

St John Fisher Catholic Primary School

Hazelmere Rd, Marshalwick, St Albans AL4 9RW

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 25 January 2017



Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is good

- The religious education programme taught in the school meets well the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory.
- The pupils are making good progress in the knowledge and understanding of religious education.
- The pupils show confidence and are articulate when they talk of religious matters.
- The teaching of religious education is good.
- The governors, head and teachers have high expectations regarding the progress pupils should make in religious education.
- There is good leadership and management of religious education on the part of the head, the senior leadership team and the religious education coordinator.

Classroom religious education is not yet outstanding because

- Further elements of differentiation need to be introduced for pupils of differing abilities.
- Staff need to gain further experience of using and moderating Levels of Achievement.
- Pedagogy and teaching approaches at Early Years Foundation Stage need further development.
- Greater opportunities need to be created for staff to observe each other teach and spread good practice and ideas among them.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- The school places Religious Education at the very heart of its curriculum.
- It fully delivers the 10% classroom curriculum time expected by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.
- Pupils are offered a range of experience in order to explore the richness of the Catholic tradition.
- The experience of prayer and worship led by the pupils in the life of the school is outstanding.
- School leaders, including governors, and all staff share a commitment to the excellent provision of prayer opportunities as part of the mission of this Catholic school.
- The parish links closely and generously to the school through the priests and the parish sister.
- The school provides excellent opportunities for pupils to serve others through involvement in activities and events designed to actively engage them in helping those in need.
- Pupils are taught well to understand the teaching of Jesus regarding loving our neighbour.
- The pupils show great generosity and initiative in raising money for causes.
- There is a remarkable sense of community surrounding the school on the part of pupils, teachers, parents and parish.
- The governors, headteacher and senior leadership team are outstanding and effective in promoting the Catholic life of the school.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

The previous inspection proposed that the tracking system should be further developed to ensure pupils make good progress in religious education (RE). The school has recently introduced a very effective tracking system which enables improved monitoring of pupil progress. The school has in the last couple of years introduced a new religious education programme to better deliver the topics of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory (RECD). It has also taken steps to improve the learning and behaviour climate in the school to make sure every pupil makes the progress of which they are capable.

The content of classroom religious education is good

The school is careful to ensure that all its teachers are properly introduced to the Bishop's guidance document for religious education, the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. This has been especially important in the last two years with the number of new teachers joining the school. Supplementary teaching material has been introduced in Years 5 and 6 beyond the religious education programme in use. This has resulted in improvements in levels reached at the end of Key Stage 2. The teaching programme and the school's religious education documents indicate that the RECD themes are well known and understood, and are effectively delivered. Other faiths are appropriately introduced and taught. Pupils' understanding of them is extended by inviting speakers from other faiths to the school and for the pupils to make trips to local places of worship. Through increasingly open ended questioning in class with the older pupils, pupils are confident and articulate in speaking of religious matters and what they mean to them. Pupils are confident in looking up scripture passages in the Bibles that are found in every classroom.

Pupil achievement in religious education is good

Pupil achievement is good and compares favourably with other core subjects. A new introduced tracking system for assessment demonstrates that teachers have set challenging but appropriate targets for pupils. Data, books and the lessons observed show that children are making good progress, which will only improve further with the new monitoring systems. Staff understand the levels of attainment and some moderation within school and with other schools has taken place, but there is scope for this to be more frequent and rigorous. Children are well behaved and engaged in their lessons which has a good impact on progress. Work shows children are meeting expected standards in each year group, however improved differentiation would benefit in supporting the less able and further challenging the more able.

The quality of teaching is good

The quality of teaching is good with some outstanding practice evident. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour. Pupils enjoy religious education lessons, are attentive and engaged and show a good level of religious literacy. This is the result of teachers planning a range of different tasks such as discussion about scripture, using art work and a range of genres of writing. Teachers regularly make links to prior learning and demonstrate good subject knowledge. Marking is consistent across the school and pupils recognise that it supports them in moving on with their learning. Homework has begun to be set for RE. However this is not yet established and would be a good way to embed learning and further involve parents. The Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum sets standards for the learning, development and care of children from birth to 5 years old and further elements of it need to be developed in the Reception class.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting religious education is good

The leadership and management of the promotion of religious education is effective. The commitment of the head, senior leadership team and RE coordinator to implementing the RE teaching programmes is good. High standards in RE are the expectation of the governors and whole staff. The deployment of staff and resources to ensure that the new teachers are brought up to speed with these expectations is evident. Monitoring of and feedback to teachers of classroom strengths are in place. However further planning should be pursued to allow teachers to observe each other teach more frequently to promote the spread of good practice. There also needs to be the creation of further opportunities to refine skills for assessment of levels and attainment. The governors take a keen interest in the progress of the improvement plans in RE and give full support to all initiatives to promote different aspects of religious education.

What should the school do to develop further in classroom religious education?

- Introduce further elements of differentiation into planning and teaching.
- Find further opportunities to promote the spread of good practice cross the staff.
- Schedule more frequent work meetings where Levels of Attainment in RE are moderated together.
- Review and develop further EYFS elements in Reception class.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

The previous report identified that the school should build on and maintain current practice and implement the new diocesan framework for self-evaluation of the Catholic life of the school. The school has fully implemented this recommendation and the current self-evaluation document is the one recommended by the diocesan. The school since the last inspection has developed areas of its Catholic life, including increased opportunities for pupils to lead worship, the establishment of a pupil chaplaincy team and regular class Masses.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

The school has at the core of its curriculum religious education. The school is outstanding in its planning and delivery of religious education through all aspects of its curriculum. The school gives at least 10% of curriculum time to religious education and fully conforms to the recommendations of the Bishops' Conference on this matter. The school has shown special concern to ensure that the new teachers it has appointed in the past two years have all been comprehensively inducted into understanding the Catholic nature of the school and the importance of religious education being at the heart of its curriculum. It has arranged the appointment of both senior staff and teachers to this end. There have been regular opportunities for teachers to have continuing professional development in this area. With the support of the governing body and the senior leadership, the priests and the sister from the local parish are regular visitors to the school. They are able to provide additional and broad learning opportunities for the support of the religious education curriculum. The school is generous in its budget provision for religious education and has recently introduced the Wednesday Word to help promote home, school and parish liaison regarding both religious education and the parish liturgy.

