



## **INSPECTION REPORT**

St Benedict's Catholic Primary  
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DfE Number: 9333358

Interim Executive Headteacher: Mr A Tarrant  
Interim Head of School: Mrs Ellen Croker  
Chair of Governors: Mr Jon Stratford

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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: 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> July 2022  
Date of previous inspection: 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> December 2015

Reporting Inspector: Ms A Fowler  
Additional Inspector: Mr D Leiblich

## **Description of school**

St Benedict's is a one form entry primary school. The school serves the parishes formally administered by Downside Abbey. Since the last inspection, the monks have withdrawn from Downside Abbey; the school is now reliant on intermittent support from a variety of priests. With the retirement of the previous headteacher in August 2021, the school has joined a formal collaboration with St Mary's Bath, with the current head of St Mary's as interim Executive Head. The current Religious Education lead, who is also the Head of School, has been in post since September 2021. Approximately 24% of the pupils are baptised Catholics. The majority of other children at the school are from other Christian denominations or have not declared a faith. 21% of pupils in the school have special educational needs or disabilities. The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is 4% which is below average. The number of families claiming free school meals is also below average. Numbers in reception have fallen. During the last two years the school has experienced considerable disruption because of Covid.

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

**Grade: Good**

### **This is a good school because:**

- Pupils, parents and staff are extremely proud of their school community.
- The governing body is committed to developing and supporting all aspects of the Catholic life of the school.
- Chaplaincy within the school is vibrant and is led effectively and enthusiastically.
- Prayer is central to the life of the school and the school has invested in training for both pupils and staff, as a result, pupils are competent at leading prayer within the school.
- The school has made rapid progress in developing the Catholic life of the school in a very short space of time, and the development of religious education is a priority for the school.

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

The school's leaders and governors are committed to developing, monitoring and evaluating the Catholic life of the school. The new partnership with St Mary's and the work with the Camino group offers opportunities to develop curriculum planning and practice. The new RE coordinator has a clear view of how to develop the subject, build effective assessment techniques and bring about improvement.

In response to the challenges Covid presented the school has put measures in place to support the mental health of both staff and pupils.

Issues raised by the last inspection have been addressed as far as possible.

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

- Continue to develop the knowledge and confidence of teachers to plan RE effectively
- Review the planning of RE to ensure objectives are appropriate and targeted and ensure that tasks are clearly linked to these objectives

- Governors should ensure that all monitoring and evaluation procedures are formally recorded and that the impact of these activities clearly stated.

## **Catholic Life**

**Grade: Outstanding**

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

- Pupils demonstrate a strong sense of belonging to this welcoming, inclusive Catholic community. Pupils said that “the teachers are lovely, and they really help us.” They clearly benefit from the Catholic life of the school with one pupil saying, “they teach us in all sorts of ways, not just lessons but how to be responsible for others.”
- Pupils have the opportunity to participate in taking responsibility for the life of the school in a number of ways. Older children act as playground leaders for younger children and the school council and chaplaincy team provide leadership opportunities. Pupils also help evaluate the life of the school through Pupil Voice exercises.
- Pupils actively and enthusiastically support opportunities for visits and retreats.
- Pupils are alert to the needs of others, both within and beyond the school community, demonstrating an informed understanding of how to make connections between faith and life.
- Pupils understand the need to help others, saying “we have to make life fairer for everyone” and “you need to treat others as you want to be treated, this is what Jesus taught us.” They support a variety of charities including CAFOD and the Red Cross.
- Behaviour across the school is exemplary and pupils’ conduct and relationships with each other demonstrate high levels of respect.
- Pupils are confident in expressing their own views and beliefs and they believe that the staff treat them fairly and with respect.
- Pupils value the opportunities the school provides for their personal support and development which enables them to be happy and confident individuals.
- Members of the school chaplaincy team are enthusiastic about the work they do. They have received training and they organise events within the school.

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

- The school’s values are prominent on displays around the school, are well known by the pupils and are linked to the assembly programme. Pupils genuinely try to live out these values.
- All staff are fully supportive of, and committed to, the Catholic life of the school, they welcome in-service training, staff meetings begin with prayer.

- Opportunities for training to develop the Catholic life are provided on a regular basis and governors undertake training with the diocese.
- The school environment demonstrates the Catholic and inclusive nature of the school.
- Parental and pupil surveys show a high regard for the pastoral support the school provides.
- The school chaplaincy team, which restarted after Covid, has clear links with the Diocesan Pastoral Plan and is very well supported by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable leader.
- There is a strong clear focus on supporting the mental health of both pupils and staff, pupils talked with confidence about 'mind apples' and understood their use.
- A new relationship and sex education curriculum, in keeping with Catholic values, was fully introduced this academic year, consultation with parents took place and the school has reviewed all aspects of relationship, health and sex education to ensure a more integrated approach. Through the religious education programme pupils learn about other faiths and cultures.

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

- Leaders and governors are deeply committed to the Catholic life of the school, placing its development at the centre of all that they do. They fully support the Bishop's vision for the further development of Catholic schools and are active participants in the Camino Partnership's strategy.
- Leaders and governors monitor and evaluate the Catholic life of the school on a regular basis. Governors receive reports from the Headteacher on the Catholic life of the school, and they make regular visits to school on both a formal and an informal basis. They have also carried out parental and staff surveys. In order to develop further there should be clear outcomes of such monitoring and evaluation sessions.
- Pupils have taken part in pupil voice activities in which they reflect on the Catholic life of the school.
- Staff are provided with varied training opportunities to strengthen their understanding of the Catholic life of the school. In order to develop this further the school needs to review the impact of these events.
- Whole school training in September 2021 focused on developing a shared vision with St Mary's Catholic Primary School. Carefully planned twilight session and staff meetings have been used to help develop staff understanding and practice.
- The school uses its newsletter 'St Benedict's Update' to inform parents about events and activities relating to the Catholic life of the school and it also sends out a specific newsletter on worship. Recent developments to improve communication have led to the development of Twitter and Facebook accounts.

