



INSPECTION REPORT

The Catholic School of St. Gregory the Great

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Headteacher: Charlotte Blanch

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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**

Date of inspection: 16-17th November 2016

Date of previous inspection: September 2011

Reporting Inspector: Mr Joseph Skivington

Assisting Inspector: Mrs Celia Dolan

Description of the school

The Catholic School of St. Gregory the Great is a larger than average primary school, with 419 pupils on roll. It takes pupils mainly from St. Gregory's parish and Sacred Hearts parish in Cheltenham, although there are a small number of pupils who come from outside this catchment area. The school serves an urban area and take pupils from very diverse social and cultural backgrounds. The school now has approximately 50% of pupils with English as an additional language, and 71% who are Roman Catholic, with the majority of other pupils from other Christian denominations. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is in line with national average. The school enjoys considerable support from parents many of whom made a positive choice for the school because of its specifically Catholic ethos. The average level of attainment on entry to the school is a little below national expectation.

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school (summary statement)

Grade 1

This is an outstanding school because:

- the governing body and all leaders are totally committed to the promotion and nurturing of the school's Catholic life and mission, and have very successfully expanded its outstanding, vibrant Catholic ethos since the last inspection;
- the highly qualified and experienced senior leadership team, led by the inspirational head teacher, are fully determined to ensure only the highest quality of Catholic education; this is evident in the significant improvement to both provision and outcomes over the last two or three years;
- it is a fully inclusive school where pupils, their parents and carers, from all faiths and none, are made welcome, and all show respect and genuine interest and care towards each other;
- the behaviour of pupils and their care for others is outstanding. They are role models for each other and this contributes enormously to the spirituality and ethos of the school. Their behaviour for learning is very positive, they enjoy their RE studies, and they make good progress over time;
- the quality of teaching is good, with outstanding practice;
- innovative leadership provides effective guidance and support to staff, making fruitful use of outside advice, and diocesan training in its drive to improve provision and outcomes for every single pupil. The school is an animating source of best practice for many other Catholic schools.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop is outstanding

- The senior leadership team and staff take an innovative approach to driving improvement in all areas and seek to share good practice with others. The governing body are highly effective in bringing proactive support and challenge. The school asks parents, staff and pupils, through discussions and questionnaires, what their opinions and suggestions for improvements are, with the result that it gains a realistic view of what has to be done to improve even further, and has already amply demonstrated the capacity to follow through its objectives;

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- The rigorous, securely embedded procedures for self evaluation enable strengths and weaknesses to be highlighted quickly, and action taken to improve practice and outcomes through a comprehensive and detailed development plan with clear, measurable objectives which are constantly monitored and re shaped where necessary;
 - The areas for development noted in the last inspection have been comprehensively addressed. The written tasks provide fruitful opportunities for pupils to respond at some length and demonstrate their very impressive grasp of how beliefs affect one's actions and behaviour. The pupils' ownership of prayer and worship is now led by an enthusiastic chaplaincy team which is having a growing impact on the involvement of all pupils;
 - The capacity to sustain and build on already outstanding provision and outcomes for Catholic Life and religious education is beyond question. The remarkable success in embedding distributive leadership ensures consistency, commitment, and stability for the future, with clear responsibilities and expectations from the whole staff and governing body.

What the school should do to improve further

- Encourage parents to become more fully involved in the prayer life of the school, so that they become proactive partners with the school, in nurturing their own spiritual life and that of their children.
- Develop teachers' skills and confidence in assessing pupils' work, so that they have a clear and reliable picture of every individual's attainment and progress over time.
- Use the marking of written work more smartly, by providing pupils with helpful, challenging feedback on their work and presentation, and encouraging them to respond more reflectively and at length.

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

Grade 1

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 internalise and live out the values promoted by the school, and flourish in an encouraging atmosphere of faith and spirituality. They can articulate for instance, the impact that the prayer life of the school has on their actions and their relationship with others.
- Pupils are immensely proud of their Catholic school, and willingly embrace the many opportunities to grow in their spiritual lives. They can articulate why their school is different from others, and they understand the impact that faith has in their daily lives. Their varied faith and cultural backgrounds bring a vibrant, fruitful addition to the school's own Catholic ethos, which as a result is open, welcoming, and an exemplar of inclusion.

