



## **INSPECTION REPORT**

### **St Nicholas of Tolentine RC Primary Academy**

Pennywell Road, Easton, Bristol BS50 OTJ

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URN Number: 139032

Head of School: Meg Collett

Chair of Governors: Anne Roberts

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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: 8-9<sup>th</sup> December 2016

Date of previous inspection: March 2011

Reporting Inspector: Mr Joseph Skivington

Assisting Inspector: Mr Frank Toner

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## Description of the school

St. Nicholas is a single form entry Catholic primary academy, with 193 pupils on roll, 25% of whom are Catholic. Most children live within the parish of St. Nicholas of Tolentine, and come mainly from the diverse inner city communities in the Easton and Lawrence Hill wards. The proportion of pupils from ethnic groups is above average at 91%, of whom 40% have English as an Additional Language. Pupils with special educational needs make up 17% of the number on roll. Stability is very low at 71%, much lower than the national average of 81%. Approximately 100 pupils are eligible for Pupil Premium funding. The average level of attainment on entry to the school is below expectation.

The head of school has been in post only since September, supported by a temporary executive head who also oversees St. Pius Catholic primary school in Bristol.

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

Grade 2

This is a good school because:

- the school's Catholic life and mission is the first concern of the governors and school leaders, and this has been successfully maintained through recent challenging times because they have made fruitful use of outside resources, advice, and diocesan training;
- it is a fully inclusive school where pupils from all faiths and none are made welcome, and all show respect and genuine interest and care towards each other. In 2014 the school was one of the first to receive the 'School of Sanctuary' award, receiving an exceptionally diverse and changing pupil population from over 40 countries. In essence the school acts like a global village welcoming all. Many families are refugees or seeking asylum;
- the behaviour of pupils and their care for others is good and this contributes much 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 typically good, despite some inconsistencies which are being addressed, and this results in good achievement and steadily rising standards of attainment;
- the pupils are proud of their Catholic school, and willingly embrace and live out the values it promotes. They are ready and willing to make a greater contribution to the Catholic ethos and prayer life of the school.

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

- This is a school that knows itself well because it has now put in place reliable procedures for self evaluation, which enable strengths and weaknesses to be highlighted and action taken to improve practice and outcomes. It has had cause to reflect on its practice and future because of the enormous challenges it has faced over the last year, with the departure of the head teacher and the significant turnover of staff at every level.
- The governors have so far not been successful in appointing a substantive head teacher. However, the acting head of school, overseen by the executive head, has been successful in establishing stability and injecting a renewed spirit of optimism and determination among the

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staff. The good provision and outcomes for Catholic life and religious education are also being successfully maintained and improved, demonstrating the capacity of leadership to move forward, although the long term future of the school will only be fully and safely secured with the appointment of a full time, substantive head teacher or a comparable leadership structure.

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

- Strengthen the impact of all teaching by
  - greater awareness of matching language used to the learning needs of the pupils
  - higher expectation of pupils' intellectual effort through challenging questioning
  - more opportunities for reflective, extended writing in response to formative comments
- Encourage more ownership, initiative and input of pupils into enriching Catholic life and collective worship.
- Provide further training for governors to enable them to play a proactive, challenging and supportive role.

## **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 growing understanding of what it means to be in a Catholic school and how it differs from other schools, particularly the prayerful atmosphere and uplifting visual surroundings, but also the impact this has on their view of life and their relationship with others.
- The school's mission statement 'Where Love and Charity are, there is God' is prominently displayed around the school, and frequently referred to. It could be the subject of a whole school community re visit, with the pupils particularly re interpreting its relevance to themselves in child friendly language.
- Pupils contribute significantly through their response to questionnaires, providing essential feedback and positive remarks, which are translated into improvement plans;
- The chaplaincy group is still in its infancy but already having an enthusiastic impact, for instance, in leading meditation sessions, or in planning a prayer garden.
- Pupils are starting to take on a range of responsibilities which show they are alert to the needs of others. Because the school is so diverse and multi- cultural they have a genuine respect for those from different backgrounds. 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 school maintains a strong link with Blessed Damian Catholic School in Uganda, as well as a global partnership with a school in Ethiopia. The children from all three schools benefit enormously, learning from and with their partners, but also experiencing a real sense of their mission as part of the mission of the universal Church.

