



INSPECTION REPORT

St. Joseph's Catholic primary School

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URN: 115707

Headteacher: Mrs Wendy D'Arcy

Chair of Governors: Mr A Lynch

**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: 23rd-24th November 2016

Date of previous inspection: September 2012

Reporting Inspector: Mr Joseph Skivington

Assisting Inspector: Mrs Michele Marshall

Description of the school

St. Joseph's is a smaller than average-sized primary school, which is growing rapidly, with a current roll of 152. Of these children 45% are Catholic. It serves the parishes of St. Joseph's, Nympsfield and St. Dominic's, Dursley, and has exceptionally strong links with the adjoining St. Joseph's church and Marist Convent. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is in line with the national average. The percentage of disadvantaged pupils entitled to the Pupil Premium grant is below national at 7%. The school enjoys considerable support from parents many of whom made a positive choice for the school because of its specifically Catholic ethos. Pupils join the school with a low baseline level of prior knowledge and experience of religious practice.

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school (summary statement)

Grade 1

This is an outstanding school because:

- the governing body and all leaders are totally committed to the promotion and nurturing of the school's Catholic life and mission, and under the inspirational head teacher, have very successfully re instated and embedded, since the last inspection, an outstanding, vibrant Catholic ethos. This is evident in the remarkable and rapid improvement to both provision and outcomes over the last two or three years;
- it is a fully inclusive school where pupils, their parents and carers, from all faiths and none are made welcome, and all show respect and genuine interest and care towards each other;
- the behaviour of pupils and their care for others is outstanding. They are role models for each other and this contributes enormously to the spirituality and ethos of the school. Their behaviour for learning is very positive, they enjoy their RE studies, and they make good and outstanding progress over time;
- the quality of teaching is consistently good, with much that is outstanding, leading to good and outstanding learning.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop is outstanding

- The senior leadership team and staff take an innovative approach to driving improvement in all areas and work closely with the diocese and other local cluster schools to seek and to share good practice. The governing body are increasingly effective in bringing proactive support and challenge. Through consulting with parents, staff, and pupils the school has a realistic view of what has to be done to improve even further, and follows this through.
- The rigorous, securely embedded procedures for self evaluation enable strengths and weaknesses to be highlighted quickly, and action taken to improve practice and outcomes through a comprehensive and detailed development plan with clear, measurable objectives which are constantly monitored and re shaped as appropriate.
- The areas for development noted in the last inspection have been comprehensively addressed. The planning of schemes of work in RE has been highly effective because it takes into account

the learning needs of every individual pupil. The Leaders in Faith programme has been very successful in involving every child making a concrete commitment and contribution to the Catholic life of the school. The pupils' ownership of prayer and worship is now led by an enthusiastic chaplaincy team which is having a growing impact on the involvement of all pupils.

- The governors have taken fruitful advantage of diocesan training and are developing into a more knowledgeable and challenging body.
- The capacity to sustain and build on already outstanding provision and outcomes for Catholic Life and religious education is beyond question. The remarkable success in embedding distributive leadership ensures consistency, commitment, and stability for the future, with clear responsibilities and expectations from the whole staff and governing body.

What the school should do to improve further

- Encourage parents to become more fully involved in the prayer life of the school, so that they become proactive partners with the school, in nurturing their children and their own spiritual life.
- Build on the success of the Leaders in Faith programme, and the Chaplaincy team, to provide even more opportunity for pupils to take the initiative in planning and presenting their own liturgies.

How good are outcomes for pupils, taking account of variations between different groups?