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

- Most pupils show interest and enthusiasm for RE. They are able to show their understanding of the value of RE, however some pupils find RE to be repetitive and not all pupils make progress. Behaviour in lessons is good but some pupils lose focus if a task goes on too long.
- Pupils use their knowledge to reflect ethically and spiritually and are able to make connections between faith and life. However, there are gaps in their understanding. Their understanding is most secure when it also links into the prayer life of the school.
- They enjoy the work on other faiths and are knowledgeable about other faith traditions. They demonstrate their understanding that everyone needs to be treated with respect.
- In general, pupil work needs to demonstrate greater depth and understanding of the topics studied.

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

- Teachers are enthusiastic about RE and want to ensure that pupils succeed. They are becoming more confident in their understanding but there are still areas where knowledge and understanding need to be more secure.
- Pupils are encouraged to work in pairs or groups and work together in a collaborative way.
- At times the pace of lessons is slow.
- There needs to be more consistency in the use of both learning goals and the way feedback is given. Learning goals are not always clear or linked to specific content. Tasks set do not always enable the learning goals to be fulfilled. As a result, pupils do not always make the progress they should. Each lesson begins with a review of previous work, but this does not always ensure pupils can correct mistakes. Pupils are mostly reliant on teachers to know if their work needs improving and cannot yet judge their own progress.
- There are gaps in pupils' knowledge that need to be addressed.
- The assessment system put in place by the new coordinator has the potential to be extremely effective. This system has not been in place long enough for its impact to be seen but it should enable data to be used in planning and to provide more detailed information about the progress of different cohorts within the school.

**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 and ensures that the teaching of other faiths is an integral part of this.
- The new leadership team have ensured that training for staff on aspects of the RE curriculum is provided on a regular basis and staff are becoming more confident as a result.
- The coordinator is new in post but has a clear insight into how to develop the subject. Monitoring and evaluating work are carried out on a regular basis through lesson observations, book scrutinies and informal meetings. As a result of this, more recent planning shows signs of improvement. The coordinator has also undertaken pupil surveys.
- The new Link Governor for RE has carried out a learning walk and has interviewed pupils about their work.
- Improvement in RE is a key focus for the school.

**The Prayer Life of the School**

**Grade: Outstanding**

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

- Pupils value the opportunity to participate in, and lead, the prayer life of the school. The school uses the format and structure provided by CAFOD to help pupil become effective leaders. From reception to year 6 pupils have the opportunity to organise, lead and plan prayer and worship. Pupil led reflections were observed throughout the school. Pupils are also actively involved in maintaining the prayer areas of the classroom and by using prompts, such as the prayer trees, make frequent use of the opportunities created to respond.
- Pupils speak with enthusiasm of the opportunity to be involved in both the nativity play and the Easter passion play
- The school has purchased a range of resources – tactile as well as online - to empower and support teacher-led and pupil-led prayer, so that pupils are able to reflect on how they set up a focal area and on which resources support specific liturgical themes and times. There is a display outlining the liturgical year within the hall which also helps develop pupils' understanding.
- The chaplaincy team help to lead, organise and plan the Stations of the Cross in Lent and in events during May which celebrate the role of Mary.
- The school community, in the absence of a permanent presence of clergy in the Downside parishes, has supported the recent preparation for Holy Communion and Reconciliation of approximately fourteen children.

- Pupils behave respectfully in assembly and understand the need to be inclusive and respect other faith traditions. In recent years this has been enhanced by outside visits to places of worship of other faith traditions.

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

- Prayer is central to the life of the school and teachers strive to ensure that prayer is relevant to life thus creating opportunities for spiritual and moral development. During the inspection Sunday's Gospel, 'The Good Samaritan' was the theme for assembly and was clearly linked to the school's values. Praying together is clearly a part of the lived experience of both staff and pupils.
- There is a clear plan for the development of prayer and worship within the school which reflects both the liturgical year and the specific needs of the school.
- As a consequence of the training provided and the availability of resources staff are able to support pupils in becoming leaders of prayer and worship.
- St Benedict's feast day is celebrated by the whole school community.

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

- Leaders and governors place a high priority on good quality provision for collective worship. The school has made rapid progress in a very short space of time providing training and resources to support the development of pupils as leaders.
- The school has invested in a range of artefacts and resources to help staff and pupils in their planning and delivery of prayer and worship.
- Leaders ensure the prayer life of the school is seen as a high priority and they ensure that the liturgical year is celebrated within the community.
- Leaders have an excellent understanding of how to link prayer to life, for example the recent stations of the cross during Lent made a connection with the plight of refugees.

**Summary of Parental Questionnaires**

There were relatively few responses from parents all of which were extremely positive. Parents commented on the inclusiveness of the school, the sense of family and belonging, the extra-curricular activities provided and the support and pastoral care provided.

One parent said *"my daughter now relates life to Jesus' teaching as if it has all come together and made sense..... This year my daughter made her first communion, I was so impressed with how she was guided through the process and how she understood what she was doing."*