The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community

is outstanding.

Prayer and worship are integral to the life of the school. Pupils are offered a range of experience in order to explore the richness of the Catholic tradition. Acts of Worship are led by the 'Chaplaincy Team', developing a sense of belonging in the school and opportunities for participation. Acts of worship in the school provide for the engagement of pupils in quiet reflection, thoughtful discussion and spiritual growth. Foundation governors are involved in planning the Sacramental programme and timetable for liturgical celebrations through the year. Eucharistic celebrations are offered at key times. The liturgical year is the foundation for all prayer and worship experiences. The school hall is used weekly as a Sunday Mass centre for the local community who live too far from the parish Church of St Alban and St Stephen in the town centre. School leaders and all staff share a commitment to the excellent provision of prayer opportunities as part of the mission of this Catholic school. Governors support the school in the development of its prayer life, visiting the school regularly to help lead acts of worship and join the pupils in prayer. Parents are involved in the Masses and sacramental programmes, building a strong community of prayer in the school. On a more ecumenical front, the school has established a tradition of the Advent and Lent trails with the local Baptist Church with which it has established a good relationship.

The contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice –**is outstanding.**

The school provides excellent opportunities for pupils to serve others through involvement in activities and events designed to actively engage them in helping those in need. The chaplaincy team in the school designs posters, leads Act of Worship for younger pupils, and organises fundraising events for both local charities and global projects. They have raised money to support an orphanage in Tanzania and speak about their desire to spread the Good News and become closer to God by their actions. Pupils show a strong understanding of following Jesus' footsteps and demonstrating they are proud to be Catholic, following the example of Jesus and other saints, such as St Theresa. Pupils speak enthusiastically about the call to serve and their understanding that this will lead to a happy life. They have an excellent understanding of the Church's call to action.

The partnership with parents, school and parish, and collaboration as an integral part of the diocese through its relationship with the diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf**is outstanding.**

The school has shown in an outstanding fashion its commitment to promoting the partnership with parents and parish, with the diocese and with the local community. The parents consulted spoke warmly of the many different ways that they feel involved and are communicated with in the life of the school and their children. The school has built up support resources for those children and families in need in one way or another, whether social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. There is an active Parent Teacher Association which organises social and fund raising events. The school has established a strong sense of community which was evident in the course of the inspection. Through the priests and the sister there is an outstanding connection and collaboration with the local parish. This is further maintained through the school being a Mass centre on Sundays for those Catholics living close by. The headteacher works closely with colleagues in neighbouring Catholic schools and ensures the school takes part in both local moderation meetings as well as diocesan in service meetings, leadership conferences or Cathedral events. The governors attend diocesan governors training opportunities and support the regular visits of the diocesan RE adviser to the school. They have cooperated closely with the diocese in the changes affecting the school over the past few years.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school**is outstanding**

Leadership and management are outstandingly effective in promoting the Catholic life of the school. The governors, the head and the senior leaders are unstinting in their efforts to support individual initiatives related to the Catholic life of the school as well as their overall encouragement of it. With the appointment of the new head a few years ago, the governors have taken specific steps to say what their expectations are regarding the importance of the Catholic life of the school and have worked closely with the head in implementing them. There is currently in place a review of its longer term strategy and mission statement, reflecting on the school motto 'Learning together, we walk in the footsteps of Christ'. Staff are encouraged to be active in various ways in the Catholic life of the school. The school takes steps to spend time looking at what it means to be a Catholic school in its locality and environment, asking itself whether it is being effective as a beacon of the Christ's message.

What should the school do to develop further the Catholic life of the school?

- Improve further pupil involvement in prayer, and in particular spontaneous prayer.

Information about this school

- The school is a one form entry Catholic primary school in the locality of St Albans.
- The school serves the parish of St Alban and St Stephen in St Albans, Herts.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 73%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 14% and from other faiths is 4%. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 67%.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is 4.
- There are 21 pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom 2 have statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is above average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is above average.
- There is a below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 22 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (12%).

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| Department for Education Number | 919 3403 |
| Unique Reference Number | 117480 |
| Local Authority | Hertfordshire |

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| Type of school | Primary Special |
| School category | Voluntary Aided |
| Age range of pupils | 4 -11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on roll | 188 |
| The appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Mary Harber |
| Headteacher | Mrs Laura Flitton |
| Telephone number | 01727 861077 |
| Website | http://www.sjfisher.herts.sch.uk/ |
| Email address | admin@sjfisher.herts.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 26 March 2012 |
| Grades from previous inspection: | |
| Classroom religious education | Outstanding |
| The Catholic life of the school | Outstanding |

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out (i) under the requirements of the Canon 806 and (ii) in accordance with the Framework for Diocesan Inspections 2015 approved by the Archbishop of Westminster and (iii) under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

- The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection.
- During the inspection 7 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended 2 assemblies and 3 acts of worship.
- Meetings were held with school staff, pupils and governors.
- Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

Inspection Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

Inspection Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

Deacon Anthony Clark

Lead Inspector

Miss Elizabeth Doonan

Associate Inspector

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