Grade 1

a) The extent to which pupils understand, contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school

- Pupils have a good understanding of what it means to be in a Catholic school and how it differs from other schools. They can articulate for instance, the impact that the prayer life of the school has on their actions and their relationship with others. This has been very successfully achieved especially through the Leaders in Faith programme with its practical outcomes.
- The school council and the chaplaincy team represent the pupils' voice to communicate ideas and feelings expressed by every class across the school. They feel their voice is heard and their opinions matter. They are active in preparing the weekly Mass in the convent, arranging and taking a lead in the liturgy. They play a key role in choosing, planning, and supporting fundraising initiatives for charities both local and global, such as CAFOD.
- Pupils contribute not only by their outstanding behaviour both in lessons and around the school, but also through pupil conferencing, providing essential feedback, which is built into the school improvement plans. Pupils increasingly take

on a range of responsibilities which show they are alert to the needs of others, and especially in becoming outstanding carers and role models for the younger children.

- Pupils have a genuine respect for those from different backgrounds. This is due to a growing understanding of different faiths, which they have studied and reflected on in RE at some depth in the Awe and Wonder weeks. There is a real sense of belonging and inclusion shared by all regardless of faith or none, which feeds into their understanding of British values and culture.
- The chaplaincy team takes the lead in promoting prayer life, but all pupils are becoming more confident practising the skills of planning and organising their own assemblies and liturgies. There are strong links with the parish, with pupils participating and leading both school and parish liturgies. The school recognises the need to encourage further ownership by taking every opportunity where appropriate to pass the initiative on to the pupils themselves.

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

- Pupils enter the school at varied levels of attainment and understanding of religious knowledge and practice, but overall at a low baseline. They make good and better progress – exceptionally so in the Early Years - so that by the end of Key Stage 1 most are meeting expectations and some exceeding them. The quality of work, and the pace of progress over time, is good and much is outstanding.
- Progress at Key Stage 2 matches the excellent quality and consistency of the written work seen in the earlier years, so that by the end of Key Stage 2 the outcomes in both attainment and achievement are quite outstanding. There is a deepening of understanding of the theology behind each topic, and very impressively they are becoming adept at reflecting on the meaning of the Gospel accounts and making links between scripture and other areas of their lives. This is greatly aided by the innovative use of the 'Prove It' challenge at the end of every written task. Pupils respond to the teachers' challenging comments by producing very detailed and extensive responses which are remarkably reflective, strong on both knowledge and understanding, but also demonstrating the relevance of the topic to their own lives. This learning strategy is a real exemplar of the spiritual understanding and insight that can be achieved at their age.
- Disadvantaged pupils, and those with special educational needs, make similar outstanding progress as the other pupils because of very effective planned interventions and the pro active support of learning assistants. Pupil mobility has become a recent issue, with 14 pupils joining between January and July 2016. These too quickly settle and make good progress.
- Discussions with pupils and responses in their written work show clearly that as they move up the school, they become more confident in using religious language in a meaningful way. Their ability to learn independently, and with others, develops quickly, as demonstrated in the quality of the research type homework and their paired discussions. The opportunities for pupils to discuss more deeply in lessons, and to write more reflectively, demonstrates high teacher expectations and pupils' real intellectual efforts.

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- Pupils are proud of their achievements and demonstrate a positive interest in learning new things and ideas. They feel confident in expressing their own opinions. When asked pupils were very positive about their learning and enjoyment of RE. They know what level they are on and what concrete steps they need to take to get to the next level. Their conduct in lessons and around the school is outstanding, a reflection of the school's successful promotion of its core values and ethos.

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 as witnessed in the Year 2 Mass in the convent where their attention and behaviour was impeccable.
- Pupils are becoming more involved in the planning and preparation of their liturgies and assemblies. The liturgical calendar is at the core of the planning process and this is evident in the pupils' growing understanding and use of religious liturgical terms. Teachers are becoming more confident in enabling pupils take the initiative, knowing when to intervene helpfully, or to step back.
- Prayer is the heartbeat of St. Joseph's and the school is intent on involving parents in its spiritual life. The pupils value the many prayer opportunities, which punctuate the school day. They compose their own heartfelt prayers and reflections, which are displayed on the pupil-monitored prayer tables.
- 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. The pupils were excited by the idea of setting up a small, reflective area, which could be theirs and used at break and lunchtime as a focus for quiet prayer, or for a Rosary Group.