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

- Pupils come from a variety of faith backgrounds or none. Most enter the school at levels of attainment and understanding of religious knowledge and practice, which are significantly below expectation.
- Although attainment is not always a strength, most classes show an increase in the percentage of children at ARE (Age Related Expectations). Some classes are working within or above the 85% target for AR.
- Pupils make good, steady progress from the EYFS, so that by the end of Key Stage 1, they are meeting expectations. At the end of Key Stage 2 most pupils are meeting their targets with some exceeding expectation. For the first time, Year 3 and Year 5 in particular show children who are exceeding AR.
- There has not been enough years' data to accurately measure progress from KS1 to KS2. The current Year 6's first data collection was when they were in Year 3.
- Groups such as those with SEN and disadvantaged pupils, make similar good progress because of very effective planned interventions and the pro active support of learning assistants.
- Progress over time is, however, inconsistent between classes because of the disruption caused by the significant turnover of teachers. High pupil mobility also has a detrimental effect on their progress, and the school's achievement and attainment data.
- Discussions with pupils and responses in their written work show clearly that as they move up the school, important literacy skills have been secured in order for them to access the curriculum, and they become more confident in using religious language in a meaningful way. Teachers sometimes assume that all pupils understand the language used in the lessons.
- Their ability to learn independently, and with others, is improving, demonstrated in some good quality pieces of work. They are however, sometimes hampered by the lack of discussing topics more deeply in lessons in order to be able to write more reflectively and at length in their books.
- Pupils are proud of their achievements and demonstrate a positive interest 'in learning new things and ideas', and feel confident enough to express their own opinions. Their positive conduct in lessons and around the school reflects the school's successful strategies to promote the highest standards of behaviour.

## **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. They are becoming more involved in the planning and preparation of their liturgies and assemblies. This could be encouraged even further: they already have the example and role modelling of the chaplaincy team, and as the teachers become more confident in letting them take the initiative, so they the pupils will become more confident in taking more ownership of the prayer life of the school.

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- They value the many prayer opportunities during the school day, are regular visitors to the church, and are made to feel welcome in the parish community. The parish priest is a frequent visitor and engages pupils in age appropriate activities including Baptism and Marriage role play, and leads service as and retreats during Holy Week, including a Passover meal.
  - They compose their own heartfelt prayers, writing them into the whole school prayer book which is shared by children and adults. Sometimes during worship the Muslim children share their prayer alongside the Catholic prayer. The school choir leads the prayer in assemblies and whole school Masses.
  - 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. In this way they are provided with inspiring role models and this contributes enormously to their spiritual, moral and vocational development.

## **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 thrust of its strategic planning.
- The governing body fully supports the acting head of school in reinstating the very best provision for pupil outcomes, and is willing to learn how to become a challenging, knowledgeable and practical influence in the life of the school. They meet all the statutory, canonical, and diocesan requirements fully.
- Robust processes of self-evaluation ensure that judgements are becoming more accurate and reliable. This is helped by monitoring through the Mission and Ethos committee, who report back to the full governing body, but just as importantly by asking parents, staff and pupils their opinions as to what could be better. As a result of their feedback, the school leadership knows itself well, can more accurately assess the impact of its actions, and can start to re shape its improvement planning where necessary.
- The spiritual life of the staff has not been neglected. Staff prayers at the start of the school day, and Inset days on spirituality and RE, have been included on the timetable. All staff attend an annual residential retreat. In 2014 staff went to Rome and attended Pope Francis' Epiphany Mass.

