



# Archdiocese of Birmingham

## Section 48 Inspection

### **ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL**

### **Part of the Dominic Barberi Multi Academy Company**

Brook Lane, Thame, Oxfordshire OX9 2AB

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Inspection date 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> June 2017

Reporting Inspector Mr T J Hughes  
Assistant Inspector Mr A Maund

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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Type of School	Academy
Age range of pupils	4 – 11 years
Number on roll	208
Appropriate authority	The Board of Directors
Chair of Governors	Father David Hartley
Telephone number	01844 214278
E-mail address	stjosephsthame@dbmac.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	23 <sup>rd</sup> May 2012
DFE School Number	931/3826
Unique Reference Number	139529

**Principal** **Mr P Roberts**

Previous inspection: Good

This inspection: Good

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## Evidence

- The inspection was carried out by two Diocesan Inspectors.
- The focus of the inspection was on the quality, leadership, and impact of the school's provision of Catholic life, collective worship, and religious education (RE).
- The inspectors observed teaching across 7 RE lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Some of these lessons were conducted jointly with the principal and the RE leader.
- The inspectors completed a work scrutiny and held discussions with pupils to evaluate their understanding of Catholic life, worship, and the impact of teaching on their learning over time.
- Meetings were held with the chair of governors, governors, the principal, the RE subject leader, the parish sister, the academy lay chaplain and class teachers.
- The inspectors attended the celebration of Mass, a whole school assembly and undertook a learning walk to look at aspects of learning and teaching in RE, the presentation of the Catholic life of the school and pupils' behaviour.
- The inspectors reviewed a range of documents including the school's self evaluation, data about pupils' attainment and progress, RAISEonline, the development plan, teachers' planning, and learning journals.

## Information about the school

- The school is situated in the parish of St Joseph and serves the community in Thame.
- The percentage of ethnic minority pupils is well below the national average.
- The percentage of Catholic pupils is currently 46%.
- The percentage of disadvantaged pupils is well below the national average.
- The percentage of pupils with special needs is above the national average.
- Attainment on entry is in line with national expectations.

## Main Findings

- At St Joseph's Catholic Primary School the Catholic life, collective worship and religious education are all good.
- There is an overriding sense of inclusion for all; St. Joseph's is a faith-filled family.
- Every pupil is able to confidently declare the school's mission through the school prayer.
- Relationships, behaviour and the level of care for all in the school are outstanding.
- Most pupils enter school with average starting points and they make good overall progress in attainment of religious education.
- Some groups of pupils are not making sufficient progress and would benefit from targeted support in RE.
- The pupils' response to all aspects of faith is sincere; they are thoughtful and inquisitive and demonstrate maturity and confidence.
- The teaching of RE is at least good with a proportion outstanding.
- Teaching and learning in RE could be further advanced by providing more opportunities for the pupils to reflect on the meaning of their faith.
- The broad and thoughtful RE curriculum motivates the pupils, building incrementally on their knowledge, skills and spiritual perceptions.
- Collective worship in the school is reverent and filled with joy.

- The principal and RE leader are an effective team and together they have brought about many significant improvements in the school's religious provision.
- The local academy committee governors and MAC directors are committed to providing and maintaining excellent Catholic education.
- All pupils benefit spiritually from the preparation for and the celebrations of the Sacraments.
- The school's environment could be developed further to demonstrate the strength of its Catholic life.
- The good systems of monitoring of religious provision that have been established, need to be utilised strategically to further assist the school in making improvements.