How effective are leaders and governors in developing the Catholic Life of the school?

Grade 1

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 very effectively promote, nurture, and sustain the Catholic ethos of the school as their primary concern and care, which is the main focus of their strategic planning. The inspiring head teacher has communicated a vision for the future and assured stability and continuity through team building and distributive management.
- The governing body is an increasingly knowledgeable and practical influence in the life of the school. They meet all statutory, canonical, and diocesan requirements fully, and

strive to bring to reality the call to be a People of Hope. They are well informed and proactive in all aspects of school life. The influence of the Marist Sisters has been a sustaining influence and support for the ethos and mission of the school, particularly the role of link governor for RE. The governors have benefitted from diocesan training and reflection on the People of Hope document as well as the Bishop's Pastoral Plan.

- There is a commitment from every member of the staff to work together to achieve the best for the pupils, as well as promoting Catholic values across all the subjects. Staff morale and their investment in the school is outstanding and they are excellent role models for their charges;
- Robust and rigorous processes of self evaluation ensure that judgements are accurate and reliable. This is achieved by constant monitoring through governors' school visits and learning walks, with findings reported back to the full governing body.
- The school frequently asks parents, staff and pupils their opinions as to what could be better. As a result of this feedback, the school leadership knows itself very well, can more accurately assess the impact of its actions, and can quickly re shape its improvement planning where necessary. Parents are kept informed of school events and the topics their children are studying through regular newsletters and email.
- The spiritual life of the staff is nurtured and celebrated. Staff prayers, retreat, and Inset days on spirituality and RE are an integral part of the timetable. This helps bind staff together in commitment and unity of purpose, sharing the same goals and values of the school's mission. There is at least one Inset day annually which is devoted specifically to Catholic life and spirituality which is focussed on instilling confidence in leading and directing the prayer life of the pupils through their own spiritual growth. Induction procedures for new staff are both supportive and inspiring.

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 intelligently and effectively, exercising careful oversight of the curriculum and learning outcomes. The governors receive termly reports from the head teacher, who is also the RE coordinator, but are also kept closely informed through feedback from the Marist sister link governor and the parish priest, who are frequent visitors to the school. Governors challenge, question, and hold senior leaders and staff to account, as is evident in a scrutiny of the minutes of governor's meetings.
- The subject records are comprehensive with great attention to detail but also to the wider picture. The parents are invited to be part of their child's education through newsletters outlining the topics currently being studied. Their views, and the views of the pupils, are frequently elicited through conferencing, and any issues or problems arising properly addressed. For example, an individual parent might take issue with the teaching of other beliefs other than the Catholic Faith, or have a view about younger pupils involved in the sex and relationship programme. These are resolved with respect, genuine dialogue, and reassurance.

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- Subject development plans are drawn up and used as working documents, which are added to or re shaped during the course of each term. They do not remain as general aims or wishes, but instead are measurable objectives to be achieved over a stated time.
 - The provision for staff induction, in service training, and diocesan training is particularly supportive for the teaching of RE. This has resulted in teachers becoming, more confident in assessment and in setting learning objectives. There is always work to be done in these areas and the school has this well in hand.

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

Grade 1

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' outstanding attitudes to learning have a strong impact on their progress and achievement. Teachers have established excellent rapport with their charges. Learning assistants are involved in planning lessons with the teacher, so that interventions clearly have a positive effect.
- Teaching is consistently good with some outstanding practice. A good range of teaching styles are employed, including strong questioning skills, which ensure pupils' concentration and engagement.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' presentation of work and intellectual effort. As a result the pupils rise to the challenge and are able to contribute their own arguments and opinions, writing reflectively and at some considerable length. This is illustrated many times over in the extended answers to the Prove It challenges. This is a remarkably fruitful teaching strategy, demanding real intellectual effort from the pupils and usually prompting engaging, in- depth discussions.
- Teachers' skills and expertise in assessing pupils' progress are being successfully improved so that they can arrive at reliable judgements on individual achievement and progress over time. Written work is annotated in green and pink highlights so that the pupils' progress over time can be clearly seen.