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**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 to exercise oversight of the curriculum and learning outcomes. Governors now scrutinise reports from the head of school who is also the RE leader, as well as taking part themselves in learning walks around the school. Their challenge in holding staff to account is having more impact, evident in a scrutiny of the recent minutes of governors' meetings.
- The provision for staff induction and in service training is supportive of the teaching of RE. This is resulting in teachers becoming, for instance, more confident in assessment and in setting learning objectives, although there is still work to be done in these areas in order to improve pupil outcomes further. Some of the current staff have completed the Theology for Teachers course.
- The subject leader effectively supports teachers with advice and training, modelling the implementation of the syllabus, and the schemes of work. Likewise, the lesson observations and work scrutinies carried out regularly by the subject leader and governors monitor the impact of both teaching quality and pupils' progress over time, as well as planning at all levels. This is leading to better teaching and learning.
- The parish priest runs the excellent God Matters Unit Booster sessions which are enormously helpful to teachers whose subject knowledge is incomplete, as it gives them confidence and a deeper understanding of the next term's curriculum topic.
- Two of the classes have new teachers, one of whom is newly qualified. They are keen to give the best quality RE lessons and to that end have been on the New to Catholic Education as well as the three- day Theology course run by the diocese. These have been immensely helpful in deepening their knowledge and understanding.

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

**Grade 2**

**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' 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.
- Teaching is good with some weaker practice being monitored and supported. 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.

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- The quality of teachers' questioning is on occasion inconsistent, reflecting their sometimes insecure subject knowledge. This results in missed opportunities to stretch students even further, or failing to check that they really did understand before moving on. This is noticeable in the lack of impact of some marking where there are missed opportunities to challenge deeper thinking or to pick up on misconceptions.
  - The introduction of a new assessment format has increased the awareness and importance to collect and store RE data. There is now a bank of three whole years of RE data which has increased the accuracy of teachers' assessment.
  - The assessment and marking policies are becoming embedded, but with some discrepancy on occasion between the over generous levels given by an individual teacher, and the quality of the actual work in their books. However, in conversation all pupils expressed their appreciation for the help given by teachers in their comments and marking.
  - Book scrutinies have shown there to be a significant improvement of RE books from previous years as well as in this academic year.
  - At the start of a topic pupils self assess what they know and are given the opportunity at the end to assess what they have learned. This gives a good indication of progress, although it is unclear if any follow up actually addresses some misconceptions, which are on occasion evident in pupils' responses to formative comments.

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

- The RE curriculum meets all Bishops Conferences requirements. It is broad and balanced so that students can explore and develop their own values and beliefs. They explore 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.
- The study of other world faiths is a real strength of the curriculum. A focus in two separate Faith Weeks promotes tolerance, understanding, and respect for others' beliefs in an experiential way such as visits to places of worship, such as the local Gurdwara, and forming close links with Muslim schools.
- Pupils themselves, coming from backgrounds representing the major world religions, are a powerful resource and are affirmed and celebrated on their faith journey. The whole programme inculcates an appreciation of the diversity and richness of other cultures and belief systems.
- Provision for sex and relationship education is in place and approved by the governors adhering to diocesan guidelines.
- The curriculum design promotes continuity and progress, and leads to good teaching and learning. It promotes strong spiritual, moral and vocational development and is taught through the lens of the Faith
- The sacramental preparation programme is run by the parish with support from the school.

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

- The prayer life of the school is fully inclusive and joyful. Prayer punctuates the school day and is part of every celebration. There is now a focus on encouraging more pupils to organise and lead collective worship, initially through the enthusiastic example of the Chaplaincy team.
- The parish priest makes an important and valued contribution to the spiritual life of the school and reflects its role in the wider mission of the parish and the universal Church. All pupils have the opportunity to be involved in a Stations of the Cross retreat at the school.
- Both teachers and pupils have created colourful and thought provoking displays around the school, which remind the whole community of the liturgical cycle, the topics the pupils are currently studying, and are supportive of the school's vibrant Catholic life.
- Daniel O'Leary gave an inspirational talk to the whole staff last year, and Caroline Price led the staff on a Team Work Retreat Day.
- Parents and carers are invited to attend Mass and assemblies. During the inspection there was a good number at assembly, and this is a typical feature of the strong links between parents, school and parish.
- Spiritual, moral and vocational development provision is very strong and pupils internalise and live out those same values, which are an integral part of the identity of the school.



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## Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were 94 responses to the parental questionnaire. All were positive about the school and the quality of their children's education. Some typical responses included:

*'The school has a strong feeling of community and values'.*

*'I like the school because it is very multicultural...each child can have individual attention and has strong spiritual values'.*

*'It is a school of many nations that work together for the common good'.*

*'It's inclusive, child orientated, family focussed but maintaining that religious element'.*