## **THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL**

### **Catholic life, collective worship and spiritual, moral and vocational development: provision and outcomes**

- The Catholic life of the school is good.
- St Joseph's School is a family with God at the centre where everyone is welcomed, loved, respected and cared for and supported to achieve their very best.
- The consistency of approach to Catholic life and the way in which it is made manifest is a real strength of the school. All members of the school family appreciate the care they receive, aspire to share the mission and reflect upon how their faith will inform their development as people.
- The principal strives to attain a spiritual environment where the needs of all pupils are conscientiously cared for. He works tirelessly to lead the Faith in the school and ensure that relationships and behaviour are outstanding so that each individual can thrive.
- The talented and open staff team are totally united in promoting the school's mission and bringing it alive for the children. As a result, the experiences for all children are spiritually rich and supportive, helping the pupils, whatever their needs, to thrive and realise success in all aspects of life.
- The contribution that the pupils make to the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. They are reflective and enquiring and demonstrate a strong sense of personal worth and respect for others.
- Pupils clearly understand their beliefs and spiritual values and are confident in asking searching questions in order to gain a deeper level of understanding.
- Evidence during this inspection shows that the pupils' spiritual growth is strongly linked to the liturgical year.
- The preparation for the Sacraments provides pupils in the appropriate years, an in depth exploration of faith, forgiveness and a closer relationship with God.
- There is a tangible sense of pride in the school, which infects all members of the school family. Pupils and adults are genuinely secure in and grateful for the Catholic environment of the school.
- Whilst the Catholic life of the school is made manifest in the dialogue of the pupils and adults, it is not very visible around the school in terms of displays, prayers, artefacts and information about the prayer life of the community. The school would benefit from having an upgraded visual Catholic profile, which can easily be recognised by pupils and visitors as soon as they enter the school site.
- Pupils are eager to serve one another and can identify the gifts given to them by God. They have a secure understanding of how to use their talents to help in their school, local community and further afield.

- The witness of the parish priest and the parish sister contribute to the pupils' appreciation of vocation and living a life of mission.
- The RE provision within the school enables the pupils to support the development of a good Catholic ethos and recognise how faith enhances their lives. The pupils' appreciation of spirituality in their lives should be deepened by incorporating more opportunities for spiritual reflection within their lessons.
- The school has a good relationship with the parish; sharing in celebrations, participating in the youth and parish choirs and supporting fund raising for local and global causes.
- The pupils appreciate the small size of the school and they see this as a true strength as it gives rise to closeness and security.
- Collective worship at St Joseph's is good.
- Pupils are reverent, reflective and sincere in all aspects of collective worship.
- Celebrations are alive with joy; the pupils thoroughly and genuinely enjoy worshipping together.
- Mass is celebrated by the parish priest most weeks in the parish church. This celebration is sacred and carefully planned by the staff and pupils with advice from the parish priest.
- Pupils are becoming increasingly involved in developing and leading the celebration of Mass.
- Pupils are at ease when praying and pray sincerely in class, in church and all around the school site.
- The pupils' own prayers are contemporary and relevant, demonstrating their confidence in God and in one another.
- Pupils sing joyfully. They are guided in their choice of hymns to reflect the spiritual landmarks in the life of the school.
- Sacred music is inspired by talented staff musicians.
- The school staff guide the pupils in participating in a wide range of prayer, to bring about a deeper relationship with God and to help all pupils engage in a spiritual dialogue. For example when praying the school prayer or some traditional prayers, all pupils use sign language; this further engages pupils and gives a physical dimension to the prayer.
- The staff team and some governors have evaluated the quality of collective worship using a carefully structured audit. However, these evaluations have not been analysed or utilised in bringing about improvements.
- Parents and governors attend the school Masses and further support the prayer life of the children by also attending worship at the weekend. As a result, the pupils embrace the celebration of Mass with reverence and commitment. In turn the programme for sacramental celebration has strengthened and Mass attendance for these pupils has improved.
- The principal and deputy principal lead a gospel assembly each week where they reflect on aspects of the liturgical year, explore key values and focus on gospel messages.
- The ministry of the parish priest, the parish sister and the lay chaplain make an important contribution to the collective worship experienced by the pupils. Mass preparation, retreats and guidance for personal prayer all form part of their work and support for the spiritual fulfilment of the pupils.
- Collective worship helps the pupils to make connections for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by prompting them to understand what the scriptures and teachings of Jesus mean in their lives today.