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

- The RE curriculum meets all Bishops Conference's requirements. It is broad and balanced so that students can explore and develop their own values and beliefs. They discuss 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. Consistency and continuity in progression is carefully planned.
- The study of other world faiths is a real strength of this inclusive school, because it understands that its rural village location means it needs to ensure ample time to explore and understand other major world religions, and to promote tolerance,

understanding, and respect for others' beliefs. It also inculcates an appreciation of the diversity and richness of other cultures. It is taught through the weeks of Awe and Wonder, when they also explore and experience meditation. Pupil feedback on these weeks is very positive.

- Provision for sex and relationship education is in place and approved by the governors adhering to diocesan guidelines. The wider curriculum successfully promotes spiritual, moral and vocational development, and is taught through the lens of the Faith.
- The use of scripture is embedded in the schemes of work, as well as bible referencing skills. As a result the pupils become remarkably adept at making links between the subject they are discussing, and salient references in Scripture, such as a parable, or Jesus' words, or an incident or personality in the Old Testament. This is a clear indication that the teachers are teaching for meaning, and enable the pupils to make sure links between what one believes and how one acts and lives.

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

- The outstanding prayer life of the school is inclusive and joyful. Prayer punctuates the school day and is part of every celebration. A well planned timetable of Masses and assemblies follows the liturgical year, including traditional Catholic practices such as the Rosary, Advent and Lent celebrations, and the Stations of the Cross. There is a clear intent to encourage more pupils to organise and lead collective worship, using the excellent role modelling of the chaplaincy team. The parish priest and the Marist Sisters makes an important and valued contribution to the spiritual life of the school, supporting its role in the wider mission of the parish and the universal Church. Both the convent and the parish church are excellent resources and draw the school into the life of the parish. Teachers and pupils have created colourful and thought- provoking displays around the school, which remind the whole community of the liturgical cycle, and the topics the pupils are currently studying.
- Parents and carers are invited to attend Mass and assemblies and many do. The school is keen to encourage more parents to become involved in the prayer life of the school and their children. The excellent newsletter keeps parents fully involved about what is going on in school, and very successfully outlines what each Year's termly topic in RE is, with prompts and questions that the parents can use to reinforce the learning in school. Every opportunity is taken to for joint worship with other schools.
- Opportunities are provided for the children to act out their faith and demonstrate in practical ways their compassion for others, generously supporting charities such as CAFOD, Foodbank, the Meningitis Trust, Macmillan Cancer, and the current refugee crisis. The Year 6 pupils inspired by a theme on Fair Trade have established a Fair Trade Shop in school and led an assembly to explain the principles of fair trade.

Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were 60 parental questionnaires returned. All were extremely positive about the school and the quality of their children's education. Some typical responses included:

'As a Catholic family we chose this school not only for its religious values but also for its caring and warm atmosphere, excellent academic standards, dedicated staff and inviting environment'.

'The school is peaceful and calm. There is a spiritual and reverent atmosphere. It is a gentle school and pupils are polite and considerate of others'.

'All staff are highly approachable and caring'.

'Under Mrs D'Arcy's lead the school has thrived... pupils are encouraged to be the best they can be.... the staff go above and beyond.... communication is fantastic... the standard of work is very high'.

'Good values.... good leadership and excellent culture that is strong and morally grounded, calm, creative, fun, confident, and extremely good learning environment.... a unique and special school'.

'The head teacher ensures that the Catholic values and ethos of the school are acted out in real life every day'.

'We are not Catholic but have strong respect for the catholic beliefs. The school is inclusive, it supports all children, it knows itself, it understands its strengths, it has strong morals and is run with strong leadership (unique in my experience)'.

'It is like a big family... the children are very happy and the staff approachable. Children are given an education on many religions.... my child drew a mosque as well as telling me stories about Jesus'.