



St Margaret Clitherow Catholic Primary School

Monkswood Lane, Stevenage, Herts SG2 8QJ

Date of inspection: 8th May 2014

A. Classroom Religious Education

What is the overall effectiveness of classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy?

Overall Grade I*

The school is outstandingly effective in its classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy. Its religious education (RE) curriculum is rich, relevant and dynamic. Pupils make very good progress in their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith. High quality teaching ensures that achievement and progress is at least as good as or better than other core subjects. The pupils have very positive attitudes towards learning. The pupils benefit from the whole school initiative to build their learning power and independent study. The requirements of the Curriculum Directory are met in an exceptional way. Learning in religious education enables and supports active participation in the Catholic life of the school. Staff receive very good in service training and are confident in their teaching and the achievement of learning outcomes. Outstanding leadership in religious education inspires the pursuit of excellence from both staff and pupils.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What is the overall effectiveness of the Catholic life of the school in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing?

Overall Grade I*

The Catholic life of the school is outstandingly effective in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing. The vision of the headteacher, senior leadership and governors ensures that the ethos and life of the school fully reflect and embody the Catholic values of the school. The experience of the Catholic life is engaging and empowering for everyone in the community. The school leadership ensures that the ethos of Catholic life is rich, dynamic and creative. The whole school community lives out the schools' Mission Statement, striving for excellence and the support of the most needy. Worship, prayer and the Eucharist are central to the life of the school. Religious education is recognised as being at the core of the curriculum. Different styles of prayer are shared and respected, with the pupils increasingly leading it. There is very close cooperation with the local parish and the parish priest is a welcome contributor to the life of the school. The governors are fully conversant with their role as guardians and promoters of the Catholicity of the school. The parental responses to the questionnaire, answered by more than three quarters of the parents, were overwhelmingly very positive.

Introduction

The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection. The inspectors spent one day in school, visited eight lessons and one assembly, and carried out seven interviews with school staff, pupils and governors. Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, discussion with local clergy, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

The Inspection of St Margaret Clitherow, Stevenage was carried out under the requirements of the Canon 806 and Education Act 2005, and in accordance with the Framework for Section 48 Inspections approved by the Archbishop of Westminster. The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop. The inspection reviews and evaluates how effective the school is in providing Catholic education. This process begins with the school's own self-evaluation.

Inspection Team

Dcn Anthony Clark
Mr Daniel Keane

Lead Inspector
Associate Inspector

Description of School

The school is a one form entry in the LA of Hertfordshire and the locality of Stevenage. The school serves the parish of St Hildas as well the other parishes of Stevenage as well as Knebworth. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 99%. The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 1% and from other Faiths 0%. The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 70%.

There are 234 pupils on roll, with 3 pupils with statements of Special Educational Need. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority 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. 14% of pupils receive the Pupil Premium.

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URN Number: 117474

Headteacher: Mr Jonathan White
Chair of Governors: Mrs Sally Curtis

Date of previous inspection: February 2008

Key for inspection grades:

<i>Grade 1*</i>	<i>Outstanding</i>
<i>Grade 1</i>	<i>Very Good</i>
<i>Grade 2</i>	<i>Good</i>
<i>Grade 3</i>	<i>Requires improvement</i>
<i>Grade 4</i>	<i>Causing Concern</i>

A. Classroom Religious Education

How religiously literate are pupils in the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith and how well do they know, understand and appreciate the importance of religious faith and practice in everyday life?

What has improved in classroom religious education since the last inspection?

The last inspection said the school should ensure consistency of marking across the school so that pupils know how their work could be improved and are given opportunities to make these improvements, and also said that the school should embed the recent developments in assessment procedures into school practice so that these full impact on teachers' future planning. The school has fully met both recommendations; the pupils are aware and are given the opportunity to improve their work, and the school has implemented current developments into its assessment procedures.

How well does the content of classroom religious education meet the requirements of the Curriculum Directory?

