



INSPECTION REPORT

St John's Catholic Primary School
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DfE Number: 3430

Headteacher: Mrs T Sessions
Chair of Governors: Mrs Clare Farrow

**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: 29th/30th November 2018
Date of previous inspection: 14th/15th October 2013

Reporting Inspector: Mrs A Barrett
Additional Inspector: Mrs C Baron

Description of school

St John's is a larger-than-average Catholic primary school which serves the parishes of St. John the Baptist in Trowbridge, St Bernadette's in Westbury and St Thomas More in Bradford-on-Avon. The proportion of pupils baptised Catholic is 81%, with 10% from other Christian denominations and 1% from other faiths. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.

The proportion of pupils who have an SEN statement or an educational health and care plan is below the national average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is above average and those speaking English as an additional language is well above. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support from the pupil premium is well below the national average.

There have been significant changes in leadership since the last inspection. In September 2017, a new headteacher and deputy headteacher took up post and new phase leaders were in place in the summer term, 2018. The headteacher's commitment to distributive leadership has also led to changes in the leadership of RE, Catholic life and Prayer life.

This has resulted in the formation of an RE Faculty in October 2017 whose remit is to support teaching and learning in RE and to develop the school's prayer and Catholic life. The deputy headteacher (also the RE lead) oversees the Faculty and liaises closely with the headteacher and link governor.

The school is an outward looking community, committed to promoting links with the wider community through music and charities, as well as taking a lead in the Emmaus Catholic Partnership. The headteacher attends the Resources Committee and is currently chair, whilst the RE leader (deputy headteacher) is an active participant on the Mission and Ethos Committee. The headteacher is working with Bath Spa University to promote Catholic education and quality assured teacher training within the Catholic sector. The intention is to extend and develop a teacher training 'cluster' for the Catholic partnership.

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school (summary statement)

Grade 2

This is a good school with outstanding features because:

- The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school, the quality of its provision and the effectiveness of leaders and governors in monitoring and evaluating this provision is outstanding overall.
 - Behaviour is exemplary across the school, reflecting its strong Catholic character.
 - Pupils benefit hugely from the long tradition of excellent links between the school and parishes.

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- There is a palpable sense of community, and commitment amongst all staff and governors to the school's mission, driven, in particular by the headteacher, deputy headteacher, chair of governors and link governor.
 - Provision for RE, and leaders and governors monitoring and evaluation, is good. However, too many pupils are not making appropriate progress in relation to their starting points due to teachers' lack of mastery of the subject. There is, however, a strong commitment on the part of teachers to improve their subject knowledge and pedagogy in this area.
 - Pupils' response to and participation in the school's prayer life, the quality of prayer life provided by the school, and leaders and governors' monitoring and evaluation of this provision is outstanding overall.
 - Every pupil, regardless of their faith background feels welcome to participate fully in the school's rich prayer life.
 - The experience of living and working in a faithful, praying community makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development and plays an important part in supporting their learning in RE and other areas.

The capacity of the school community to improve is good

The capacity of the school to improve is good and continues to grow from strength to strength under the new leadership team. The two areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection have been effectively addressed.

Significant progress has been made in relation to developing the use of the chapel in order to enhance the prayer life of the school. The chapel is now a thriving hub of school life, used and valued by all members of the community. The Chapel Champions (chaplaincy team) are respected members of the school community. The appointment of an adult leader of chaplaincy and the planned refurbishment of the chapel demonstrate the commitment of leaders and governors to this important aspect of school life.

The new Relationships and Sex Education Guidelines are fully embedded in SMSC lessons and the wider curriculum and remain an ongoing focus for governors and leaders.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching across the school, in order to accelerate pupils' progress, to enable them to achieve age-related expectations or above, by:
 - improving teachers' specialist knowledge of RE by providing enhanced training and support, both in-house and through continued attendance at diocesan courses;

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- providing opportunities for teachers to observe and model the excellent practice identified during the inspection;
 - providing opportunities for teachers to explore effective examples of extended writing in RE;
 - ensuring a consistent approach to the marking of pupils' work in order that pupils know how to improve their learning and are able to capitalise on opportunities to use feedback to improve.
 - Leaders and governors should strengthen further their systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact of their work in RE, Catholic and prayer life.