- The school council and the chaplaincy team represent the pupils' voice to communicate ideas and feelings expressed by every class across the school. They feel their voice is heard and their opinions matter. For example, they play a key role in choosing, planning, and supporting fundraising initiatives such as St. Vincent de Paul and CAFOD.
- Many pupils were involved in rephrasing the school mission statement 'Believe and Achieve', presenting it in child friendly language. It is prominently displayed around the school and frequently referred to in lessons and assemblies;
- Pupils contribute through their response to questionnaires, providing essential feedback which is built into improvement plans. This includes reviewing the impact of liturgies, and suggesting how they could be improved. They vote each term on which specific Values for Life they would like to focus on in the next term, by donating a penny into a drop box voting system. This money is collected and given to a charity of the children's choice, such as Blue Cross and Cancer Research;
- Pupils increasingly take on a range of responsibilities which show they are alert to the needs of others, and especially in becoming outstanding carers and role models for the younger children;
- Pupils have a genuine respect for those from different backgrounds. This is due to a growing understanding of different faiths, which they have studied and reflected on in RE at some depth. There is a real sense of belonging here shared by all regardless of faith or none, which feeds into their understanding of British values and culture;
- The chaplaincy team takes the lead in promoting prayer life, but all pupils are practising the skills of planning and organising their own liturgies with confidence and real faith. There are strong links with the parish, with pupils participating and leading both school and parish liturgies. The school continues to actively develop pupil ownership further in these areas.

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, which match expectation. They make good and better progress – exceptionally so in the Early Years - so that by the end of Key Stage 1 most are meeting expectations and some exceeding them. The quality of work, and the pace of progress over time, is good.
- Progress at Key Stage 2 matches the quality and consistency of the written work seen in the earlier years. There is a deepening of understanding of the theology behind each topic, and very impressively they are becoming adept at reflecting on the meaning of the Gospel accounts and making links between scripture and other areas of their lives. This is greatly aided by the innovative use of the What if... objective built into every other subject directly relating to what they learn in RE lessons.
- Disadvantaged students, and those with special educational needs, make similar good progress as the other pupils because of very effective planned interventions and the pro active support of teaching partners. Through the outstanding pastoral care of the child and family working team, the school supports pupils with personal or family difficulties so that obstacles are removed and they are ready to learn;
- Discussions with pupils and responses in their written work show clearly that as they move up the school, important literacy skills have been secured, especially for those with English as an Additional Language (EAL) so that they become more confident in using religious language in a

meaningful way. Their ability to learn independently, and with others, develops quickly, as demonstrated in the quality of the research type homework and their paired discussions. The opportunities for pupils to discuss more deeply in lessons, and to write more reflectively, could be encouraged even further;

- Pupils are proud of their achievements and demonstrate a positive interest in learning new things and ideas. They feel confident in expressing their own opinions. When asked pupils were very positive about their learning and enjoyment of RE. They know where they are and what concrete steps they need to take to get to the next level. Their conduct in lessons and around the school is outstanding, a reflection of the school's successful promotion of its core values and ethos.

