

St Stephen's Catholic Primary School

URN: 101455

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of Most Rev. John Wilson the Archbishop of Southwark

29–30 November 2023

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

Catholic life and mission (p.2)

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission

Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education

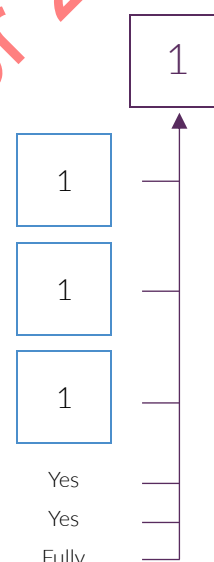
Collective worship (p.7)

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school

The school is fully compliant with the curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference

The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop

The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection



What the school does well

- There is a real sense of a welcoming community at St Stephen's, with relationships throughout the school based on the highest levels of care as a result the school creates a tangible sense of unity and mutual respect.
- Parents value the school's work and greatly appreciate how the school nurtures the faith, education and spiritual life within this thriving Catholic community.
- Religious education is outstanding because pupils achieve well and enjoy their learning.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitude to learning are outstanding, and teaching is consistently good with many outstanding features.
- The experience of working in a faithful, praying community has a visible effect on the spiritual and moral development of all pupils.

What the school needs to improve

- Utilise identified outstanding practice to ensure all pupils across the school are consistently challenged to maximise their learning and deepen their understanding.
- Extend the established pupil-led prayer and liturgy to other year groups by giving all pupils the opportunity to plan and lead age-appropriate spiritual and prayerful experiences.

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Catholic life and mission

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.

Catholic life and mission key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

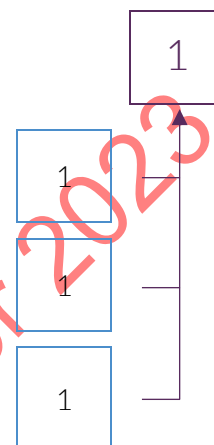
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

Provision

The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school



St Stephen's Catholic School stands as a shining example of a community committed to its mission. This commitment resonates throughout every aspect of school life, because of the example of leaders and staff who embrace the mission and are dedicated. They demonstrate a drive for continual improvement to secure the best outcomes for all. As a result, it continues to be an exemplar, outstanding school. Pupils are nurtured and in no doubt that they are loved and valued in all of their God-given uniqueness because the staff are so committed to caring for and nurturing every single child in their care. These sentiments were highlighted by a parent who wrote. 'In addition to the academic and spiritual aspects, the school's efforts to create a culture of inclusivity and respect are impressive. The diversity within the school community is celebrated, fostering an environment where students learn to appreciate and embrace differences.' Pupils have a deeply embedded understanding of the example of Jesus, and they readily make connections between their actions and those of Christ, for example, when explaining how they try hard to be kind, caring and forgiving. Pupils are keenly aware of their responsibility to care for the earth and look after God's creation because of the environmental initiatives and activities in which they participate. They embrace opportunities to help others in the local community and beyond and respect everyone's individuality because they understand everyone is part of God's family and everyone is loved by Him.

The school has adapted well to changes in demographics and resultant changing intake. Breakfast and after-school clubs provide families with a safe and stimulating environment at the start and end of the school day, benefitting working parents. There is a strong sense of collegiality, vocation and belonging among staff. The school's welcoming atmosphere extends from initial contact, drawing together parents, carers, pupils, and staff from diverse cultural and faith backgrounds. The Catholic environment, both indoors and outdoors, is beautifully designed, exemplified by the Romero prayer

garden created by the pupils. The chaplaincy provided by the parish priest engages the pupils in their faith and helps to root the school in parish life and vice versa, and the school is keen to develop this further.