a) **The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school**

- Pupils wholeheartedly embrace the school's strong Catholic ethos which values them as unique individuals, celebrates their achievements and enables them to feel supported, safe and cared for. They demonstrate a strong sense of belonging and pride in their school and can articulate the importance and purpose of the school's mission statement, and their pupil designed logo.
- Pupils value the opportunities the school provides for their personal support and development which enables them to be happy and confident individuals. This, alongside a child-centred education in personal relationships (RSE) prepares them for the next stage of their physical, social, emotional and spiritual development.
- Behaviour across the school is exemplary and reflects the Catholic character of the school. Pupils' conduct and relationships with each other demonstrates high levels of respect. This is due in no small measure to the school's behaviour policy and mission statement being consistently adhered to. The addition of child-generated rules, evident in classrooms and around the school, is highly effective in supporting and reinforcing high levels of respect across the board.
- Pupils are alert to the needs of others, both within and beyond the school community, demonstrating a clear understanding of how to act in the light of the Gospel values to support others who are less fortunate. This is evident in their participation in, and leading, a wide range of local charities such as Mary's Meals, Julia's House, the Trowbridge Soup Run and Food Bank, alongside more globally focused charities such as Mission Together, Fair Trade, CAFOD, Christian Aid and Water Aid.
- Pupils are fully aware of the school's chaplaincy provision in which each class has two 'Chapel Champion' representatives. This is a large, pro-active, high profile group who create their own yearly action plan, engage annually with diocesan chaplaincy training, attend diocesan events, and represent the school at parish events. They are effective in sharing their faith during collective worship and whole school collective worship, liturgies and Mass. Their role could be further strengthened by providing planned opportunities for them to monitor and evaluate the impact of their work in this area.
- Pupil voice is a strong aspect of school life. In particular, their involvement in the Trowbridge Youth Parliament and School Council is effective in strengthening their understanding of responsibility, democracy and justice and how these link with Gospel and British values.
- Pupils benefit hugely from the long tradition of excellent links between the school and parish, with the parish priests regularly visiting the school.

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- Pupils across the key stages embrace the demands that membership of this inclusive school community entails. For example, in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Key Stage 1 (KS1), younger pupils enthusiastically engage in planning reflections and liturgies; in Key Stage 2 (KS2), pupils work collaboratively with their teacher and the chaplaincy lead to plan class Masses. All of these are open to parents and the wider school community. In addition, the expectation that all KS2 pupils engage in the 'Leaders in Faith' Diocese award is effective in enabling pupils to develop and grow in their faith and share it with others.
 - The recently introduced Year 5 overnight faith camp (June 2018), held on the school site, has proved effective in developing older pupils' contribution to the leadership, participation and response to the Catholic ethos of the school, with opportunities to prepare and contribute to Mass, create their own prayer reflections and celebrate the world around them. This camp and other opportunities such as participation in a whole day Glastonbury pilgrimage and the pilgrimage to St Thomas More church in Bradford-on-Avon, enables pupils to embrace a holistic approach to their education and develop an understanding of their own vocation.

b) The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school

- The school's mission statement is central to its life, understood by all and annually revisited – the heartbeat of school life. All members of the school community are aware of its power and purpose and see it as providing a steer to their working day in the school community and beyond. This, alongside the strong chaplaincy provision is highly effective in promoting the Catholic Life of the school.
- There is a strong sense of community and commitment amongst staff, driven, in particular by the headteacher, deputy headteacher, chair of governors and link governor. This commitment is evident in staff participation in relevant Continuing Professional Development (CPD) on Catholic Life, participation in staff retreats and attendance at Friday prayer in the chapel. In addition, three members of staff are currently studying for the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies (CCRS).
- All staff are aware of their responsibilities in promoting Catholic education and supporting children on their faith journey. One INSET Day each year is set aside to support the teaching of RE or developing spirituality.
- The school environment, with its age appropriate icons, statues and vibrant RE displays in both classrooms and corridors, is explicit in its reflection of its mission and Catholic identity.
- The school's strong promotion of high standards of behaviour, steeped in Gospel values, combined with staff who provide excellent role models of mutual respect, is highly effective in creating an inclusive, supportive community for all.

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- Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), and Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) reflect Catholic teachings and principles and have significantly improved since the last inspection. These programmes place a strong emphasis on pupil voice.
 - The school is very attentive to the pastoral needs of both pupils and staff, ensuring that the needs of individuals are recognised and catered for. There is, for example, a strong drive from the new leadership team to further enhance and nurture the school's high levels of pastoral care through the use of meditation for reflection and focus.