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 show reverence, attentiveness, and willingness to play their part. For instance, the Year 3 class assembly was planned and written by the pupils themselves, and presented as an interactive reflection, followed by enthusiastic singing. Every single pupil is involved, and their confidence indicated this was a typical and normal act of worship.
- Pupils are becoming more involved in the planning and preparation of their liturgies and assemblies. The liturgical calendar is at the core of the planning and this is evident in their growing understanding and use of religious liturgical terms such as 'Ordinary Time'. Teachers are confident in letting pupils take the initiative, knowing when to intervene helpfully, or to step back.
- Prayer is the heartbeat of St. Gregory's and the school is intent on encompassing parents in its spiritual life. The pupils value the many prayer opportunities, be it at the beginning of every lesson or the end of the day. They compose their own heartfelt prayers and reflections, which are displayed on the pupil monitored prayer tables. The school has devised an innovative prayer progression sheet clearly displaying the prayers both formulaic and traditional that pupils learn at each stage throughout their school life.
- The chaplaincy team under the skilled guidance of an assistant teacher takes the lead in planning the liturgical programme and modelling for the younger children. The sacramental and liturgical life of the school is reflected in the assemblies, Masses, and the celebrations throughout the Church's liturgical year of the life of Jesus, and the saints. A quiet chapel area has been set up which is run by the team very successfully at lunchtimes. Meditation and stillness exercises are currently being introduced, including a thoughtful approach to body posture and gestures at prayer. The team is also involved in the planning, organising, and leading the Gospel assembly each week.

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

Grade 1

- 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 very effectively promote, nurture, and sustain the catholic ethos of the school as their primary concern and care and which is the main focus of their strategic planning. An example of their care is the long but successful journey to appoint the 'right' person for a senior post. The inspiring Headteacher has communicated a vision for the future and assured stability and continuity through team building and distributive management.
- The governing body is a challenging, knowledgeable and practical influence in the life of the school. They meet all statutory, canonical, and diocesan requirements fully, and strive to bring to reality the call to be a People of Hope. They are impressively well informed and proactive in every aspect of school life. They have benefitted from diocesan training and reflection on the People of Hope document as well as the Bishop's Pastoral Plan. In March 2016 they commissioned an external Governance Review to improve their skills, and in the process demonstrating their commitment and determination to be the most effective use to the school;
- 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. Each new applicant for a vacancy receives a summary leaflet spelling out the expectations of teaching and working in a Catholic school, so that they are aware of the commitment expected even before they apply for interview. This innovative leaflet has been taken up by the diocese as an exemplar of good practice for other schools and their governing bodies. Staff morale and their investment in the school is outstanding and they are excellent role models for their charges;
- Robust and rigorous processes of self-evaluation ensure that judgements are accurate and reliable. This is achieved mainly by constant monitoring through governors' school visits and learning walks, with findings reported back to the full governing body.
- The innovative set up of Key Area Teams, each assigned to an area of the curriculum, and made up of a senior leader, a governor, a pastoral action member and teaching partner, has been very effective in gaining a clear picture of practice and progress in each area so that improvements are quickly put in place. Examples of feedback include encouragement to use the 'What if..' objectives as learning objectives rather than success criteria, or the better use of trigger words in lessons, or the use of thinking skills formats from the God Matters syllabus.
- There is a strong parent representation on the board, but more importantly governors frequently ask parents, staff and pupils their opinions as to what could be better. As a result of this feedback, the school leadership knows itself very well, can more accurately assess the impact of its actions, and can quickly re shape its improvement planning where necessary.
- The spiritual life of the staff has not been neglected. Staff prayers, retreat, and Inset days on spirituality and RE are an integral part of the timetable. This helps bind staff together in commitment and unity of purpose, sharing the same goals and values of the school's mission. There is at least one Inset day annually devoted specifically to Catholic life and spirituality.

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 intelligently and effectively, exercising careful oversight of the curriculum and learning outcomes. They receive termly reports from the RE leader and match these to their own learning walks around the school as part of their Key Area Team. Where necessary they challenge, question, and hold senior leaders and staff to account, as is evident in a scrutiny of the minutes of governor's meetings;

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- The subject leader is very experienced, innovative, with great attention to detail but also to the wider picture. She is also an outstanding teacher and role model for the staff. She is developing a scheme of work for each of the 'other' faiths on the curriculum, and is planning to do the same for the other Christian denominations within the school. This will acknowledge their faith and give them a real sense of ownership of their learning.
 - Subject development plans are drawn up and used as working documents, which are added to or re shaped during the course of each term. They do not remain as general aims or wishes, but instead are measurable objectives to be achieved over a stated time;
 - The provision for staff induction, in service training, and diocesan training is particularly supportive for the teaching of RE. This has resulted in teachers becoming more confident in assessment and in setting learning objectives. There is still work to be done in these areas and the school has this well in hand;