- Pupils show commitment to being part of key celebrations throughout the liturgical year by attending events outside of school. This participation extends to multi-school celebrations co-ordinated by the MAC as well as key diocesan events. A significant number of reliable and willing altar servers participate in services.

## **LEADERSHIP**

### **Leadership of Catholic life and collective worship**

- The leadership of Catholic life and collective worship is good.
- The principal recognises the God given potential in each individual member of the school family. He nurtures both the pupils and the staff as they work together to fulfil the mission statement every day. As a result, all pupils, whatever their needs and life experiences, are able to grow in faith and personal strength and achieve in their tasks.
- School leaders have ensured that the pupils have a voice and are confident in both reflecting on their own faith and the impact it has on the world around them and in asking questions about all aspects of religion.
- The close and productive partnership of the principal and deputy principal has had a significant impact on the quality of the Catholic life and collective worship, which has improved incrementally in the past two years. The leadership team has embraced the trust put in them by the governors. As a result, the reputation of St Joseph's as a welcoming and caring Christian family, has grown.
- The governors are dedicated and active in their evaluation of the school's spirituality and promotion of gospel values. They assess provision through learning walks, the scrutiny of pupils' work, attendance at assemblies and through the reports and discussions at meetings with the head teacher and senior teachers. They recognise the need to establish more formal processes for auditing the quality of the school's Catholic provision, so that they can be more strategic in their governance and clearer about the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- The governors are sincere in their desire to uphold the Catholic mission of the school. They have a very real sense of the strong heritage of the school and the wealth of faith and care it can offer to many children and families both now and in the future.
- The challenge that the governors exert is realistic and focussed on improvement. For example in recent years they have worked diligently to secure high quality teachers who they know will be faithful to the school's mission and will promote faith, and build on the skills of the pupils.
- The governors support the school in the constructive relationship that it has with all of the schools within the MAC. The enthusiasm of the governors for joint working is encouraging and this momentum will clearly bring about better Catholic education for St Joseph's and the sister schools within the MAC. However, they are mindful of the challenges that exist in the working dynamic of a MAC and are committed to both maximising the opportunities and making a contribution to the development of a strong and faithful Catholic community.
- The leadership of the school has worked to monitor provision. However, the impact of their self evaluation has not been as effective as it might and there is a need to be more analytical about strengths and weaknesses in order to make greater progress.

- The governors are mindful of succession within the school leadership and value the inspiring middle leadership demonstrated by teachers who take a key role in enriching the faith life of the school.
- The pupils play an important role in leading the Catholic life of the school. They are sensitive to the emotional and spiritual needs of everyone in the school community. This empathy inspires the prayers that they share and influences their actions as members of the school family.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

### **Leadership, outcomes from and provision for religious education**

- The provision of religious education at St Joseph's is good.
- RE is very well led by the co-ordinator. She routinely monitors and reflects upon the school's provision, adjusting and enhancing planning, teaching, learning and assessment to achieve high standards.
- The leadership of RE is gaining momentum as the leader aspires to outstanding provision across all areas.
- The strength of the school's consistent provision of RE has been brought about by the support that the RE leader provides for her colleagues. She ensures that all staff are clear and confident about the syllabus and how to deliver the RE curriculum. She administers useful guidance and appropriate liturgical resources to the teachers to bolster and enhance the experiences for the pupils.
- Pupils make good progress over time and on average achieve well.
- For most groups there are no significant differences in achievement. Year on year the majority of pupils grow in knowledge of the Faith and improve their skills. However, the proportion of boys exceeding the expected standard of attainment in RE falls well below that of girls.
- In addition, a large proportion of pupils with special educational needs are not keeping up with other pupils in terms of overall attainment and progress in RE.
- Through improving analysis of assessments in RE the school is beginning to address any cohort specific achievement issues. For example where the pace of progress in a particular year group has not been in line with other year groups, the leadership of the school has put in place targeted interventions delivered by teaching assistants.
- The pupils enjoy RE. They take particular pleasure in stories from the gospels and are moved to consider their own values in life by reflecting on the events in the life of Jesus.
- The teaching of RE is nothing less than good with a proportion outstanding.
- The high quality teaching is brought about through teachers' thoughtful questioning, the well established routines for learning and the many inspired ideas that teachers use to engage the pupils.
- The commitment of the classroom staff to deliver the good learning and teaching is underpinned by very strong subject knowledge.
- The teamwork of all staff in the classroom is excellent. As a result, learning for all pupils is managed and supported very well indeed.