c) How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school

- Leaders and governors are committed to, and effective in, promoting the Catholic life of the school. There is a sense of ongoing urgency to improve and move forward, underpinned by its mission to 'Grow and learn in the footsteps of Jesus' which is shared by all.
- Leaders and governors ensure that the whole curriculum contributes to pupils' spiritual, moral, and vocational development. This and other aspects are carefully mapped by the PSHE lead and this is used as a tool for further improvement.
- The provision for the Catholic life of the school is given the highest priority and is an integral part of its life. For example, the annual RE/spirituality INSET day has a clear focus on enhancing its Catholic life and supporting all in their faith journey. Consequently, staff (especially new ones) are developing a good understanding of the school's mission, enabling them to shape and support it.
- Leaders and governors are highly ambitious for the school's Catholic life and lead by example, providing challenge and support where necessary. The RE leader and link governor have recently engaged in a Catholicity audit, which they are using as a tool for further improvement. In addition, the headteacher's report to governors ensures that there are regular updates on the school's Catholic life.
- The school has effective strategies in place for engaging with parents. For example, the recent Parents' Forum to ascertain parents' views on the school's prayer life and RE is used to inform and improve provision.
- The school actively engages with diocesan policies and initiatives and promotes the Bishop's vision throughout the school as clearly evidenced in the strong focus on The Year of Mission. The school's commitment to The Year of Prayer (Advent 2018) was evident during the inspection, with the whole school involved in an outside-led theatre initiative to launch the focus for the new year.
- Leaders and governors have continued to sustain and build on the school's strong tradition as a Catholic school. This remains an ongoing whole school priority as evidenced in the work of the RE Faculty (whose remit includes developing this aspect).

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- The governing body, under the strong leadership of the Chair of Governors and Link Governor, is highly ambitious for the Catholic life of the school. They are overtly committed to the school's mission and they work closely with the headteacher and RE Faculty (whose remit also includes the school's Catholic life) to monitor and evaluate the provision for this. They visit the school and attend assemblies, Mass and liturgies both formally and informally. However, leaders and governors acknowledge that self-evaluation could be further strengthened by working with the RE faculty to adopt a more focused and systematic approach in order to measure impact and plan for future improvements.
 - The school has effective strategies in place for engaging with parents through Parent Forums to ascertain and build on their views in relation to RE and RSE. However, further consideration should be given to ascertain their view on the school's Catholic and prayer life and achieving a greater focus on celebrating the excellent work being done in these areas.

a) How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

- Overall, pupils enjoy their learning in RE because of the excellent relations engendered by their teachers. However, whilst some pupils, relative to their starting point and capabilities, are making appropriate progress, a significant number are not. This is due to teachers' lack of mastery of the subject. There is, however, a strong commitment on the part of teachers to improve their subject knowledge and pedagogy in this area.
- The headteacher and RE leader are working closely with all staff to provide appropriate training and support in line with the new diocesan outcomes in RE. However, this should be accelerated as a matter of priority to enable all pupils to make good progress across the board and especially at Upper KS2.
- The school's strong Catholic ethos, prayer life and parish links play a major role in supporting pupils' religious literacy, but this is not sufficiently developed in the teaching of the subject across the board. Pupils are aware of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life but are, on too many occasions, insufficiently challenged to reflect spiritually, and think ethically and theologically as they progress through the school.
- The quality of pupils' current written work requires improvement. There are limited opportunities for extended writing, especially in Upper Key Stage 2.
- Pupils have good attitudes and are keen to do their best, applying themselves and working at a good pace when provided with appropriate tasks and guidance. However, the limitations of some tasks do not always allow pupils to demonstrate what they are capable of or enable them to respond in a way which encourages them to use religious language and make appropriate links between faith and life.
- Pupils are keen to share their views when asked and have a genuine desire to engage with the subject. At times, pupils are unclear about the progress they are making and what they need to do in order to improve. They enjoy tasks which are challenging and 'make me think', responding positively to learning through art, drama and imaginative activities.

b) The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education

- The quality and efficacy of teaching, in promoting good learning and pupil progress, is inconsistent across the school and is very dependent on teachers' subject knowledge and their confidence in engaging pupils in order to build and develop their understanding of RE. Those lessons which required improvement did not take sufficient account of pupils' prior learning and adopted 'a one size fits all approach' with some pupils struggling to understand, and others insufficiently challenged. In

addition, teachers' management of time hampered pupils' concentration and progress.

- Inconsistency in following the school's marking policy meant that pupils were not clear on how to improve their learning or capitalise on opportunities to use feedback to improve. In addition, teachers' use of WALTs (We are Learning To...) did not always match the activities set.
- Inspectors observed some highly effective teaching in Lower Key Stage 2, exploring whether Jonah was a good prophet. In this lesson, the teacher skilfully encouraged pupils to make links between the story of Jonah and Christian beliefs through consolidating and building on pupils' knowledge and understanding, encouraging them to 'think outside the box' and share their ideas with others. This resulted in highly effective learning and high levels of pupil engagement.