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

Grade 1

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

- Teaching is effective in promoting purposeful learning, the engagement of the pupils, their enjoyment, and their overall good results. The pupils' outstanding attitudes to learning have a strong impact on their progress and achievement. Teachers have established excellent rapport with their charges. Teaching partners are involved in planning lessons with the teacher, so that interventions clearly have a positive effect;
- Teaching is good with some outstanding practice. A good range of teaching styles are employed, including strong questioning skills, which ensure pupils' concentration and engagement;
- Where teachers have high expectations of pupils' presentation of work and intellectual effort, the pupils rise to the challenge and are able to contribute their own arguments and opinions. This was illustrated in a very challenging Year Six lesson where the teacher, through skilful questioning, brought the pupils to think and discuss for themselves what it means to be a 'good' Jew or to be a 'good' Catholic. This was a remarkably fruitful teaching strategy and demanded real intellectual effort from the pupils and prompted an engaging, in depth discussion;
- The expectation of teachers is not always consistently high, which results in some missed opportunities to stretch pupils even further through challenging marking, and expecting the pupils to respond thoughtfully and at some length to formative comments. However, in conversation, most pupils expressed their appreciation for the help given by teachers in their comments and marking;
- Teachers' skills and expertise in assessing pupils' progress are being continually improved so that they can arrive at reliable judgements on individual achievement and progress over time. The school is studying how best to achieve clear steps and descriptors of progress in religious education without the use of levelling grades, which are no longer used in other subjects.

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 students can explore and develop their own values and beliefs. They discuss themes such as prejudice, 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. Consistency in progression is carefully planned;
- The study of other world faiths is a strength of this inclusive school because it ensures ample time to the topics, and promotes tolerance, understanding, and respect for others' beliefs. It also inculcates an appreciation of the diversity and richness of other cultures. Provision for sex and relationship education 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.

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

- The prayer life of the school is inclusive and joyful. Prayer punctuates the school day and is part of every celebration. There is a strong focus on encouraging more pupils to organise and lead collective worship, following the excellent example of the chaplaincy team. The school chapel is at the heart of the school and used well;
- 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. Both 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;
- Parents and carers are invited to attend Mass and assemblies. The school is keen to encourage more parents to become involved in the prayer life of the school and their children. The excellent newsletter keeps parents fully involved about what is going on in school, and very successfully outlines what each Year's termly topic in RE is, with prompts and questions that the parents can use to reinforce the learning in school.

Summary of Parental Questionnaires

The inspectors talked to an unsolicited group of parents who were anxious to express their very enthusiastic gratitude to the school for its warm and welcoming openness, the wonderful education their children are getting, and its 'wrap around care' for them as well as their children.

There were 118 parental questionnaires returned. All were extremely positive about the school and the quality of their children's education. Some typical responses included:

'St. Gregory's makes everyone feel like one big family. The children are polite, confident and happy...a diverse vibrant school.... I wanted a catholic school that could help me and my children grow in faith'.

'I chose this school because it is a Catholic school... but more than that - when I became a single mum the support they gave me was incredible... I can't thank them enough'.

'It is a special place in this very secularised world, where children can learn and talk about God'.

'We chose St. Gregory's based on religion, and of all the schools we communicated with, this one made me feel wanted, welcome and confident for my child's future'.

'Parents are made to feel welcome and have lots of opportunities to take part in school life'.

'We have not been disappointed with our son's religious and more general knowledge. He has shown good understanding in First Communion classes excelling compared to others who attend other schools.'

'Due to family moves my son has attended other schools, but the sense of community and welcome we have experienced at St. Greg's has been unparalleled'.

'It's an inclusive school.... there are so many children of different cultures and nationalities just cohabiting nicely together....they (the school) will seek to find the cause and resolve a problem rather than 'punish'.