



INSPECTION REPORT

St. John's Catholic Primary School

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DfES Number: 865 3430

School URN:

Headteacher: Mr F Toner

Chair of Governors: Mrs Mary Keates

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: 14th and 17th October 2013

Date of previous inspection: October 2010

Reporting Inspector: Joseph Skivington

Description of School

St. John's is an above average size primary school with 307 pupils on roll, 85% of whom are Catholic. It serves the parish of St. John's in Trowbridge and the surrounding area. Prior attainment on entry is in line with expectation. The numbers of pupils with special educational needs and pupil premium support are below average. Around 28% are from ethnic minorities. There are very strong and fruitful links with the parish.

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. John's provides an outstanding Catholic education for all its pupils. It is a fully inclusive, distinctively Catholic, and its ethos is characterised by openness to all, with strong and close links 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 nearby 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 consistently 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

At the last inspection the school was judged to be satisfactory but since then it has made impressive progress and crossed two grade boundaries to become a well merited outstanding Catholic school. The school's capacity to sustain this very high quality of care and education it provides is excellent. It has established a trend of sustaining and developing the spiritual life not only of the pupils but the whole Catholic school community. This is due to a commitment to Catholic values by the whole school community. Self-evaluation at all levels is grounded in accurate analysis and rigorous, detailed review, which is both comprehensive and reliable. The head teacher 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 embed effective systems to monitor teaching and learning, to use assessment to identify targets for lesson planning and tracking progress, and lastly to raise standards of presentation across the key stages. All these have been addressed very effectively so that they are now real strengths of the school and have impacted significantly on the individual progress and achievement of pupils.

What the school should do to improve further

- To develop further the use of the chapel to enhance the prayer life of the whole school.
- To embed the new Relationships and Sex Education guidelines in SMSC lessons and the wider curriculum.

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

Grade 1

Pupils are wholeheartedly involved in the Catholic life of the school and make a very 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, with its pupil designed logo, around the school was the result of an energising exercise which invited the whole school community to input and invest in the mission of the school. As a result staff and pupils can both talk about it with understanding, and can relate it to their daily lives in and outside of school. Pupils also contribute their ideas through the frequent opportunities for feedback, and especially through the Prayer Council they themselves support and monitor the prayer life of the school. They take responsibility for their own lives and the care of the younger children. 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, such as Cafod, as well as outreach to the local community and local charities.

The pupils' 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, moving beyond just being participants or onlookers. For instance the Year 6 pupils planned and led the May procession with complete ownership of their presentation. The pupils in Key Stage 1 have a variety of liturgies which prepare them well for the more frequent celebration of Masses at Key Stage 2. A remarkable number of pupils play an active part in liturgies and assemblies, and with increasing frequency in the parish Sunday Masses as readers, servers and in the choir. Much of this involvement is the result of the impressively proactive pupil Prayer Council. Pupils sing joyously, and compose very beautiful and heartfelt prayers, which are kept on the class altars and used daily. Their demeanour and reverence at prayer, even the youngest ones, demonstrate a seriousness and growing faith, as well as a sense of the sacred and the special time for prayer. They colour the worship with music, art and drama, and as a result of their commitment they infuse and help to develop the whole Faith community.

Achievement and progress in religious education is outstanding throughout the school, from a wide variety of starting points. Close tracking of progress builds a very accurate picture of each child's achievement over time, enabling teachers to differentiate by task and pitch lesson objectives more securely to the learning needs of every individual pupil. By the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 all pupils are meeting expectations, and many exceeding them. 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 is planned emphasis and focus on learning from religion, and this is 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 targeted 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.

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. The collegiate approach to raising standards and realising the school's mission is underpinned by governors who are highly experienced and specialists in Catholic education and the teaching of religious education. 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. As a result the school can make self-evaluative judgements that are not only accurate but also reliable, because the feedback from pupils and parents is frequently sought through pupil conferencing, the school council, parents, audits and questionnaires, and promptly acted upon. The school is constantly looking for ways to maximise impact, using the diocesan resources offered, such as training in the God Matters programme, the Theology for Teachers course (jointly with St. Augustine's secondary school), and keeps up to date through diocesan Inset days. Staff, as well as pupils' pray together, and the Catholic life enhanced. Inset days for staff are both inspiring and fruitful. 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 leadership of RE is outstanding, marked by excellent record keeping and the tracking of pupils' progress, which then informs the lesson objectives. CPD is encouraged with best practice sought out and adopted through staff and moderation meetings and exercises. The RE report to the governors is detailed and invites their comment and involvement.

The governing body is made up of expert and proactive members who are committed to sustaining the school's ethos and standards, and are keen to visit the school, particularly the RE link governor and the parish priest. They have input into the self-evaluation document, and played a role in reviewing the curriculum. The recent review on RE provision was detailed and led to specific measurable targets for further improvement. The link governor with the RE coordinator conduct regular ethos walks around the school to look for ways to improve and enhance the school's distinctive Catholic identity. 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. They communicate well with parents and carers whose opinions are regularly sought. The feedback from the inspection questionnaires was unanimously positive the most frequent comments emphasising the friendliness and spiritual life of the school. All statutory and canonical responsibilities are met fully.

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 the universal church, and provide rich experiences within the school's diverse community.

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. The pupils become familiar with the parish church through frequent visits and celebration of the Mass, and play a vigorous part in parish life. The Key stage 1 pupils have para liturgies which are specifically designed to help them grow in understanding and to prepare for the Mass. The school supports the parish- run preparation programme for First Holy Communion, led by a governor and the RE coordinator. There are many occasions during the day for spiritual nourishment through prayer and moments of reflection. The Wednesday Prayer session provides encouragement and supports private prayer and reflection. The liturgical year is well marked, planned, and celebrated, particularly Advent, Lent and Holy Week, which include the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Then each event is evaluated and reviewed to determine how it could be bettered and made more relevant and engaging. There are shared liturgies with St. Augustine's, and the successful Year 6 retreat days are being offered now to Year 5 pupils

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, rising to the challenge of a new syllabus, and continuously appraising its shape and impact. The school believes the programme meets their needs, and that it has enhanced both pupils' and teachers' faith. Relationship education is dealt with sensitively and clearly from a Catholic standpoint through the still relatively new programme using a cross curricular approach. The beliefs of other faiths are explored through topics in the schemes of work, while visits to other places of worship are planned. 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. Pupils are encouraged to question and offer their own opinions and

insights. Group and paired work were especially effective strategies because they provided peer learning, challenge 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 becoming more consistent, with a dialogue set up between teacher and pupil. This is enhanced when time is set apart for pupils to reflect on and respond in writing to their teachers' challenging comments, as well as reflecting on their progress to date. Pupils' work and behaviour in lessons is excellent and they are enthusiastic about the subject. Their enjoyment is clearly evident and they themselves 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 planned introduction of a specific summative assessment at the end of each module will be a further reliable indicator of progress over time. The school has 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.