



SECTION 48 INSPECTION REPORT

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the
Archbishop of Southwark and Inspection of
Denominational Education under Section 48
of the Education Act 2005

URN 118764

English Martyrs' Catholic Primary School
Frindsbury Road
Strood, Rochester
Kent ME2 4JA

Inspection date: 24 November 2014

Chair of Governors:	Mr J Trollope
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SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

English Martyrs' School is voluntary aided. It is situated in the Chatham Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is maintained by Medway LA. The principal parish which the school serves is English Martyrs, Strood. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 63%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 9% in Key Stage 1 and 8.6% in Key Stage 2.

The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 209. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is broadly below average. Around 15% of pupils receive extra support in class. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is average. The majority of pupils are from a White British background, with an increasing number coming from Black African families. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is average.

Date of previous inspection:

20 October 2009

Overall Grade:

2

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1

Outstanding

Grade 3

Requires improvement

Grade 2

Good

Grade 4

Inadequate

English Martyrs is a good school. The Catholic ethos and the school's vision and mission are lived out and can be articulated by pupils, staff and governors. A culture of trust prevails and forms the basis for the welcoming and positive relationships throughout the school. The parish priest and governors value and applaud the work of the school in the local community in which staff members play an active role in supporting the parish. The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development exceptionally well. The behaviour of the pupils is outstanding as pupils are respectful and treat each other with kindness and consideration.

Teaching in the school is good overall with some outstanding elements. Standards pupils achieve in both key stages are high given that overall attainment on entry into the Foundation Stage is significantly below average. Strategies to track pupils' performance are well developed and in line with those for the other core subjects. The school is successful as an inclusive community.

The Catholic character of the school is visible and tangible. Displays throughout are outstanding because they feature the pupils' responses to their learning in both artistic and written forms.

Parents feel that they are welcome in the school and that any issue are addressed professionally and sympathetically. They are particularly appreciative of the outstanding support they are given for their children's faith formation and sacramental preparation.

Collective Worship is planned for and appropriately linked to the liturgical calendar but further enhancement of guidelines for staff would be advantageous.

Leadership, managers and governors are totally committed to the Church's mission in education and regularly review aspects of the school's work. Issues raised in the previous inspection (2009) have been fully addressed.

The restructured leadership team, which includes a new appointed Religious Education leader, have vision and enthusiasm to bring about the changes they have identified in the school improvement plan. More rigorous monitoring and clearer target-setting by governors and leaders will progress these developments further.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Review curriculum provision for Religious Education
- Formulate a whole school approach a policy for Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) with reference to the Diocesan policy for 'Human Love and Relationship Education'
- Extend provision to teach pupils about the major world faiths
- Collate a staff handbook for Collective Worship, which includes current good practice and includes guidelines for staff to plan class assemblies.
- Place greater focus on pace and differentiation in lessons to raise teaching to an outstanding level

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

Respect and love for one another based on the teachings of Jesus is a key aspect that underpins everything in the school. Pupils are actively engaged in formulating and annually reviewing the school's child-friendly edition of the 'Mission Statement'. Engagement at this level ensures that pupils benefit by having a sense of ownership and full understanding of its tenets. The school pays particular attention to involve pupils from other faith backgrounds in the Catholic life of the school, including the opportunity to participate in the sacramental preparation programme. Outreach in this manner is impressive as a high proportion of pupils become involved and complete the programme with two families converting to Catholicism during the recent past.

Pupils benefit from the school's commitment to engage with the wider Catholic community by engaging in music, liturgical dance and liturgy in the annual diocesan celebration and attending a celebratory Mass at Aylesford Priory.

The school fosters links with its local Catholic senior schools with ensuing wide ranging benefits for pupils are wide ranging, for example Year 6 pupils participated in a workshop dedicated to celebrating 'World Discovery Day' at St John Fisher School.

Opportunities for pupils to be ambassadors for their school are beneficial and much appreciated, such as the choir participating in music festivals and carol services.

Pupils are empowered to voice their ideas through initiatives such as the School Council, suggestion boxes, choosing charities and 'Mid-day Marvels' where pupils have made a positive contribution to the lunch hour. The range of novel opportunities for pupils to engage with charitable events gives them a beneficial insight into the lives of those who struggle to cope with life's challenges, examples being how pupils learned about physical and sensory disabilities when a paralympian visited the school. School initiatives such as these help pupils to understand the Christian approach to support, respect and appreciate difference.

Pupils benefit by being active members of the parish community. Their contribution as altar servers, members of the choir and participation in Mass and liturgies serve to enhance their understanding of a worshipping Catholic community. Pupils who were interviewed remarked that "their school is more than just a school, it is a community."