In a Lower Key Stage 1 lesson, pupils demonstrated an excellent understanding of why Advent is a time of preparation for Christians, relating this to, and building on, their own experience. Pupils were challenged to articulate how St Francis popularised the making of the crib and the meaning of a living crib for the poor of his time, emphasising the humility of the Saviour coming as a poor child. One group of pupils took great pride in explaining the symbolism of the empty manger and related this to the symbolism of the advent wreath and preparing for Christmas.

- Inspectors were impressed with teachers' commitment to improving their subject knowledge in RE and determination, under the guidance of the headteacher and RE leader to improve and develop. This, however, must remain an ongoing focus for the school, with particular support for those who are not Catholic. It is strongly recommended that time should be set aside for teachers to observe and model the excellent teaching identified during the inspection.

c) How well leaders and governors monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education

- Leaders and governors ensure that the religious education curriculum meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference in every respect and in each key stage. The school follows the approved diocesan materials and God Matters programme.
- Religious education is comparable to other core curriculum subjects in terms of professional development, resourcing and time allocation. The latter is effectively monitored by the headteacher, in collaboration with the RE leader and link governor. Each teacher is encouraged to teach at least one of their RE lessons during the morning and the study of other faiths is taught twice a year in two-week blocks. All staff are aware that RE and spirituality should permeate all the areas of the curriculum and further opportunities to make this more explicit are planned for this academic year.

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- The headteacher and RE leader have worked, and continue to work, closely with the Diocese on the development of assessment, changing from levels to end of year outcomes. This, in turn, has been shared with all staff through in-house INSET. However, leaders are aware that this is very much a 'work in progress', still needs to be fully embedded and must remain an ongoing focus.
 - RE data is gathered and scrutinised on a regular basis to identify areas of strength and areas for development. The attainment and progress of vulnerable groups is tracked discretely, using a system devised by the school's SENCO (a member of the leadership team) and is scrutinised by governors. The new leadership team is working with the RE link governor to establish a more accurate, consistent and rigorous system for tracking, monitoring, analysing and evaluating the impact of the school's work.
 - The RE leader has a secure vision for teaching and learning and provides an excellent role model for colleagues. She works closely with the headteacher to undertake regular reviews of the subject, engage in moderation and lead CPD for staff.
 - Leaders and governors effectively take into account the views of parents and pupils in evaluating religious education. For example, in November 2018, a Parent Forum enabled parents to feedback on the quality of the RE curriculum (and prayer life). This, in turn, was supplemented by the headteacher undertaking a planning and book review, and phase leaders engaging in book sampling. This resulted in sharing findings and agreeing actions to be taken. The system for sharing this should be refined to ensure that the impact of these and other monitoring activities are shared more formally with governors. This will enable both leaders and governors to effectively plan improvement in provision, especially in relation to improving pupils' outcomes.
 - The new RE Faculty is an excellent example of distributive leadership across all phase groups. The faculty (led by the RE leader) is effective in supporting teaching and learning in RE. It consists of a highly motivated group of adults, including teaching and administrative staff, the chaplaincy lead and parish priest. Together, they are committed to working with the headteacher and governors in helping to shape RE provision through adopting a creative and imaginative approach to the subject and engage in monitoring activities.
 - The headteacher is an active member of the Diocesan Working Party on the development of assessment using the new outcomes, providing effective support and guidance to this group as appropriate.
 - The headteacher and RE leader undertake regular reviews of the subject and engage in moderation of pupils' work. The school has rightly identified that this could be further strengthened through more collaborative moderation with its Catholic partner schools. This is especially important, given that all schools are in the early stages of implementing the new diocesan units.