Leaders and governors are deeply committed to upholding and continually developing the school's uniquely Catholic character. Leaders are inspired by the example of Christ the teacher and Christ the servant, and they are exemplary role models in the way they share their personal experiences with pupils. The head teacher is inspirational in her role as the faith community leader and is well supported by the school's leadership team, which actively supports the religious education leader in developing the school's spiritual life. Governors care deeply about the pupils and their families and are diligent in holding leaders to account for the Catholic life and mission of the school and provide challenge and support to ensure it continues to thrive. The school actively involves parents and carers and communicates very effectively. Parents and carers attend school regularly to participate in prayer and liturgy led by staff and pupils. Leaders' and governors' ongoing evaluation of the school's Catholic life and mission is accurate and effective. St Stephen's is not content to rest on its laurels; it actively seeks ongoing development opportunities. The school's success in gaining external accreditations, such as the Romero Participator Level and the World Class Quality Mark awards, highlights its commitment to excellence and continuous improvement.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

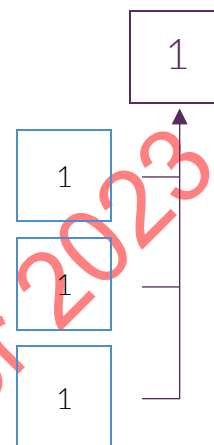
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

Provision

The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for religious education



Pupils achieve well in religious education, making good progress as they journey through the school by knowing, remembering, and doing more, leading to excellent outcomes. They are developing into religiously literate young people, as evidenced in their class discussions and written work and can discuss how scripture impacts their actions. Pupils produce work that is of a high standard. They take pride in their work, evidenced by their presentation and depth of responses. Pupils speak fluently and confidently about what they have learned, using key concepts and subject-specific vocabulary. For example, their understanding of the concept of pilgrimage is notable and well supported by the opportunities to undertake a pilgrimage to various places. Pupils link their written work and Catholic Social Teaching, which threads through all aspects of the curriculum and school life. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning ensure no significant variation in progress between groups of learners. Pupils enjoy their lessons, engage fully, participate enthusiastically, and demonstrate a real commitment to learning. They generally understand how well they are doing in religious education and what they need to do to improve. Excellent use is made of a sensory room, a nurture room, outdoor provision, support staff and external provision to provide targeted programmes to assist pupils with additional needs.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and teaching expertise. Lessons observed were never less than good, with a majority having at least outstanding elements. Teachers plan creative and engaging lessons and build on prior learning and achievement. It is a strength of the teaching that opportunities for retrieval are embedded, and lessons give opportunities for pupils to recall previous learning and build upon what they already know. The explicit teaching of vocabulary was evident in all lessons. Lessons demonstrated that teachers have high expectations of their pupils and are skilled in checking understanding and addressing misconceptions. Pupils are given opportunities to present their learning in various ways, including role-play, responding to religious art and music, writing for

multiple purposes, ensuring their work, as appropriate, is linked to Catholic social teachings. Celebration of effort is evident, leading to high levels of motivation. The staff know pupils and their needs well and adapt their teaching accordingly. Committed and experienced teaching assistants are well deployed to support all pupils to ensure that every pupil can be a successful learner. Staff have opportunities to work with colleagues to assess and moderate pupils work. The strong links with other Catholic schools through the Corpus Christi Partnership help ensure accurate teacher assessments.

Leaders and governors ensure that the school meets the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory* (2012) requirements. The content of religious education is mapped so that learning is effectively sequenced. Using 'The Way, the Truth and the Life' as its religious education scheme, staff demonstrate considerable expertise in adapting and supplementing this to ensure pupils' wider range and depth of experience. Religious education resourcing is comparable with other core subjects. Leaders ensure that all staff have access to regular training to improve their practice. Staff new to the school undergo an induction programme that includes mentoring. The head teacher, the subject leader and members of leadership all share a clear vision for teaching and learning. They have strong leadership skills and share their knowledge and expertise with colleagues, enabling them to continue developing best practices through a highly collegiate approach to leadership, reflected in the staff consensus that all are involved. There is clear professional development in place for teachers who are at an early stage in their careers. This ensures they are well supported and gain confidence when teaching religious education. Leaders clearly and accurately understand the school's strengths and areas for development. This is reflected in the self-evaluation documentation received for this inspection and, more notably, the school's termly religious education action plans. They reflect effective action to secure improvement through the monitoring evidence provided.

