worship leave room for the other person's spiritual identity, their modes of expression and their values. Parents and children from all backgrounds, especially those from other cultures are not just welcomed and supported, but inject a real sense of global awareness and provide rich experiences within the school's diverse community, for example children sharing their cultures and beliefs, or the celebration of Divali, or the parent who demonstrated the Muslim dress and its symbolism. Although the school is set in rural Woodchester it still provides many rich opportunities for global awareness.

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

Grade 1

Provision for prayer life is outstanding, a real strength of the school, because it meets very effectively the spiritual needs of the pupils, be it through assemblies and liturgies, or the opportunities for reflection and meditation, especially in the new St. Francis Room. The pupils become familiar with the parish church through frequent visits and celebration of the Mass, as well as the very impressive and colourful presentations of the Christmas and Easter Experiences. There is Mass every Friday in the parish church. The school supports the parish-run preparation programme for First Holy Communion, especially through the sacramental units of the curriculum. There are many occasions during the day for spiritual nourishment through prayer and moments of reflection. The liturgical year is well marked, planned, and celebrated, particularly Advent, Lent and Holy Week. Then each event is evaluated and reviewed to determine how it could be bettered and made more relevant and engaging. A retreat for the Year 6 and now Year 5 pupils involves the other Catholic schools in this predominantly rural area.

The curriculum successfully meets the needs of all groups of pupils, as well as meeting the Curriculum Directory for Religious Education requirements, such as the allocation of time. The school has embedded the God Matters syllabus well, developing a more creative approach, and continuously appraising its shape and impact, over the last two years. Relationship education is dealt with sensitively and clearly from a Catholic standpoint through the Journey in Love programme. The beliefs of other faiths are explored through topics in the schemes of work. Resources are well managed, and ICT, art and music particularly are used imaginatively to colour and enrich the learning experience. The colourful artwork and displays around the school reinforce the RE topics or liturgical seasons the pupils are studying, they affirm the creators and educate others, and visibly declare the Catholic ethos of the school. Resources to support teaching, and to enliven and enrich the schemes of work, are good. The curriculum makes an excellent and invaluable contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils, and is an area that the school is working on imaginatively to improve even further, with particular monitoring of the content and impact of the schemes of work.

The quality of teaching and purposeful learning is outstanding, with some good and outstanding practice observed. Outstanding teaching enables the pupils to learn really well because it engages their interest and provides challenge, so that the pupils themselves do the work and make the intellectual effort. Group and paired work were especially effective strategies because they provided peer learning and assessment. Proactive teaching assistants provide invaluable support especially in allowing the teacher to split children into smaller groups with differentiated tasks tailored to their learning needs. The scrutiny of written work indicates marking that is both helpful and consistent with an effective, with a dialogue set up between teacher and pupil, and the use of peer marking and assessment which draws pupils into the learning process very effectively. Pupils' work and behaviour in lessons is very good and they are enthusiastic about the subject. Their enjoyment is clearly evident. They say they love RE.

Assessment procedures are well embedded, aligning the level indicators closely to the God Matters programme. The key strength is that through tracking and monitoring of progress, the teachers are becoming skilled in the implementation of this data to inform teaching and learning objectives. The school has amply demonstrated that this data is interpreted and translated into the lesson plans and lesson objectives in order to meet the specific learning needs of every pupil. The already effective and fruitful structure of lesson observations will continue to enable the best practice in assessment for learning, as well as successful teaching strategies, to be shared rapidly throughout the school.