- Within the learning in RE there is a powerful dynamic of enquiry and curiosity which is strengthened by very strong questioning by staff and pupils.
- The Gospels, liturgy and the concepts of vocation are all made more accessible for pupils through good and better teaching.
- Progress in lessons is generally very good. However, more could be done to support a larger number of pupils in considering how faith has an impact on pupils' own lives.
- In lessons pupils are able, sincere and compliant. These qualities combined with excellent routines for learning make for most productive teaching and learning in RE. However, the pace of learning for more able pupils is not given sufficient impetus to take the pupils to even higher levels of achievement and deeper reflection on their faith.
- The pupils' grasp of learning intentions would be strengthened by teachers taking more time in lessons to explore pupils' ideas through wider discussion about faith.
- The majority of pupils' work in their books is of a high standard, but this is not consistent across the school; in some year groups pupils' RE books demonstrate that expectations of care and presentation are lower than others.
- Teachers are conscientious and thoughtful in their marking of pupils' RE work and it is clear from discussions with pupils that their teachers provide very comprehensive and secure guidance.
- The approach to marking in the school is one of continual development. The RE co-ordinator has plans to make feedback to pupils more strategic in terms of striking up a dialogue about faith issues with the pupils.
- Regular lesson observations and learning walks, conducted by senior staff, monitor the quality of teaching and serve as a catalyst for the promotion of improving provision.
- RE as a subject is prominent in the planned curriculum. It is given equal status to the other core subjects of English and mathematics. The standards achieved in RE mirror the good results secured in English.
- The curriculum is now rich with prayer, exploration of the liturgy and activities, which encourage detailed knowledge of the bible. Spirituality can be found in the school's wider curriculum.
- There is an important emphasis on debate in the RE curriculum. As a result, pupils are inquisitive, not afraid to ask searching questions and are confident about exposing their views.
- The teaching of relationships and sex education is in accordance with the recommended approach of the Catholic Church and is delivered sensitively to meet the needs and understanding of the pupils of all ages.
- Pupils respond to the programme for sacramental preparation with reverence and sincerity. All pupils, whether they are to receive the sacraments or not, enjoy and embrace the journey of faith that sacramental preparation inspires.
- The key year group teachers work hard alongside the priest, lay chaplain, parish sister and parish catechists to guide the pupils as they grow towards the sacraments.
- An impressive initiative for exploring other world faiths and beliefs has been implemented by the RE leader to inspire the pupils through themed days, visitors

and hands on activities to acquire and consolidate their knowledge of faith and culture.

- A key element to the success of the RE provision is the commitment and team-work of staff. The adults who work in the school are united in their mission. This is a community where everyone is helped to achieve their very best and where God is at the heart of everything they do.

### **Recommendations**

#### **In order to improve the school should:**

- Put in place strategic systems for the school leaders to evaluate the Catholic life and collective worship and use their evidence to make improvements.
- Provide more opportunities in lessons for pupils to reflect on their faith.
- Establish consistent high expectations for pupils' presentation in their RE books.
- Make the Catholic life of the school more visible around the school site.