The Prayer Life of the School

Grade 1

a) How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's prayer life

- Every pupil, regardless of their faith background, feels welcome to participate fully in the school's rich prayer life. The experience of living and working in a faithful, praying community makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development and plays an important part in supporting their learning in RE and other areas.
- Pupils play an active role in the school's prayer life. They readily take the initiative in leading prayer and worship and, with increasing frequency in the parish Sunday Masses as readers, servers and as members of the choir. They display confidence in leading, or actively contributing to whole school liturgical events, including an Advent Penitential Service observed during the inspection.
- Pupils acquire skills in planning and leading prayer and worship through careful guidance from the RE Faculty, who ensure appropriate progression is built into liturgies and services for all pupils across the school. For example, during Advent, the youngest pupils in EYFS prepare an age-appropriate celebration on the meaning of the nativity, whilst pupils in Years 1 and 2 prepare a crib reflection and carol concert. There is also a corresponding progression in prayer, including traditional Catholic prayer and a developing understanding of the Mass and liturgical year.
- Attending Mass is a regular feature of school life, with pupils attending the monthly Wednesday lunchtime Mass held in the parish church. This enables them and their families to extend their faith beyond the school community and join the wider parish community. Pupils lead the singing, read, organise the offertory procession and altar serving.
- Pupils in Key Stage 2 value opportunities to work collaboratively to plan and contribute to Masses for peers, parents and the wider school community. They are confident in using appropriate scripture, prayers and hymns. Pupil response to these show they find them beneficial to developing their own faith.
- Chapel Champions are highly proactive in sharing their faith during collective worship and whole school liturgies and Mass, taking immense pride in developing this. They enjoy a high profile across the school, engage annually with the Diocesan chaplaincy training, and represent the school at parish events.
- The whole school initiative 'Mustard Seed Theatre Project' to launch the Year of Prayer (Advent 2018) was warmly embraced by all members of the school community and is an excellent example of the prominence given to prayer within the school.

b) The quality of the prayer life provided by the school

- Prayer is central to the life of the school and continues to go from strength to strength since the last inspection. There are now planned opportunities for pupils to visit the chapel weekly and engage in quiet prayer, scripture reading and meditation. This, along with the creation of pupil-led reflection materials (supported by staff training in their use) has been highly effective in empowering pupils to lead the prayers within their class and in preparing for collective worship, class Masses and liturgy.
- Prayer and collective worship is given a high priority in terms of planning, resourcing and support for staff. Consequently, pupils' and staff's experiences of this are of a high quality and valued by all. Prayers are displayed in the classroom, with the prayer table acting as a focal point for prayer and reflection; many classrooms have their own prayer book which is taken home and shared with parents.
- The newly established role of adult chaplaincy leader has proved very effective in supporting the Chapel Champion Team, as well as facilitating lunch-time prayer activities in the chapel and training pupils in leading reflections. She, in turn, is an active member of the RE Faculty and ensures that pupil voice is represented within this group.
- Pupils' prayer life is enriched through a range of prayer opportunities outside the classroom, such as retreat experiences, participation in a Glastonbury Pilgrimage and local pilgrimage to St Thomas More church in Bradford-on-Avon.
- Links between school and parish remain exceptionally strong, building on this strong tradition. The parish priest is a valued member of the RE Faculty and school community. As well as being a regular visitor to the school, he leads class masses, liturgies and all significant liturgical events for the whole school. The school, in turn, supports the parish-run programme for First Holy Communion.
- The opportunities provided for pupils are also mirrored in provision for staff. For example, the voluntary Friday morning staff prayers in the chapel are greatly valued and well attended by all members of the staff community. The impact of this initiative has proven to be two-fold, offering valued and purposeful prayerful time, as well as enhancing the knowledge and skills of staff in relation to the liturgical year.

c) How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the prayer life of the school

- Leaders and governors have continued to sustain and build on the school's strong tradition as a prayerful community. This remains an ongoing whole school priority as evidenced in the work of the RE Faculty (whose remit is also to develop the prayer life of the school) and the clear focus given to developing prayer life in the School Development Plan (SDP).

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- Leaders and members of the RE Faculty have an excellent understanding of the Church's liturgical year, seasons and feasts and provide good role models to staff in making these accessible to pupils in a contemporary context.
 - The governing body, under the strong leadership of the Chair of Governors and Link Governor, is highly ambitious for the prayer life of the school. They are, as stated previously, overtly committed to the school's mission and work closely with the headteacher and RE Faculty (whose remit includes the school's prayer life) to monitor and evaluate the provision for this. They visit the school and attend assemblies, Mass and liturgies both formally and informally. However, leaders and governors acknowledge that self-evaluation could be further strengthened by working with the new RE faculty to adopt a more focused and systematic approach in order to measure impact and plan for future improvements.

Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were 45 parental questionnaires received. They were extremely positive about the school and their children's education. Some parents considered that they did not receive sufficient information about what is taught in RSE. Some typical responses included:

'It feels like a family – very welcoming'

'A warm and caring school where every child has a fantastic Catholic education'

'The school has a real community feel, all the children seem to get on well throughout the years...'

'The caring ethos of staff and students and its nature in how it treats all people fairly and with respect and dignity'

'The behaviour of pupils - a real reflection of the ethics and work of the school'

'Kind, dedicated staff'