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

Overall, pupils make very good progress in relation to their levels of knowledge on entering the Foundation Stage. Achievement and attainment are high and in line with levels in literacy at the end of both key stages. Pupils' knowledge of the life and teachings of Jesus is very good and they can make the link between these teachings and their lives. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils show very good skills in using bibles to research scripture readings as seen when Year 6 pupils researched 'The Beatitudes' (Matthew 5:1-12). Pupils are enthusiastic and focused learners, working well together when engaging 'talking

partners' to discussing their learning. Examples of such eager engagement was witnessed in the Foundation stage where pupils discussed how Jesus helped the 'Blind Man of Jericho' and was equally good in Year 3 when pupils discussed moral dilemmas to resolve scenarios relating to good and bad choices.

Pupils are at ease when using religious vocabulary and can express ideas with confidence and maturity as witnessed when a Year 5 pupil remarked that "earth is God's waiting room" and that we should adhere to the guidelines of 'The Beatitudes' and turn away from "man-made products that we idol." During reflection time at the end of lessons, pupils are focused and respond with reverence. Pupils stated that "Religious Education lessons are special and they enjoy the opportunities to discuss and think seriously about their work." It is evident from the pupils' work-books that they take great pride in their learning and they respond in a positive manner to the teachers' marking comments. Interactive displays on corridors, such as "What are we waiting for?" and "There is no I in Team" challenge pupils to think about their learning. The 'Star of the Week' display acts as an incentive for pupils to contribute their best in Religious Education as seen in the winning composition by a Year 6 pupil relating to the Ten Commandments.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

Pupils at English Martyrs' know the purpose of prayer and how to pray. Pupils are confident and comfortable when praying and see prayer as a fundamental part of school experience.

By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils know that prayer can relate to praise, petition, thanksgiving and repentance. Examples of the pupils' responses and engagement are evident in the exemplary 'thank you for creation intercessions', which are displayed in the main-hall. Pupils from the earliest years engage with enthusiasm and awesome respect as witnessed during the Key Stage 1 assembly which was based on 'Learning to Love as Jesus taught us'. Prayer focal areas in classes are used effectively to assist the pupils' spiritual development. A lighted candle is a significant symbol when pupils pray and at interview the younger pupils cited that they know "their prayers go up to heaven" when a candle is extinguished. Year 6 pupils know about the psalms and can research them in the Bible. All classes have prayer as a key element and there are four regular times throughout the school day when pupils pray. The quality of class based collective worship could be improved further by providing a structure for teachers so that the exemplary practice as seen in a Key Stage 2 class on the theme of 'Acceptance' is practiced throughout.

The Parish Priest is a great support to the school and his involvement is highly valued by leaders, parents, pupils and staff. Visits to the church enhance pupils' understanding of the purpose and power of Collective Worship and this aspect of the Catholic life of the school is very well developed. The celebrations of class Mass are joyful occasions for pupils and parents. According to the parents "they are very special occasions and it is nice to know that our children have such meaningful spiritual experiences in their classrooms."

'Children of Faith' is a weekly lunch-time prayer group, led by a parishioner who is also a governor and its popularity is testament to the pupils' positive response to prayer.

How well leaders, governors and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils

Leaders and managers demonstrate a commitment to the Church's mission in education with the pupils' spiritual and moral development a priority. Governors are involved in and supportive of all aspects of the Catholic life of the school, including worship and they attend school celebrations, Deanery Mass and visit the school regularly.

Leaders and governors ensure that the school's vision and mission are fulfilled when embracing families of other cultures and faiths with wide-ranging provision, so that all feel respected and valued.

The environment of respect for the individual is clearly shown through the sensitivity extended to pupils when dealing with issues. Members of the leadership team offer 'Parent Chat' once a week, which is an open-door invitation for any parent who has a concern or worry to call in for a chat. The school offers similar support for pupils in the form of a lunch-time club where a member of staff offers a safe and friendly sanctuary for any pupil who requires specific nurture.

Governors value their staff and prioritise on-going training with one day set aside each year for spiritual development. Such training often takes the form of reflection, as in June 2014, when staff spent the day at Aylesford Priory.

Good progress was made on the issues raised in the last inspection. Leaders, governors and managers have a good understanding of the school's strengths in relation to its Catholic Life, have identified areas for further development and demonstrate a strong capacity to improve.

How well leaders, governors and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education and plan and implement for improvement to outcomes for pupils

Leaders have high expectations of both behaviour and learning. They are ambitious that the school does well, carefully identifying key areas for improvement and plan actions that are successful in moving the school forward, as seen in the manner in which pupils' levels of attainment in writing have risen in recent times. This raising of standards has an impact on pupils' written assignments in Religious Education and is evident in their workbooks.

Governors, leaders and managers conduct a range of systematic monitoring activities relating to provision and outcomes. They undertake learning walks, work scrutiny and lesson observations on a regular basis and there is evidence that this has an impact of raising levels of attainment.

Tracking of pupils' progress is good and assessment procedures are effective for pupils' knowledge and understanding of their Religious Education programme. The school self-evaluation form has accurately identified that the school needs to give more training to staff in assessing what the pupils are learning from religion (Attainment Target 2). The

school improvement plan identifies areas for the further development of the subject. However, its targets need to be more specific with more focus on the impact of success criteria and how development will be monitored.