Grade 1*

The school has incorporated the Curriculum Directory (CD) into an attractive and functional version applicable specifically to its own situation. This version is in every religious education teachers' files, along with specific links to each lesson scheme and plan. The pupils are aware of the Directory and that what they are learning in religious education is based on it. The CD areas have been represented pictorially and are displayed in each class and in communal areas as well. The Directory is also online to all Governors, and an adapted version will soon be available to all parents. The school has moved in the last year from using the Here I Am syllabus to The Way, the Truth and the Life. In so doing it has increased its awareness that the Directory is the source of what is taught to the pupils and that each and any syllabus is only a vehicle for that primary purpose. The content of religious education meets the requirements of the Curriculum Directory outstandingly well.

Pupil achievement (as well as attainment and progress) in religious education

Grade 1*

Pupil achievement in religious education is outstanding as measured against the levels of attainment and the schools own internal systems. At the end of the foundation stage, the trend shows that data is in line with or above national and local data. Attainment is at least good or better than other core subject, by both the end of KS1 and KS2. Pupil Progress each year is very good. Very few learners under-perform. Secure moderation is in place and pupils are very enthusiastic in their learning. Pupils are informed clearly about how to take the next steps to make progress in their work. Staff have been focussing on the performance of boys and the slight gap in their performance below the girls at KS1 and KS2 has now been closed. Pupils' achievements are underpinned by resilience and resourcefulness and they show a tangible thirst for learning. Religious literacy is outstanding.

The quality of teaching

Grade 1*

Lesson observations confirm the quality of teaching in religious education to be outstanding. Teachers have high expectations. Teachers plan accurately and check pupils' work for understanding. Religious education time is well used. Marking and constructive feedback is given. High order questioning, in particular in KS2, is embedded and working independently is encouraged. Teachers have high expectations and good subject knowledge. This was evidenced in the range of classwork

seen and for example, in the topics of prayer, choices, the Easter people and Pentecost during the inspection. All children enjoy religious education. The innovation of the class microphone system supports both teaching and pupil responses. The close monitoring of the teaching by the senior leadership team, headteacher and deputy, supports and ensures that religious education and teaching is at the centre of school life. Religious education is prioritised as a core subject, underpinning the whole curriculum. Religious literacy has a high priority. Pupils, age appropriate, know what to complete and what needs to improve. 'Building Learning Power' is very evident in religious education lessons, as the children are encouraged to ask meaningful questions, reflect on their faith and be independent in their own learning. For example the pupils in one lesson were using the ipads available in their classroom to look up the documents of Vatican II and the mention of the Holy Spirit in one of the documents. The LIFT (Love, Inspire and Follow Together) week was specially useful in enabling the children to apply their learning in religious education to their daily Christian life. The Religious Education Curriculum Directory, the Way the Truth and Faith and Life textbooks, together with very good planning, supports the teaching of religious education. Homework is regularly set and marked. However in the parental responses this was the one area it was suggested where the school could do more to communicate with and involve parents.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade 1*

The arrangement in the school whereby the head and deputy act as the coordinators of religious education was carefully reviewed in the course of the inspection. The evidence seen and received confirmed that this arrangement for providing the leadership and management of religious education is outstandingly effective. There is a creative dynamism about planning, driving to prioritise religious education as underpinning the whole curriculum. The cross curriculum links are evident. In the religious education Inset meetings, staff spent time exploring strands of the CD in order to communicate them better to pupils. Governors, by their presence and focus, ensure that the quality and progress of religious education is carefully monitored and encouraged. As a core subject, religious education data is analysed in the same way as other subjects and presented to the governors. The arrangement ensures that the governors are kept fully informed on developments in religious education both in the diocese and in the school.

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

- Review how parents are informed regarding regular and appropriate homework which the pupils do in religious education

B. The Catholic life of the school

How well do pupils experience the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing through all areas of school life?

What has improved since the last inspection?