Collective worship

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

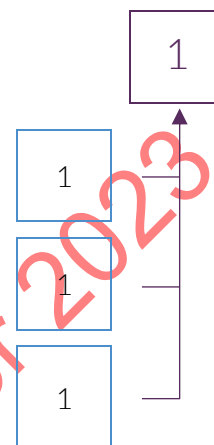
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship



Pupils show reverence and participate enthusiastically in opportunities for prayer and liturgy, joining in with correct responses and singing. In prayer and liturgy attended during the inspection, pupils made good use of opportunities to form focal points and explain their reasons for choosing the artefacts they used. Their understanding of liturgical colours and seasons is very secure. These activities benefit from staff participating in these celebrations and acting as good role models. Good use is made of scripture, art, and music to enhance the worship. It would be appropriate now to develop these celebrations by further broadening the format and developing pupil participation and skills in voice projection to maximise their impact. Pupils in the St Stephen's Stewards, Mini Vinnies and prayer group talk enthusiastically about opportunities to lead prayer and liturgy and take their responsibilities seriously. Participation in these opportunities could usefully be broadened to involve a more significant number of pupils at an age-related level. It would be an opportunity to develop the pupil groups and formalise them further by giving them more structure to enable pupils to more fully understand their roles and their impact. Pupils enjoy planning and leading liturgical prayer and are keen to share their ideas about choosing appropriate artefacts for prayer areas and enhancing scripture and messages through drama. Pupils experience a wide range of different types of prayer and liturgy, but they say they would welcome more regular opportunities for pupil-led worship.

The school provides opportunities throughout the day for prayer and reflection in formal and informal ways. Each class has its own, beautifully kept class prayer book in which pupils share their own prayers and this is utilised during prayer times. Pupils and staff follow the liturgical year; prayer areas reflect appropriate liturgical colours. Significant events and times of the year are appropriately marked. Families are invited into school for liturgies, speak positively of being involved in times of worship at school and how this impacts their children positively, and comment on how well they are included. Hymn practice is held weekly to encourage the whole school to sing and worship so pupils

learn the meaning of traditional and contemporary hymns. As a parent wrote, 'The school does a fantastic job in celebrating the Catholic faith and teaching the children. My child is very proud to be a Christian and learns so much from lessons, liturgical services and assemblies'.

Leaders and governors place great importance on prayer and liturgy. They are committed to continual staff development and training opportunities. There are planned opportunities for staff to gather together in prayer. The school establishes a termly and yearly cycle for prayer and liturgy to incorporate a range of events linked to the liturgical year. St Stephen's makes regular links with and uses the parish church, and all pupils attend Mass through a cycle of whole school and class Masses. While sacramental preparation is parish-based, the school supports the programme, reflecting a good partnership. A parent wrote, 'The commitment shown by the school and teachers at all levels sets an example for children and parents alike. The regular and enthusiastic involvement of the parish priest gives another level of understanding to the children and parents. The number of opportunities for parents to get involved again shows the school and parish's commitment to religious education and practice, which is exemplary'.

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Information about the school

Full name of school	St Stephen's Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	101455
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	3033500
Full postal address of the school	St Stephen's Catholic Primary School, Ruskin Avenue, Welling, DA16 3QG
School phone number	0208 303 9738
Headteacher	Susan Oram
Chair of Governors	Nigel Fisher
School Website	www.st-stephens.bexley.sch.uk/
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	N/A
Age-range of pupils	5-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	19 May 2016
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

The inspection team

Mr Stephen Beck
Mrs Lisa Wimshurst

Lead
Team

Key to grade judgements

Grade	England	Wales
1	Outstanding	Excellent
2	Good	Good
3	Requires improvement	Adequate and requires improvement
4	Inadequate	Unsatisfactory and in need of urgent improvement