Staff development is given due attention by leaders and managers with training covering areas such as planning, assessment and monitoring pupils' progress. This ensures that teachers have the necessary skills and expertise to deliver 'We belong to the Lord' syllabus.

Leaders and governors work closely with the Parish Priest ensuring that the pupils take best advantage of the church as a resource to enhance pupils' learning.

The leadership of the subject is in the process of transition. A member of staff is taking over the role of co-ordinator from the Headteacher forthwith. Governors and leaders are ensuring that the new subject leader will be equipped with the necessary skills to undertake the role, and in the recent past she has spent two days shadowing co-ordinators within the deanery to learn best practice.

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The quality of teaching and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education

Teaching is good overall with some outstanding elements. Lesson plans build on prior learning and set clear learning objectives that challenge and enthuse the pupils. Where teaching is its best, there is purposeful pace and challenge, key vocabulary is explained, tasks are imaginatively planned and pupils make progress as seen in when Year 3 pupils explored the theme of 'conscience'. Teachers use questioning skills to great effect as pupils are allowed time to process their thoughts with short interludes to engage with 'talking partners'. These short discussions are particularly well managed as the pupils engage and remain on task, as witnessed in Year R when pupils discussed a video clip of how Jesus showed his love to others. Differentiation of tasks for the less able is very well planned but there is little difference between the challenges posed for the able and the more able either in pupils' workbooks or the lessons inspected and this needs to be addressed. All teachers set a calm and reflective atmosphere at the beginning of lessons, thereby enhancing opportunities for spiritual development. Teachers are very good role models, set high expectations of behaviour and teach the subject with confidence and commitment. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed in most cases, ensuring that pupils with special learning needs have full access to the curriculum.

Procedures are in place to track pupils' progress. However, the fact that each year group studies the same topic, for example 'Creation' every year, inspectors found it difficult to ascertain the depth of progress being made by pupils at each level. Opportunities for teachers to undertake moderation exercises, both within the school and by joining external deanery groups, would greatly enhance their expertise.

Developmental marking of pupils' work is very good and fully embedded in practice with pupils making insightful and mature responses to teachers' comments.

The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum promotes pupils' learning

'We belong to the Lord' is the Religious Education programme and meets the requirements of the Bishop's Conference. Leaders are aware that it is time to rethink provision as the syllabus, although strong in doctrine and scripture, requires further development. Assessment procedures have been cross-referenced with attainment levels in the Curriculum Directory for Religious Education, however, it is some time since this levelling process was undertaken, there have been staff changes in the intervening period and no external moderation exercises have been undertaken. Teachers require further training, to enhance their expertise at levelling work against national standards in line with the guidelines of the Curriculum Directory for Religious Education.

The time-tabling of lessons, especially at the top end of Key Stage 2 falls below the recommended 10% requirement and this needs to be addressed.

The curriculum is greatly enriched by the Catholic Life of the school, as there is a seamless link with prayer, Collective Worship and the strong connection with the parish church. The school values and promotes the link with the parish as they are very aware that many pupils are not familiar with church services until they experience them through school. Provision for pupils to learn about the sacraments and the practice of the faith are outstanding, examples being pupils visiting the church to learn about the sacrament of

Baptism or learning about the Stations of the Cross. Families are encouraged to engage in their children's learning, for example the 'Sharing Homework' exercise when pupils take their workbooks home to compose prayers.

The school has an established approach to teach older pupils about puberty but has not, as yet, adopted a whole school policy. Leaders and governors need to address this gap in provision and establish a school approach to Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) in line with diocesan guidelines.

The approach to teaching the pupils about the major world faiths needs to be expanded so provision includes opportunities for pupils to engage with practitioners of the faiths.

Cross-curricular links such as art, music and hymn singing, role-play, drama, ICT and literacy are very well integrated into provision for Religious Education.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

Worship and prayer are at the heart of provision with pupils having opportunities to experience a broad range of worshiping opportunities including reflection, communal prayer, retreats and hymn singing. Pupils of all faith backgrounds are invited to participate in acts of Collective Worship and the evidence of their involvement is that so many choose so to do. There is a full programme of school Mass with pupils actively engaged in their preparation. On the 4th May the whole school holds a joint celebration with the parish community to celebrate the Feast of English Martyrs.

The pattern of the liturgical year is used very effectively to involve the pupils in Advent, Lent and services of reconciliation. Planning for weekly assemblies is comprehensive with effective links made to the liturgical calendar and the Religious Education programme. Three acts of Collective Worship witnessed during the inspection varied in quality, two of which were good whilst the third required improvement. The school needs to reflect on the structure and content of class based assemblies so that good practice is embedded.

Parents at interview stated that the Parish Priest "has a good relationship with the pupils" and that "the links with the local church are stronger since the Headteacher took over." This has a positive impact as more pupils are engaged in the practice of their faith and are actively participating in Mass and liturgies in the church.

Overall, provision for pupils' spiritual development is exemplary.