The previous report gave no specific areas for improvement in the Catholic life of the school. Since that inspection, the Catholic life of the school has improved in a number of ways, for example the inclusion of the vision of the Curriculum Directory into whole school planning, the improved independent learning scheme and the LIFT week mentioned below.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum – time, staffing, accommodation, resources, budget

Grade 1*

Religious education is at the core of the curriculum. It informs the vision of the school, the timetable, the staffing allocation, the resources and space allocation made to it, and the budget allocation it receives. The curriculum time devoted to it fully meets the 10% required by the bishop. The commitment to make sure that CD underpins the place of religious education as the core of the curriculum is evident at all levels. The school has brought in the authors of at least two religious education syllabuses to help with their year planning, developed its ICT use at the service of religious education. The displays on the walls of the communal areas as well as the classrooms reinforce the pupils' experience of the school's Catholic ethos.

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

Grade 1*

The school provides an outstanding experience of Catholic worship, prayer and liturgy. There is a prayerful approach to the beginning and ending of lesson times, to staff meetings and to whole school assemblies. The parish priest is a regular visitor to the school, celebrating Mass on occasions appropriate to the year. Pupils have an ease and familiarity about prayer. The parish and the school are partners in preparing pupils for the Sacraments, for First Holy Communion, mainly in the parish and for First Reconciliation, mainly in the school. The school assembly, celebrated as per custom on a Thursday afternoon, happily also the inspection day, was focussed on theme of the Mass for the following Sunday, the Good Shepherd. As well as action hymns, where the pupils sign the meaning of the lines they are singing, the pupils acted out the gate of the sheepfold. It was well linked with the recent visit of Bishop John Sherrington, and specifically his crozier, the sheep catcher as one pupil called it. The initiative of Year 6 to become the schools' chaplaincy team has led to increased confidence among the pupils in talking about their faith and its relevance to life. This was deepened when the whole school engaged in a LIFT week where the themes of Love, Inspire and Follow Together were concentrated on. Pupils and staff led the whole school in prayer and celebrating these themes, resulting in pupils from the whole school contributing to the painting of a very large mural covering the whole back -drop to the Altar in the school hall, illustrating how the themes are put into practice in ordinary life.

The commitment and contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice.

Grade I*

Within the school there is real respect and support for every individual child. Pupils have a good understanding of the gospel and moral issues. There is a real sense of unity and purpose. This is evident in 'pupil voice', in the work of the Chaplaincy team and their Wednesday Word work. Pupils are encouraged to develop their gifts and talents, this was evident during LIFT Week 2013 and the LIFT programme. Harvest parcels are produced annually and distributed; year 6 pupils take part in the annual carol singing. School masses are very well attended. The Mission Statement is used as a daily prayer and reference point: 'Jesus lives in us, our families, our School, our Church, our world. Jesus is our guide; let us follow him.' The pupils are specially taught to care for each other – Year 6 pupils act as playtime buddies for infant and reception children. The school gives witness as a Catholic Eucharistic community with a commitment to excellence.

Enabling the authentic partnership between parents, school and parish as an integral part of the Diocese, particularly through its relationship with the Diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf;

Grade I*

The school has established a constructive and affirming partnership with the parents and the parish. The parents speak of their loyalty and affirmation of the school and illustrate this well with their support and involvement. They contribute to a blog celebrating aspects of the Catholic life of the school. The parish priest is welcomed to the school regularly and contributes to the life of the school. The Governors and staff attend diocesan training events and meetings and cooperate closely in local initiatives. In particular, governors and staff are contributing closely with aiding nearby schools, both Catholic and community, who are in need of assistance. The school is developing approaches with its feeder secondary school, John Henry Newman, on improving transition so that in particular, pupils at Level 5 in religious education, continue with their attainment and progress. With a group of parents the school is developing, through regular meetings, a programme to assist and promote Catholic Parenting. By involvement and generous outreach the school contributes to diocesan educational initiatives.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school.

Grade I*

The leadership and management of the school are outstandingly effective in promoting the Catholic life of the school. The Governors, senior leadership team and staff, share a strong vision of the Catholic nature of education. There is a dynamism in the school leadership pushing out to new boundaries and helping the pupils make progress in knowledge and appreciation of their faith and their world. The adaptation and development of the 'Building Learning Power' strategies enabling pupils to become more independent and critically aware learners have contributed to the increased knowledge and appreciation of their faith.

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

- Continue developing the Year 6 Chaplaincy initiative, helping all pupils in the school become aware of their call to ministry and service arising from their baptism